Entrepreneurial Experiences of Becoming an Employer: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Helen Catherine Williams BScEcon, MSc

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Thesis Abstract

The aim of this study is to better understand how entrepreneurs become employers. Taking a phenomenological position, my research uses a co-creative methodology to explore transitions from entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer. Job creation is commonly cited as a benefit of entrepreneurship (Birch, 1979; Acs, 2006), yet little is known about the transition to entrepreneur-employer. Recent estimates highlight that many UK enterprises are classified as non-employing businesses, comprising the founder only (ONS, 2020). This suggests that while a high proportion of individuals enter self-employment, growth presents a significant challenge for many (Coad et al., 2017).

Extant research investigating the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition is predominantly functionalist, reinforcing commonly held beliefs that entrepreneurship is a desirable economic activity (Dvouletý, 2018). In response, I sought to apply a qualitative approach. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a guiding framework, I explore the lived experiences of six female and four male entrepreneur-employers in South Wales.

My contribution to the entrepreneurship field is twofold. Firstly, my findings reflect an uglier reality to job-creation than is readily visible in the mainstream entrepreneurship literature. Perceiving it as a double-edged sword, participants juxtaposed common entrepreneurial narratives against their everyday realties. Becoming an employer introduced a level of relationality, exposing participants to systems demanding conformity rather than entrepreneurial diversity. Second, methodologically I demonstrate how the use of a co-creative method is a valuable tool for accessing complex and nuanced entrepreneurial experiences.

Participants universally expressed frustration at being suspended in what I interpret as a liminal state. Drawing on relevant literature, I theorise that this is particularly felt within neoliberal post-industrial contexts. I conclude that, for my participants, negotiating the gap between mainstream entrepreneurial narratives, and their lived entrepreneurial experiences, was a significant factor in moving beyond the critical entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition.

Declarations and Statements

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed .... (candidate)

Date ....12/09/2020..

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed .... (candidate)

Date ....12/09/2020..

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed .... (candidate)

Date ....12/09/2020..

Table of Contents

THESIS ABSTRACT 2

DECLARATIONS AND STATEMENTS 3

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 9

LIST OF FIGURES 10

LIST OF TABLES 12

LIST OF APPENDICES 13

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS 14

PUBLICATIONS FROM THIS RESEARCH 15

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES: A CAUTIONARY TALE 16

CHAPTER 1 17

INTRODUCTION 17

1.1 Aim of Thesis 18

1.2 Background 19

1.3 About This Research 20

1.3.1 My Starting Point: Mapping Field Assumptions 21

1.3.2 Choosing a Definition 23

1.3.3 Being Relevant 25

1.3.4 A Critical Gap? The Transition from Non-Employer-Employer 28

1.3.5 The Research Questions 31

1.4 How to Read this Thesis 32

1.5 Chapter Summary 34

CHAPTER 2 35

LITERATURE REVIEW 35

2.1 Introduction 36

2.1.1 Structure of Part One: Mainstream Approaches 38

2.1.2 Structure of Part Two: Critical Approaches 39

2.2 Mainstream Approaches: An Overview 41

2.3 Enterprise Growth 44

2.4 ENTREPRENEURSHIP 47

2.4.1 Entrepreneurship and Context 49

2.5 THE ENTREPRENEUR 53

2.6 THE ENTREPRENEUR-EMPLOYER TRANSITION 56

2.6.1 Human Resource Management Perspectives 56

2.6.2 Reviewing Entrepreneur-Employer Literature 58

2.7 MAINSTREAM APPROACHES SUMMARY 60

2.8 CRITICAL APPROACHES: AN OVERVIEW 62

2.9 ENTREPRENEURSHIP 64

2.9.1 Entrepreneurship: 'Entrepreneuring' 64

2.9.2 Entrepreneurship: A Means for Social Change 65

2.10 THE ENTREPRENEUR 68

2.10.1 Curating the Entrepreneur: The Role and Influence of Neoliberalism 69

2.10.2 The Entrepreneurial Self 71

2.11 THE GROWTH IMPERATIVE: THE LIMITLESS PROMISES OF NEOLIBERALISM 73

2.11.1 Growth and The Entrepreneur-Employer 76

2.12 CRITICAL APPROACHES SUMMARY 77

2.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY 78

CHAPTER 3 80

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE 80

3.1 INTRODUCTION 81

3.2 ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITIONING 82

3.3 ADDRESSING ONTOLOGICAL DIVIDES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH 86

3.4 THE VALUE OF PHENOMENOLOGY AS A META-THEORETICAL POSITION 89

3.4.1 Rejection of Dualism 90

3.4.2 Intentionality of Consciousness 91

3.4.3 A Presuppositionless Philosophy 91

3.4.4 The Lebenswelt 93

3.4.5 Section Summary: Applying Interpretative Phenomenology to My Research 94

3.5 INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS: AN EPISTEMIC FRAMEWORK 96

3.5.1 Phenomenology 97

3.5.2 Hermeneutics 98

3.5.3 Idiography 100

3.5.4 The Phenomenological Concept of 'Experience' ... *101*
3.6 Research Questions ... 105
3.7 Chapter Summary ... 108

CHAPTER 4 ... **109**

RESEARCH METHODS ... **109**

4.1 Introduction ... 110
4.2 Selecting IPA as a Methodology ... 111
4.3 Combining Creative Methods with IPA ... 112
4.3.1 Exploring Different Modes of Meaning Construction and Analysis ... *113*
4.4 The Lego Interview Method ... 114
4.4.1 Lego Serious Play ... *117*
4.4.2 Explicitation (phenomenological) Interview Framework ... *119*
4.4.3 Relational Mapping and Interview Arc Approach ... *121*
4.5 Conducting Fieldwork ... 121
4.5.1 The Pilot ... *122*
4.5.2 Pilot: Key learning points ... *123*
4.5.3 The Main Study ... *126*
4.5.4 Choosing Participants ... *126*
4.5.5 Collecting Data ... *129*
4.5.6 Data Preparation ... *131*
4.5.7 Data Analysis ... *132*
4.6 Ethical Considerations ... 136
4.7 Research Quality ... 138
4.8 Reflexivity ... 140
4.8.1 The Researcher's Role: Achieving Critical Distance ... *141*
4.8.2 Dealing with the Unexpected: Reflections from the Field ... *144*
4.8.3 Lodgers in My House: Reflections on the IPA Analytic Process ... *147*
4.8.4 Acknowledging the Doctoral Journey ... *151*
4.8.5 Using Lego as an Analytic and Self-Reflexive Tool ... *152*
4.9 Meet the Participants ... 157
4.9.1 Meet Alex ... *157*
4.9.2 Meet Bobbie ... *158*
4.9.3 Meet Maximus (Max) ... *159*

4.9.4 Meet Bruce *160*
4.9.5 Meet Warrior *161*
4.9.6 Meet Phoenix *162*
4.9.7 Meet Melissa *163*
4.9.8 Meet Bish *164*
4.9.9 Meet Joe *165*
4.9.10 Meet Tree Lady *166*
4.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY 167

CHAPTER 5 168

FINDINGS 168

5.1 INTRODUCTION 169
5.2 SUPERORDINATE THEME ONE: GREAT EXPECTATIONS 171
5.2.1 Rejection of Entrepreneurial Expectations *172*
5.2.2 Gendered Expectations *185*
5.2.3 Regional Expectations *195*
5.2.4 Theme Summary *202*
5.3 SUPERORDINATE THEME TWO: CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: ME, MYSELF AND MY EMPLOYEE(S) 205
5.3.1 The Mother Hen: Finding Meaning in Hiring Others *206*
5.3.2 What if They Don't Turn Up? *213*
5.3.3 The Wake-up Call *221*
5.3.4 Theme Summary *229*
5.4 SUPERORDINATE THEME THREE: NEVER-ENDING STORIES 230
5.4.1 The Impossible Staircase *231*
5.4.2 The Winner Takes It All *236*
5.4.3 But It Gives a Purpose *244*
5.4.4 Theme Summary *248*
5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY 249

CHAPTER 6 250

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS 250

6.1 INTRODUCTION 251
6.2 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS 252

6.2.1 Entrepreneurship: The Impact of Context *253*
6.2.2 The Entrepreneur: The Entrepreneurial Self *258*
6.2.3 The Imperative of Growth: The Never-Ending Staircase *262*
6.3 METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS 269
6.4 PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS 271
6.5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS 273
6.6 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS 275
6.7 CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS 277
6.8 FUTURE AREAS OF RESEARCH 278
6.9 FINAL CONCLUSIONS 281
REFERENCES **283**
APPENDICES **343**

Acknowledgments

List of Figures

Figure 1. Non-employing and employing businesses in the UK 2000 – 2017. 29
Figure 2. Overall structure and chapter summaries of thesis...33
Figure 3. Mainstream approaches informing entrepreneurial job-creation assumptions.........39
Figure 4. Critical approaches challenging entrepreneurial job-creation assumptions. 40
Figure 5. The Lego Interview Method..116
Figure 6. Participant's models during different stages of the interview. 125
Figure 7. Participant's Lego selves...128
Figure 8. Organisation and set-up process of the Lego 129
Figure 9. Before (L) and after (R) an interview, demonstrating the Lego set-up. 130
Figure 10. Examples of participant's Lego selves..131
Figure 11. Transcript with image of a Lego model placed alongside relevant description. ..132
Figure 12. Example of raw analysis: IPA stages one and two (Alex). 134
Figure 13. Reflexive framework (adapted from Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013. p. 365)...142
Figure 14. My Lego Self (as lone researcher)..143
Figure 15. Warrior's initially constructed (left) and latterly reconstructed (right) 'standing taller' self. 144
Figure 16. Screen shots from some of my post-interview video journaling. 146
Figure 17. My ever-present data (the lodger). 147
Figure 18. Analytic frustrations present in my data..150
Figure 19. My doctoral journey; constructed by myself and my supervisory team. 151
Figure 20. A reflexive model built by myself and my supervisory team, 'brick by brick'. ..152
Figure 21. Example of Lego used to draw meaning from data...153
Figure 22. Using Lego as a self-reflexive tool to work through ethical challenges. 154
Figure 23. A 'post-it patchwork' created from the labels of participant's Lego model. 156
Figure 24. Melissa's Shark (L) vs Bish's Cheeky Shark (R)..174
Figure 25. Joe's model of himself..182
Figure 26. The Masquerade 184
Figure 27. Bruce: the world's strongest woman 187
Figure 28. Joe in Quicksand...194
Figure 29. Phoenix's 'Wall'..201
Figure 30. Keeping everyone safe 207
Figure 31. Warrior's conflict of interest 214

Figure 32. Melissa's 'why not to employ your friend bridge' 215
Figure 33. Joe's realisation 221
Figure 34. Chaos (L) and 'The wake-up call' (R) 222
Figure 35. Melissa's chaos (L) and organised employer (R) selves 223
Figure 36. Max 'just running' 224
Figure 37. The 'shit storm' (L) and 'like clockwork' (R)..225
Figure 38. Tree Lady's 'The Breakthrough' 227
Figure 39. Model of Penrose and Penrose's (1958) 'impossible staircase' 231
Figure 40. Corporate vs. Quirky (Alex) 233
Figure 41. Bish: Tricky decisions! 234
Figure 42. Melissa: Trapped – 'a victim of my own success' 236
Figure 43. Tree Lady – 'Existing' 238
Figure 44. Phoenix's 'Battle' 239
Figure 45. Bobbie feels 'stuck in an ugly corporate world' (again!) 242
Figure 46. Phoenix: 'Life is a mess' 243
Figure 47. Alex's timeline 244
Figure 48. Warrior then, and now 246
Figure 49. Warrior is now standing taller 247
Figure 50. Joe: 'Almost there' 248

List of Tables

Table 1. Definitions of Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurs 23
Table 2. Mainstream and Critical Approaches to Entrepreneurship 36
Table 3. Non-employer to Employer Literature 59
Table 4. Typologies of Meaning 104
Table 5. Participant Characteristics 128
Table 6. IPA's Six-stage Analytic Process 133
Table 7. Example of Raw Analysis IPA Stages Three and Four 135
Table 8. Final Superordinate Themes and Corresponding Subthemes 136
Table 9. Ethical Considerations 137
Table 10. Research Quality Framework 139
Table 11. Superordinate Themes and Corresponding Subthemes 170
Table 12. Initial Review Journals 344
Table 13. Articles Included in Initial Review 345

List of Appendices

APPENDIX A. INITIAL REVIEW INFORMATION ... 344

A.1 Journals Included in Initial Literature Review ... 344

A.2 Articles Included in Initial Review ... 345

APPENDIX B. PILOT STUDY FORMS ... 350

B.1 Ethical Approval Form ... 350

B.2 Participant Information Sheet ... 353

B.3 Consent Form ... 354

APPENDIX C. MAIN STUDY FORMS ... 355

C.1 Ethical Approval Form ... 355

C.2 Participant Information Sheet (PIS) ... 358

C.3 Consent Form ... 359

C.4 Participant Information Form ... 360

C.5 Interview Prompt Sheet ... 361

C.6 Participant Interview Debrief Form ... 362

C.7 Lone Fieldwork Risk Assessment and Management ... 363

C.8 GDPR Data Flow Table ... 365

List of Abbreviations

EAP	Entrepreneurship Action Plan
EU	European Union
EUROSTAT	European Union Statistical Office
HGF	High Growth Firms
ONS	Office for National Statistics
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
HRM	Human Resources Management
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LSP	Lego Serious Play
PIS	Participant Information Sheet
SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goal
SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America

Publications from this Research

Publications

Williams, H. C., Pritchard, K., Miller, M. C., & Reed, C. (2020). Climbing to freedom on an impossible staircase: Exploring the emancipatory potential of becoming an entrepreneur-employer. *International Small Business Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242620967613

Conference Papers and Workshops

Williams, H.C., Pritchard, K., & Miller, M.C. (2020). The winner takes it all: Challenging constructions of entrepreneurial success. Accepted for *Gender, Work & Organization Conference*.

Williams, H.C., Pritchard, K. & Reed, C. (2019). Building an enterprise: Using LEGO® to explore lived experiences of entrepreneurs. *Critical Management Studies.*

Williams, H.C., Pritchard, K. & Reed, C. (2019). Building rapport with LEGO®. *British Psychological Society creative methods seminar series*.

Williams, H.C, Pritchard, K., & Reed, C. (2018). Entrepreneurial experiences of becoming an employer: a case for interpretative phenomenological analysis? *British Academy of Management Doctoral Symposium.*

The Emperor's New Clothes: A Cautionary Tale

There once lived an Emperor, who's only ambition was to always be well dressed.

One day, two swindlers came to this city and pretended to everyone that they were weavers. Their colours and patterns, they said, were not only very beautiful, but were made of a special material invisible to only those worthy of seeing them.

'That must be wonderful cloth', thought the Emperor. 'If I were to be dressed in a suit made of this cloth, I would be able to find out which people in my kingdom are not worthy to be in their jobs. I must have this cloth made for me without delay'. The 'tailors' gleefully set to work.

Upon completion, the Emperor took to the streets under his splendid canopy. The crowds cried, 'Oh, how fine are the Emperor's new clothes! Don't they fit him to perfection?' Nobody would confess that they couldn't see anything, for that would prove him either unfit for his position, or a fool.

'But he hasn't got anything on?' a child said.

'Did you ever hear such innocent prattle?' said their father nervously. Whispers began to spread throughout crowd, 'he hasn't anything on. A child says he hasn't anything on.'

'But he hasn't got anything on!' the whole town cried out at last.

The Emperor shivered, for he suspected they were right. But he thought, 'This procession has got to go on!' So, he walked more proudly than ever, as his noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all.

Translation of The Emperor's New Clothes, Hans Christian Anderson (1837)

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Aim of the Thesis

1.2 Background

1.3 About This Research

1.3.1 My Starting Point: Mapping Field Assumptions

1.3.2 Choosing a Definition

1.3.3 Being Relevant

1.3.4 A Critical Gap? The Entrepreneur to Entrepreneur-Employer Transition

1.3.5 Study Research Questions

1.4 How to Read This Thesis

1.4.1 Thesis Outline

1.5 Chapter Summary

1.1 Aim of Thesis

The study applies a phenomenological lens with the aim of better understanding how entrepreneurs experience becoming an employer. Enterprise growth as a means for job creation is commonly cited as a beneficial outcome of entrepreneurship (Acs, 2006; Birch, 1979; Davis et al., 1996). Yet, little is known about what this critical transition entails. Much of what is written about becoming an employer sits largely within the human resources domain. Recent estimates show many UK ventures are classified as non-employing businesses, comprising the founder only (Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2020). This suggests that while a high proportion of individuals enter self-employment, growth presents a significant challenge for many.

Given this challenge to growth, I set three research objectives. My first objective was to understand the nature of finding and hiring a first employee as a critical step in entrepreneurial venture growth (Caliendo et al., 2019; Coad et al., 2017). My second objective was to identify what may enable or inhibit the transition from entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer. As this transition is currently an under-researched phenomenon, this will facilitate a better understanding of how entrepreneur-employers can be supported further, and where future research could be focused.

My final objective stems from an interest in the application of an innovative qualitative methodology. Extant research investigating hiring practices and employment are predominantly functionalist and tend to readily apply borrowed concepts from human resource management (HRM), or economic literatures (Caliendo et al., 2019; Nyström, 2019). Not only does this tend to reinforce commonly held beliefs that entrepreneurship is a desirable economic activity (Dvouletý, 2018; Fairlie & Miranda, 2017), but rarely explores the impact that becoming an employer has on the *entrepreneur*. There is a small, but ever-growing acknowledgement that this transition is worthy of more in-depth and contextually sensitive empirical investigation (Baker & Welter, 2020); particularly in understanding what may (or may not) inhibit or challenge enterprise growth (Tunberg & Anderson, 2020).

In response my research takes a theoretical phenomenologically informed stance and applies a co-creative qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of this transition, from the entrepreneur's perspective. To gain the level of insight needed, I incorporated Lego-builds within a phenomenological interview. To guide and ground my research I chose Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a framework to explore the lived

experiences of six female and four male recent entrepreneur-employers based in South Wales, UK.

1.2 Background

Before pursuing my PhD, I worked as an organisational psychologist delivering and designing evidence-led behavioural recruitment and selection tools. After seven years, and with hundreds of selection interviews under my belt, I grew despondent with the work I was doing. Following a desire to gain a more theoretical grounding, I enrolled on an MSc in Psychological Sciences. I was wholly motivated by the prospect of researching and knowing more, although I wasn't sure what 'more' I wanted to know at this point in time.

My MSc was very much orientated towards more traditional psychological fields (social, cognitive, clinical). Qualitative research was not widely encouraged or taught, with only one faculty member trained in qualitative methods. Out of all the modules offered by the programme, only one focused on qualitative research approaches, this was the one I felt most at home in – I was hooked. Thus, my thesis choice was driven by a desire to build knowledge about the application of qualitative psychological methodologies – particularly Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) within organisational research.

My MSc research explored nascent entrepreneurs in areas of high unemployment, and in so doing I came across entrepreneurship as a field of study. During some initial searches on 'phenomenological methods', and 'IPA' I came across the work of the late Jason Cope (2005; 2011; Cope & Watts, 2000). Unfortunately, Jason Cope was taken from the world far too soon, but his scholarship remains an exemplar of how taking a different philosophical, and thus methodological approach can bring new and refreshing insights. Further reading at the time (Bjerke, 2007; Bygrave, 2007; McDonald et al., 2015) all pointed to areas to be explored due to a historic use of reductionism within the entrepreneurship field. Berglund (2007, 2015) identifies the benefits of phenomenology and this helped shaped my research approach at the outset.

I was surprised by the findings of my MSc IPA analysis, and this very much influenced my desire to continue my research as a PhD. The entrepreneurs I interviewed spoke of a frustration with being mis-identified, the level of personal investment involved in venture creation process, and the challenges that come with being labelled an entrepreneur. One particular finding in my MSc, was that those who had hired employees found the experience particularly challenging, with one participant even declaring they wanted to go back to being

on their own. This countered the discourses I had read in the literature, where enterprise growth is depicted as a central to measuring entrepreneurial activity. This dichotomy was one of two reasons that motivated me to pursue further research in the field. The second relates to methodology and methodological development. I enjoyed the challenge of conducting an IPA study and the in-depth insights the method provided. I was keen to build a more in-depth understanding of developing such research methods. With both these factors in mind, I, somewhat naïvely, began my doctoral journey.

1.3 About This Research

In the following section I lay out, in a deceptively linear fashion, my justification for my research topic and the process that developed my research questions. As a relative newcomer to the discipline, I wanted to first understand the core assumptions in the field of entrepreneurship. This approach, problematising core assumptions of a research field, is one recommended by Alvesson and Sandberg (2013a; 2013b; 2014b; 2020). They suggest this will aid the generation of research questions that will enable new insights, rather than simply add knowledge to existing assumptions. This approach requires conducting research in a deliberately reflexive manor to continually make oneself aware of assumptions.

Consequently, the first three chapters of this thesis follow the recommendations of Alvesson and Sandberg (2013a; 2014b; 2020), both in the conduct of the literature review (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020) and in the formation of my research questions (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013a, 2014b). In the following section, I lay out the process I went through to understand the core assumptions within the field of entrepreneurship, and how problematising them led to the focus of this thesis.

There are five elements in this process. Each element continuously interacts with the other, so although they are described discretely, in effect they co-exist in the process of the development of the research questions. The elements are:

- understanding the assumptions underpinning the entrepreneurship discipline;
- choosing a definition of entrepreneurship;
- developing relevant questions;
- identifying a critical gap in knowledge; and,
- the research questions.

1.3.1 My Starting Point: Mapping Field Assumptions

To understand current challenges facing the entrepreneurship discipline before conducting a broader literature review, I began conducting an initial systematic review of articles that provided a general overview of the field. Three systematic approaches guided how this initial review was conducted (Lockwood et al., 2015; Siddaway et al., 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). To start, I set my search criteria for this first phase of mapping an overview of the field. First, all papers that self-report as entrepreneurship research reviews (using the terms 'entrepreneur', 'entrepreneurship', 'research methods', 'challenges', 'issues', 'review' and 'future') in the title, keywords, or abstract of ABS 3 to 4* journals (see Appendix A1., Table 12) in entrepreneurship, management and organisation were collated. However, choosing this approach introduces significant limitations by restricting the literature to be included. To overcome this, the full literature review available in Chapter Two provides an unrestricted review of the literature not bound by publication date, impact factor, nor ABS journal ranking.

Systematic reviews are characterised by a methodical and replicable methodology and presentation (Siddaway et al., 2019). Thus, a significant limitation with this approach are the parameters set the review. These limit what literature can be reviewed (e.g., the selection of ABS 3-4* journals only) and therefore often exclude relevant literatures. Due to this limitation, this initial review does not form part of my broader literature review in Chapter Two. It was conducted to understand overarching challenges as I undertook this initial mapping of the field. Taking account of these limitations, what follows outlines the inclusion and exclusion criteria chosen for this initial review.

For this initial review, editorials and articles published from the year 2000 were included to begin mapping an overview of the field. ProQuest Central, ProQuest Business, ProQuest Entrepreneurship and Google Scholar searches produced 100 peer-reviewed articles. The abstract of each was reviewed to determine its suitability for inclusion. Forty-two papers were rejected because entrepreneurship was not their stated focus or were too narrow, focusing on one specific construct of entrepreneurship (e.g., entrepreneurship orientation). I reviewed each of the remaining sixty-three papers (listed in Appendix A.2) generating a summary of the key challenges to organise the review and provide a springboard for my own research.

I chose to start the review from the year 2000. Not only did this mark a new millennium, but also the publication of two influential articles. Both summarised the discipline's evolution and provide opportunities for future research. First, Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) 'The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research' in the

Academy of Management Review. Second, a special issue in *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* in 2001, where Davidsson, Low, and Wright's (2001, p. 5) work 'Low and MacMillan Ten Years On: Achievements and Future Directions for Entrepreneurship Research,' fuelled a growing debate on which direction research should take. Both articles provide a suitable starting point to gain a complete picture of the intellectual foundation on which current research debates rest.

Both articles identified significant challenges that could leave entrepreneurship research vulnerable and open to criticism. They highlighted a frustration among scholars about the 'hodgepodge' or 'potpourri' (Davidsson et al., 2001) character of entrepreneurship research and how this was a potential cause of an ever-fragmenting paradigm. Back in 2001, Gartner noted that 'entrepreneurship espouses a diverse range of theories applied to various kinds of phenomena. There is no theory of entrepreneurship that can account for the diversity of topics that are currently pursued by entrepreneurship scholars' (p. 34).

After conducting a systematic review of published articles (available in Appendix A) the following four themes were identified:

1. a lack of unified definition or conceptual synthesis;
2. an overreliance on positivistic forms of enquiry;
3. a lack of philosophical positional transparency within empirical research where implicit assumptions are rarely challenged; and,
4. continued calls for more critical approaches to bring new theoretical insights and methodological developments.

More recent summaries of the general state of research indicate these are not historic challenges. Shepherd et al. (2019, p. 160) describe entrepreneurship research as trying to complete a constantly evolving jigsaw, but 'no one has any idea what the finished construct looks like'. After conducting this initial review and gaining an understanding of what current challenges the field is facing, I set about conducting a broader review of the literature. In Chapter 2, Section 2.1, I detail how I moved from this limited initial review, to a full review of the entrepreneurship literature.

1.3.2 Choosing a Definition

The etymology of the term ‘entrepreneur’ comes from the Latin terms ‘inter’, meaning between and ‘prehendo’, meaning to seize or grasp (Chia, 1995). More recently, it is associated with the French term ‘entreprendre’, meaning to undertake (Hoad, 1993). Despite its known etymological roots, it is challenging to find an agreed definition in the research literature. This is reflected in the various historic, although not exhaustive, definitions of entrepreneurship summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Definitions of Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurs

Overview of historic definitions of Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurs

Starting and/or Owning an Enterprise	**Identifiable Traits (e.g., propensity for risk taking, innovation)**	**The process of creating a 'new' business**	**Entrepreneurial Orientation: Intention and Opportunity Seeking**
Baumol (1968); Cantillion (1755); Hawley (1907); Knight (1921); McClelland (1961, 1975); Schultz (1975, 1980) Drucker (1985,1986); Schumpeter (1934, 1989); Shackle (1955) Davidsson, (1991).	*Brockhaus (1980); Cole (1968); Davidsson (2005, 2016); Hornaday & Bunker (1970); Hull et al., (1980); McClelland & Winter (1969).*	*Baker & Nelson (2005); Bruyat & Julien, (2001); Draheim (1972); Gartner (1985; 1990); Hisrich 1990); Howell (1972).*	*Ardichvili et al (2003); Bygrave & Hofer (1992); Covin & Slevin (1991); Kirzner (1999)); Lumpkin & Dess (1996); Miller (2011); Stevenson et al. (1985); Shane (2000, 2003); Wiklund & Shepherd (2005).*

Similar notions appear within these definitions: organising, developing, creation and newness. Nevertheless, there is little clarity in establishing who, how or what an entrepreneur may be. While there have been many attempts to define the field of study, an uncomfortable and arguably fundamental question still looms over the discipline: what and who is it that entrepreneurship scholars’ study? Over thirty years ago, Sexton (1988, p. 4) raised what remains a relevant question: ‘Is the field of entrepreneurship growing, or just getting bigger?’. In the interest of fairness, entrepreneurship scholars are not alone in their definitional challenges. For example, the study of both leadership and economics are domains that face similar challenges (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2016; Blackhouse & Medema, 2009).

Maintaining definitional flexibility is an argument echoed by some entrepreneurship scholars (Davidsson, 2016a). However, the literature seems to suggest that having a vague definition purely for the purpose of remaining flexible does not sit well with many key thinkers in the field (Audretsch et al., 2015; Bygrave, 2007, Gartner, 2016). Mainstream entrepreneurial definitions tend to reflect a scholarly focus on understanding the outputs and processes of new venture creation. Historically, scholars thought it unnecessary to study the individuals who engaged in entrepreneurship (see Baron, 2002; Gartner, 1988). Despite this, much work continues to be conducted to identify differential cognitive 'traits' between those that become entrepreneurs and those that do not (Kerr et al., 2018). It marks a clear separation between studying the 'entrepreneur' the person, and 'entrepreneurship' the process – although both explorations come from an ontologically realist position, assuming that entrepreneurship and therefore the entrepreneur is something 'out there', already existing and waiting to be found. A result has been the systemisation of entrepreneurial activity in the literature. Much of this work often generalises it to a series of logical steps to make sense of and promote entrepreneurial activity on a broader scale, or to develop and identify 'entrepreneurial mindsets' (Kuratko et al., 2020, p. 1; Frederiksen & Berglund, 2020). Bygrave (2007) challenges this approach, suggesting that entrepreneurial acts cannot 'be described by smoothly changing, linear, deterministic models that can be analysed with regression equations' (p. 38). Bygrave's (2007) view is still echoed in more contemporary reviews of the field (Blackburn & Smallbone, 2008; McDonald et al., 2015; Wiklund et al., 2011; Wiklund et al., 2019).

This reliance on ontological realism led to a lack of epistemic diversity (Gartner & Birley, 2002; Pittaway & Tunstall, 2016). Diverse philosophical positions have been neglected and fragmented, thus narrowing understandings of the range of phenomena associated with entrepreneurship (Davidsson et al., 2001; Gartner, 2001; Jennings et al., 2005). Historically, entrepreneurship research has failed to recognise the impact of underlying philosophies (McDonald et al., 2015; Ogbor, 2000; Pittaway & Tunstall, 2016; Pittaway. 2003, 2005). This lack of justification suggests mainstream entrepreneurship research applies *a priori* assumptions without too much consideration (Gartner, 2016). Grant and Perrin (2002) call for more discussion of epistemological issues in entrepreneurship research so that each study starts from, 'a thoughtfully articulated philosophical position' (p. 202), a call that has been reflected in more recent works (Packard et al., 2017).

Over a decade ago, Busenitz et al. (2003, p. 304) claimed that research was moving 'through its emergent stage'. They suggested the emergent stage is a time when researchers try to define a field's boundaries via discourse to lay the foundations. Critical studies emerged

as part of this move to understand and challenge how discourse constructs the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship, as an overwhelmingly positive, hegemonic force. Thus, the definitions that appeared are grounded in the logics of economics and politics, and specifically that of capitalism (Tedmanson et al., 2012; Verduijn et al., 2017). Critical entrepreneurship studies developed as a field of enquiry to challenge extant assumptions (Essers et al., 2017). Ontological relativism led to understandings of entrepreneurship being regarded as a social, multifaceted and complex phenomenon constructed by popular and scholarly discourses – a hark back to the emperor's new clothes – rather than something already in existence. These dominant discourses are criticised for constructing the entrepreneur as predominately white (Ram et al., 2017) and masculine (Lewis, 2014a; Lewis et al., 2017b; Marlow, 2020).

Critical perspectives shift entrepreneurship into the interpretivist paradigm of inquiry, and thus explore it not just for its economic, but also its social potential (Calás et al., 2009). Both mainstream and critical perspectives appear to converge on the premise that entrepreneurship can broadly bring about forms of positive change, whether it be social or economic, micro or macro (Verduijn et al., 2017). Definition becomes less of an issue from this perspective, with preference for heterogeneity rather than homogenous theoretical unity. Flexibility and broad definitions such as 'anyone who starts an enterprise' (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), 2020, p. 22) appear to be preferred starting points from this position.

Recognising that definitional issues remain at the ontological level was in part a factor in choosing phenomenology as a theoretical lens. Chapter 3 provides a detailed justification, but briefly, phenomenology allows for the recognition that some aspects of our world may exist, but that these are subjectively experienced and thus interpreted differently by each of us.

From this phenomenological position I accept that entrepreneurs exist as individuals who start an enterprise, as per the GEM definition (2020). However, each of these individuals will experience entrepreneurship differently and this is the start point of my investigation.

1.3.3 Being Relevant

Increasing the clarity and relevance of research, as Alvesson and Sandberg (2020) reflect, is key to engaging and better understanding the topics scholars choose to study. A pervasive challenge facing the management discipline, and indeed, entrepreneurship is a widening gap between theory and practice (Blackburn & Kovalainen; 2009; Rajagopalan, 2020; Trehan et

al., 2018). This influenced my decision to ensure this research topic is of practical value, and not simply a theoretical project. Therefore, in the following paragraphs I provide the context that shapes the scope of my study.

Critical entrepreneurship approaches continue to identify limitations that lead to 'taken for granted' (Tedmanson et al., 2012, p. 532) norms of entrepreneurship scholarship. These include but are not limited to its ideologies, dominant assumptions, grand narratives, samples and methods becoming commonplace. However, mainstream discourses promote the implicit assumption that entrepreneurship is inherently economically or socially good (Bandinelli, 2020a; Wiklund, 2019). This assumes that individuals benefit from engaging in entrepreneurship, and increased entrepreneurship rates lead to regional and national development.

By engaging with the assumption that more entrepreneurs and thus, more entrepreneurship is an inherently good thing (both socially and economically), it becomes clear as to why the promotion of entrepreneurship has a turbulent history. One of the most commonly cited assumptions, is that entrepreneurship is linked to job creation and lower unemployment rates (Coad et al., 2017). In many Western countries, this assumption stretches back almost four decades to the seminal works by Birch (1979) and Acs and Audretsch (1987). In this it was claimed that small enterprises created two thirds of new jobs in the USA between 1969 and 1976. These were in firms with less than 20 workers and, of these, the bulk were firms that did not exist prior to 1969. Acs and Audretsch (1987) proposed a link between the entrepreneur and innovation, that in turn was linked to economic development. This combination of roles became the basis of Porter's (1990, p. 125) influential assertion that 'invention and entrepreneurship are at the heart of national advantage'. These assertions appear to have had a lasting influence.

Given these attributes, governments, particularly in areas of economic disadvantage, sought to promote entrepreneurship as a means of achieving economic progress. The basic argument was that since entrepreneurs created wealth and jobs, it was a legitimate economic and political function of governments to use public funds to create more entrepreneurship. More was frequently equated with better (Marlow, 2020). Thus, imperatives encouraging more entrepreneurs and small enterprise growth became commonplace – particularly on the assumption that it would lead to more jobs and lower unemployment rates (Mallett & Wapshott, 2020).

On this basis, many countries have enacted policies, using taxpayers' money to promote entrepreneurial activity. Yet as Wiklund et al., (2019) notes, 'rarely are these assumptions

tested' (p. 14). Lundström et al. (2014), following a careful assessment, concluded that, in Sweden, annual public expenditure on SME and Entrepreneurship policy was SKK 46.5 billion. This is broadly in line, on a per capita basis, with work for the UK showing that annual expenditure in this policy area was approximately £8 billion, almost on a par with Police funding in the UK (Fotopoulos & Storey, 2019).

Whether or not such policies constitute effective use of taxpayers' money is an open question (Arshed et al., 2014; Mallett & Wapshott, 2020). It has been recognised that policy development seems to be based on current fads or convictions of individual politicians and policymakers (Brown et al., 2017). Moreover, entrepreneurship policies are rarely evaluated in any systematic way (Frese, et al., 2014). When they are, studies have found that entrepreneurship policies don't quite deliver their societal saving potential (Brown et al., 2017). Scholars note the difficulties in evaluation due to vague and poorly defined objectives, illuminating entrepreneurship's lack of a unified concept and common language (Lundström et al., 2014; McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2016; Shane, 2009; Storey & Greene, 2010).

Several factors complicate the relevance of entrepreneurship research and its ability to be effectively communicated to intended audiences. The first challenge to relevance is the growing complexity of research designs, methods, and techniques (Baker & Welter, 2020). Effective and well thought out methodologies are essential for rigorous and credible research findings (Pittaway & Tunstall, 2016; Welter et al., 2019). Secondly, complex approaches to theory building have left conceptual developments difficult to understand and disseminate (Pittaway & Tunstall, 2016).

Effective theory building can enhance scholar's capacity to generate new knowledge useful for practice (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020), provided practitioners can access this new knowledge. It can guide research design choices and inform interpretations of findings. Providing clarity about arguments, core assumptions and implications of findings could lead to less misinterpretation and grandiose meta-theories being touted by academics and policymakers alike. With considerable public funds at stake, understanding how entrepreneurs experience the growth of their enterprise is relevant for both theory and practice. It could therefore be assumed that relevant research can influence the development of polices that *facilitate* positive impact, rather than *intervene* to create assumed 'conditions' (Shepherd et al., 2019, p. 16) for changes to occur. The relevance of my research is based on this latter assumption.

1.3.4 A Critical Gap? The Transition from Non-Employer-Employer

The popular assumption that increased entrepreneurial activity is a catalyst for job creation may not be entirely accurate (Tunberg & Anderson, 2020; Haltiwanger et al., 2013). Evidence suggests that the link between higher self-employment and lower unemployment is complex and contradictory. Although it should be noted often the term 'self-employed' is widely used in tandem with becoming an 'entrepreneur', data suggests that individuals who start an enterprise are not likely to grow it (ONS, 2020). However, there remains a wide body of literature which supports the view that 'entrepreneurship' is positively associated with job creation and unemployment reduction (Coad et al., 2017). Tracing the roots of such assumptions reveals that narratives draw from positivistic forms of inquiry, with a preference for using large secondary data (McDonald et al., 2015).

Fölster (2000) found a positive correlation between employment and self-employment and was careful to caution on the assumptions that could be formed from reading this conclusion. 'Another cautionary note concerns the characteristics of self-employment. Our results concern the effects of the pattern of self-employment that actually occurred. If one implemented public programmes to increase self-employment it is not at all certain that this artificially created self-employment has the same characteristics, and the same employment effects' (Fölster, 2000, p. 145).

A typical region with high self-employment, such as the Valleys in South Wales, where 10 percent of the workforce are self-employed (ONS, 2019) would then have total employment of 6.5 percentage points higher than a typical region with low self-employment (Mallett, 2017). To put it simply, employment rates are often skewed by those who choose self-employment. However, do those who enter self-employment and set themselves up as a limited company (entrepreneurs by GEM definition) then go on to create jobs as a result of their endeavours?

A rapid growth of self-employment has been a pronounced feature of the UK labour market in recent years, perhaps as Mallett and Wapshott (2020) reflect, due to the continual encouragement (though various policies and schemes) that entrepreneurship is a preferred means of generating jobs in the UK. The number of self-employed increased from 3.3 million people (12.0% of the labour force) in 2001 to 4.8 million (15.1% of the labour force) in 2017. Recent studies of this phenomenon have examined the characteristics of the self-employed (e.g., Wales & Amankwah, 2016; Tomlinson & Corlett, 2017) but have largely sidestepped the income of the self-employed or investigated what these individuals do.

According to the population estimates, growth in the UK private sector business since 2000 has been mainly due to increasing numbers of non-employing businesses (Figure 1). This suggests that while a high proportion of individuals enter self-employment, few decide to grow their venture and create jobs. Nevertheless, do those that cross the threshold actually create work for others? The available data below in Figure 1 would suggest that while many enterprises start, few grow beyond just the sole entrepreneur.

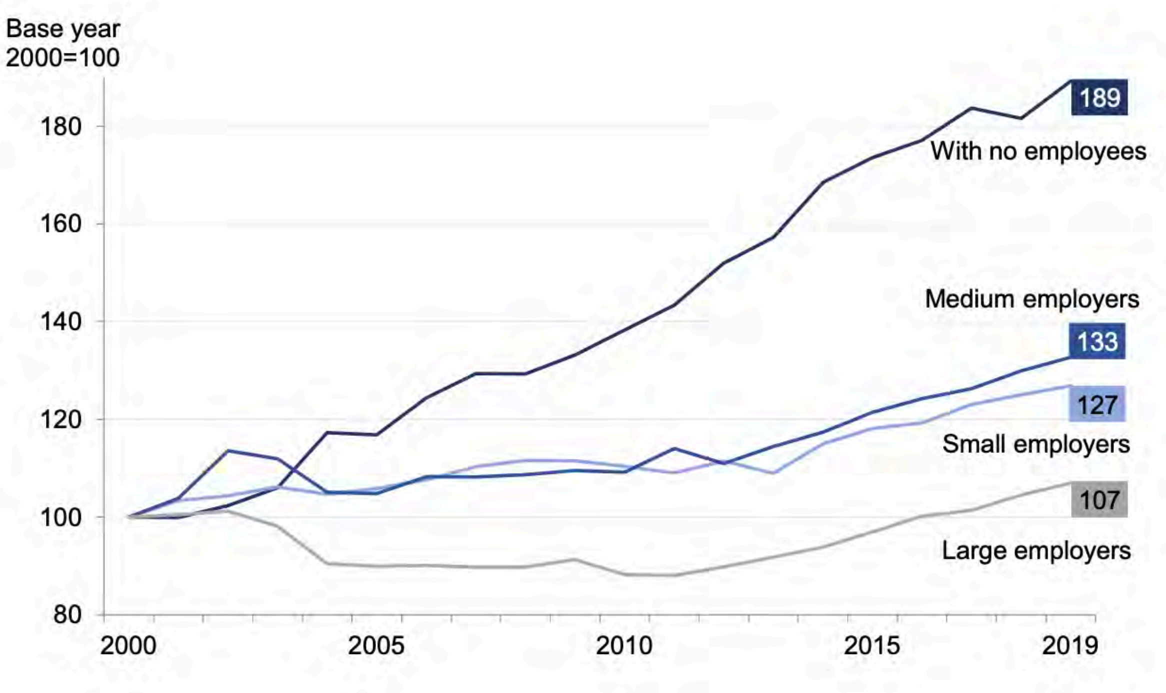

Figure 1. Non-employing and employing businesses in the UK 2000 – 2017.

(Source: ONS Business population statistics, as of October 2019).

The late 1980s showed that smaller UK firms (i.e., those employing fewer than 10 employees), across all sectors, accounted for a disproportionately large share of total job creation in relation to their overall share of employment (Hart & Hanvey, 1995). Storey (1994) observed, 'of every 100 small firms, the fastest growing four firms will create half the jobs in the group over the decade' (p. 113).

Recent studies have found small firms also have higher job creation and job destruction rates than larger firms. Anyadike-Danes et al., (2015) found that within the UK, over a typical 12-month period, over a quarter of all jobs in the private sector were either destroyed or created, pointing to a significant level of turbulence. The authors found new and existing small businesses accounted for 66% of all new jobs created in this period, contributing more to job

creation than their share in employment (56%). However, small businesses were also responsible for around 66% of job losses in this period.

In addition, they found that the majority of jobs in the United Kingdom are created by small firms (notably micro-enterprises of five or less employees) yet these new small firms also exhibit the greatest rates of churn (Anyadike-Danes et al., 2015). Small businesses destroy as many jobs as they create. Moreover, they concluded that a relatively small proportion of firms are responsible for a disproportionate share of job creation.

The rapid rise in non-employing businesses coupled with high job 'churn' rates for micro-businesses suggests that finding, hiring and managing employees is a significant challenge to venture growth. It highlights two potential areas of further investigation:

- investigating the criticality of initial employment transition as a determinate for business growth; and,
- understanding the challenges in making the transition from non-employer to employer.

Exploring these areas has the potential to stimulate relevant research, by forming a better understanding of the impact that employees have in the initial stages of venture creation. Much of the available research that attempts to explain the impact of employees identifies it as a determinant of firm 'growth'. Although there is no single overriding measure of new venture growth, Gilbert et al., (2006)'s comprehensive review of existing literature suggests that common measures of new venture growth are sales, employment, and market share. Much of research on the determinants of firm growth categorise employment under the dependant variables: 'resources' and 'human capital' (Baum et al., 2001; Chrisman et al., 1998; Gilbert et al., 2006; Mazzarol et al., 2003; Thakur, 1999). They highlight 'human capital' as a determinant of venture growth, but limited studies have sought to explore this in more depth.

Atkinson and Meager (1994) identify firm size as a significant influence on employment decisions. In an earlier study, Atkinson et al., (1990) identified four crucial '*thresholds*' through which a business must pass if they are to interact effectively with the labour market. They argue the decision to take on any employee is one that a business 'must' take and define this as the 'entry threshold' (p. 24). A later study conducted by Foreman-Peck et al. (2006) supported this analysis, identifying a 'threshold difficulty of employment' (p. 317) which varied by firm type and sector. The authors also note the reluctance towards taking on staff appeared to extend considerably beyond the initial commitment. As the literature review

will highlight in more detail, the investigation of this transition has been largely through functionalist approaches that seek to understand the determinants of when and what, rather than how the transition takes place (Tunberg, 2014; Tunberg & Anderson, 2020). In light of these potential areas for further exploration and given the criticality of the transition in whether an enterprise grows or not, I formed my research questions.

1.3.5 The Research Questions

Research seeking to understand the impact of entrepreneur's first hiring decisions are predominately functionalist and tend to reduce the role of the entrepreneur to a set of identifiable variables or traits (Coad et al., 2017). Additionally, while HRM and small business employment relations literatures recognise the impact of the entrepreneur, investigations tend to use concepts developed from research on larger organisations (Kitching & Marlow, 2013). My literature review (in the following chapter) found a number of recent studies that have specifically investigated the transition and recognise its significance (e.g., Coad et al., 2017; Dvouletý, 2018, Dvouletý & Lukeš, 2016; Fairlie & Miranda, 2017). Much of the available research uses survey data to explore the determinants of taking the leap from a non-employer to employer. However, scholars increasingly recognise the transition (and enterprise growth more broadly) as a complex social and relational process, thus deterministic approaches are not an appropriate tool to develop more meaningful understandings (Tunberg & Anderson, 2020). Thus, hiring employees represents one of the major thresholds that entrepreneurs encounter when growing their businesses, and there is ample opportunity to explore this transition using qualitative methods.

Investigating this phenomenon requires seeking an approach to illuminate contextual complexities and ugly truths as experienced by those actually doing it: the entrepreneurs. Thus, within this thesis I use a phenomenologically informed theoretical framework to ask and explore the following overarching research question and two sub-questions:

1. How do entrepreneurs experience the transition from non-employer to employer?
    a. What are the potential enablers or inhibitors to this transition?
    b. What is the impact of this transition from the entrepreneur's perspective?

1.4 How to Read this Thesis

A broad outline of this thesis is provided in Figure 2, which also provides a brief summary of each chapter. However, to ensure understanding and clarity, a short guide on what to expect from each of the six chapters and how they may be read can be found below.

The message in the story of the Emperor's New Clothes, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, runs as a connecting thread throughout this thesis. The story cautions us to be aware of how phenomena are depicted and discussed by those in positions of privilege (in its various forms), and how this shapes individuals and their worlds. It reveals, although not directly, how certain bodies of knowledge become readily accepted not because they are finite, but because the challenging of such knowledge may have undesirable consequences (McMullen, 2019).

Relating this to my study, the story's warning elaborates how accepted assumptions influence how the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship are perceived as wholly positive economic and social phenomena. This historic belief has led to the continual promotion of entrepreneurship as a means to create more jobs – leading to a better society and healthier economy. If entrepreneurship does lead to positive outcomes, then surely understanding the key measurement of its growth (job creation) is an area worthy of further investigation.

The initial chapters of this thesis (1, 2 and 3) lay the foundations of my argument, where this study offers scope for contribution, and why I chose phenomenology as my theoretical lens. The subsequent chapters (4 and 5) are the building blocks as they discuss how I conducted my fieldwork (4) and also present my subsequent analysis and findings (5). The remaining chapter (6) takes a step back to appraise what has been built and seeks to interpret my findings to extend theoretical insights discussed in chapter 2.

Figure 2. Overall structure and chapter summaries of thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction
- Summary of thesis aim and objectives.
- Discusses research background.
- Overview of key challenges.
- Introduces thesis structure.

Chapter 2: Literature Review
- Reviews mainstream and critical approaches to enterprise growth, entrepreneurship and the entrepreneur.
- Identifies limited literature examining the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Perspective
- Situates research within the interpretivist paradigm.
- Provides rational for taking phenomenological theoretical position.
- Introduces theoretical positioning of IPA.
- Research questions detailed and explained.

Chapter 4: Research Methods
- Provides detail about using my chosen methods and the fieldwork stage of this study. IPA with co-creative method using Lego.
- Reflexively discusses fieldwork and analytic stages of my research.

Chapter 5: Findings
- Presentation of my research findings.
- Three superordinate themes, each comprising three corresponding subthemes are investigated in depth.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions
- Theoretical implications consider neoliberalism as a relevant conceptual lens.
- Methodological and practical implications are discussed.
- Research limitations and are considered.
- Study conclusions are identified.

1.5 Chapter Summary

The chapters that follow (as demonstrated in the thesis outline) provide an illusion that my research process followed a 'traditional' and uninterrupted research process. At times, I found this to be a frustrating endeavour, particularly given the exploratory nature of my work. This meant that my findings were central in the eventual direction this thesis takes. In the chapters that follow this, I take a deliberately reflective tone. I have been central to all parts of shaping how this research has been designed, conducted and the findings analysed. Recognising this also highlights that this research is bounded by my inherent biases and my own worldviews. Writing relevant parts of this thesis in a reflexive tone ensures my presence is felt throughout, but also brings a level of transparency to my interpretations and final conclusions. The following chapter, the literature review, engages with mainstream growth, entrepreneurship, human resources and critical approaches to better understand how my study can bring about new insights and understandings to the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition.

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Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Mainstream Approaches: An Overview

2.3 Enterprise Growth

2.4 Entrepreneurship

2.4.1 Entrepreneurship and Context

2.5 The Entrepreneur

2.6 The Entrepreneur-Employer

2.6.1 Human Resource Management Perspectives

2.6.2 Reviewing Entrepreneur-Employer Literature

2.7 Mainstream Approaches Summary

2.8 Critical Approaches: An Overview

2.9 Entrepreneurship

2.9.1 Entrepreneurship as 'Entrepreneuring'

2.9.2 Entrepreneurship: A Means for Social Change

2.10 The Entrepreneur

2.10.1 Curating the Entrepreneur: The Role and Influence of Neoliberalism

2.10.2 The Entrepreneurial Self

2.11 The Growth Imperative: The Limitless Promises of Neoliberalism

2.11.1 Growth and The Entrepreneur-Employer

2.12 Critical Approaches Summary

2.13 Chapter Summary

2.1 Introduction

It has become universally accepted in both popular and political cultures that entrepreneurship has a positive impact on the economy and society (European Commission, 2020; Nightingale & Coad, 2016). The central theme of the story that I opened this thesis with - 'The Emperor's New Clothes' - is that illusion depends as much on self-deception (the Emperor) as it does on those to be deceived (his people). It illustrates how we, as individuals, engage into an unspoken contract to wilfully disregard our own realities and accept a status-quo. Ultimately, it asks how something can appear to exist, or not. This is a central question of ontology - what exists; and, epistemology, how do we come to know it exists (Cassell & Poth, 2016; McBride, 2018)?

These deceptively simple questions shape what we research, and how we come to understand what is researched. From the following review of entrepreneurship literatures, it is the ontological assumption of whether an entrepreneur exists or not, that appears to divide scholarship into two broad categories (Landstöm & Harirchi, 2019). Within this review, I have labelled these '*Mainstream Approaches'* and '*Critical Approaches*' (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. Mainstream and Critical Approaches to Entrepreneurship

Summary of mainstream and critical approaches within the entrepreneurship field

Dominant Perspectives	**Mainstream Approaches**		**Critical Approaches**	
	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneurship
Ontology	Realism		Relativism	
Epistemology	Objectivism		Subjectivism/ Constructionism	
Methods	Quantitative	Quantitative	Qualitative	Qualitative
Key understandings	An autonomous individual - identifiable through a series of 'different' characteristics, traits and cognitive functions.	A series of linear and replicable steps determining how a new venture is created. A process that is both a context and time specific phenomenon.	A social construct shaped by pervasive economic discourses. Challenges heroic and agentic constructions of the entrepreneur.	A social, historic and cultural phenomenon. It is social in nature and has the potential to produce social change as a result.
Examples from the literature	*Davidsson 2016a; McMullen & Shepherd 2006.*	*Gartner, 1988; Greiner; 1972; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000.*	*Anderson & Warren, 2011; Armstrong, 2014; Nadin et al., 2020; Ogbor, 2000.*	*Ahl & Marlow, 2018, 2021; Rindova et al., 2009; Steyaert, 1997, 2005, 2007.*

A more detailed explanation of these philosophical assumptions is available in Chapter 3: Theoretical Perspectives.

To conduct this review, I used Alvesson and Sandberg's (2020) problematising review framework. The primary aim of the problematising review is to evaluate existing understandings of phenomena (Hart, 2018). This is with a particular view to challenging and reimagining current ways of thinking about them (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013a). The authors outline three principles to guide how this type of review is conducted.

1. *Reading reflexively:* this requires actively and systematically trying to avoid taking conventions for granted and simply reproducing and reinforcing them (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).
2. *Reading broadly but selectively:* a problematising review rejects the full store inventory approach. Instead, it suggests a more limited and careful set of readings to encourage review authors to be less assumption-blind in their orientations. This is to reduce the risk of narrow thinking and taking the existing research domain as given.
3. *Not accumulating but problematising:* rather than undertaking a surface reading of a high volume of available studies, in-depth reading of foundational texts, and of a moderate number of representative texts of a field is recommended. This enables the review author to better identify, articulate and challenge problematic assumptions in a specific domain (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020; Davis, 1971; Patriotta, 2017).

My intent within this Chapter is to show how critical orientations differ from traditional normative research found in the mainstream entrepreneurship literatures. However, I am aware of the dangers that come with using broad categories – like Mainstream and Critical - and that this may seem like I am oversimplifying what is a hugely diverse and complex field of study. Categories are how we make sense of the world and communicate our ideas to others (de Langhe & Fernbach, 2019). However, it can lead to treating members of a category as more alike than they are and can magnify differences between members of different categories. This could lead the reviewer to discriminate, favouring certain categories over others; and, treat the categorical structure I have imposed as if it were static (de Langhe & Fernbach, 2019). Therefore, I note that in separating the literature into two high level categories I am aware I may also be obscuring the diversity present within each. The potential for doing so is something I continue to reflect on throughout this review.

In the sections that follow I provide an overview of how this chapter has been structured. In Part One I review the 'Mainstream' literature and in Part Two that of the 'Critical' literature.

2.1.1 Structure of Part One: Mainstream Approaches

This part looks more closely at specific assumptions implicit across relevant mainstream literatures that conceptualise:

- enterprise growth (section 2.3)
- entrepreneurship (section 2.4)
- and the entrepreneur (section 2.5) (see Figure 3 below).

I examine how, within these mainstream approaches, ontological and epistemic positions align through rational economic arguments that reinforce entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship and enterprise growth as a means to create jobs (see Figure 3).

Continuing this effort in 2.6, I review relevant literature that explores the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition. I find that at the time of writing, few quantitative and no qualitative studies have been done that explore this transition. Finding work that examined becoming an employer, particularly from the perspective of the individual making the transition to becoming an employer, led me to HRM literatures. In 2.6.1 I summarise what literature is available within the context of growing an enterprise. Within this context I have found no in-depth studies exploring the transition from non-employer to employer (other than from an HRM theoretical perspective). Returning to entrepreneurship scholarship in 2.6.2, I find that at the time of writing, few quantitative and no qualitative studies have examined the phenomena associated with becoming an entrepreneur-employer. I conclude that despite job creation narratives being propagated, little understanding exists as to how the transition to entrepreneur-employer happens, particularly from the perspective of those doing it. This identifies a gap in current knowledge and phenomenon for further exploration.

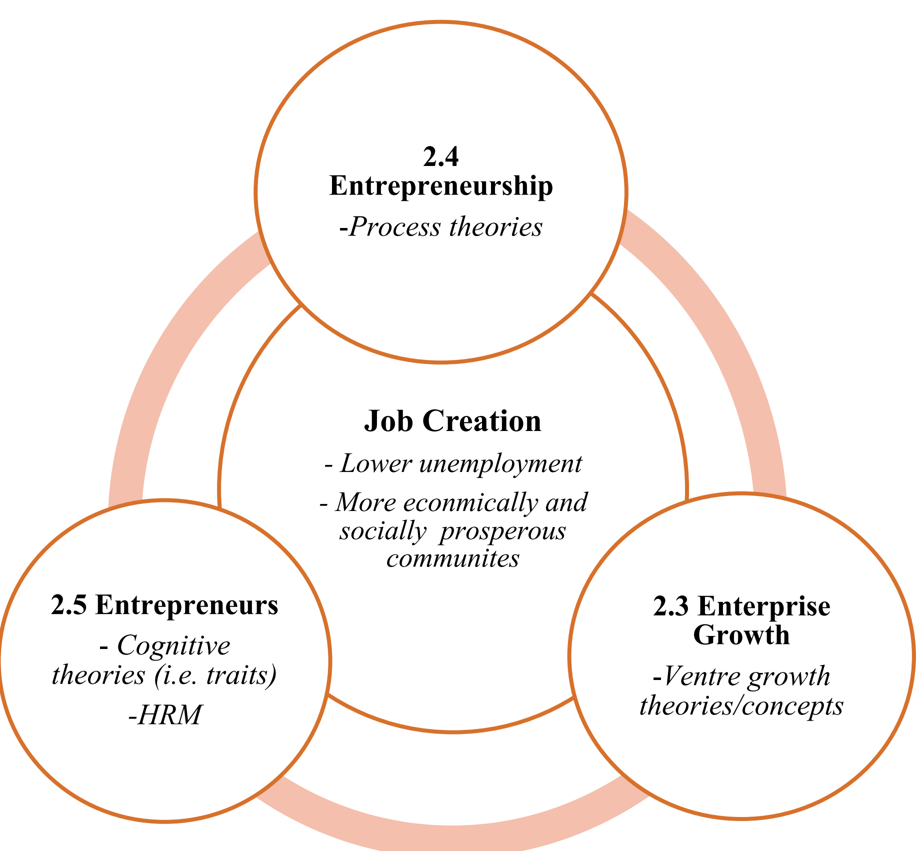


Figure 3. Mainstream approaches informing entrepreneurial job-creation assumptions.

2.1.2 Structure of Part Two: Critical Approaches

In this part of the chapter (2.8), I review critical approaches to re-evaluate our existing understanding of:

- entrepreneurship (section 2.9);
- the entrepreneur (section 2.10); and,
- enterprise growth (Section 2.11) (see Figure 4 below).

In this part of the chapter (2.8), I review critical approaches to re-evaluate our existing understanding of entrepreneurship (section 2.9) and the entrepreneur (section 2.10), reconceptualising them as social, as opposed to economic phenomena (see Figure 4 below). In sections 2.10.1 and 2.10.2, I examine how a growing body of work scrutinises the role and

influence of neoliberalism upon constructions of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship. This is with a particular view to challenge and reimagine current ways of thinking about these concepts (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013b; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). This brings new insight into how entrepreneurial discourses (like enterprise growth, as reviewed in section 2.11) can be conceptualised as regimes of subjectification that shape our everyday lives (Scharff, 2016b).

In sum, this chapter identifies a need to explore the non-employer to employer transition in-depth. In addition, I recognise a need to investigate it from the perspective of those labelled as 'entrepreneurs' to understand how this impacts their experience of becoming an 'entrepreneur-employer'.

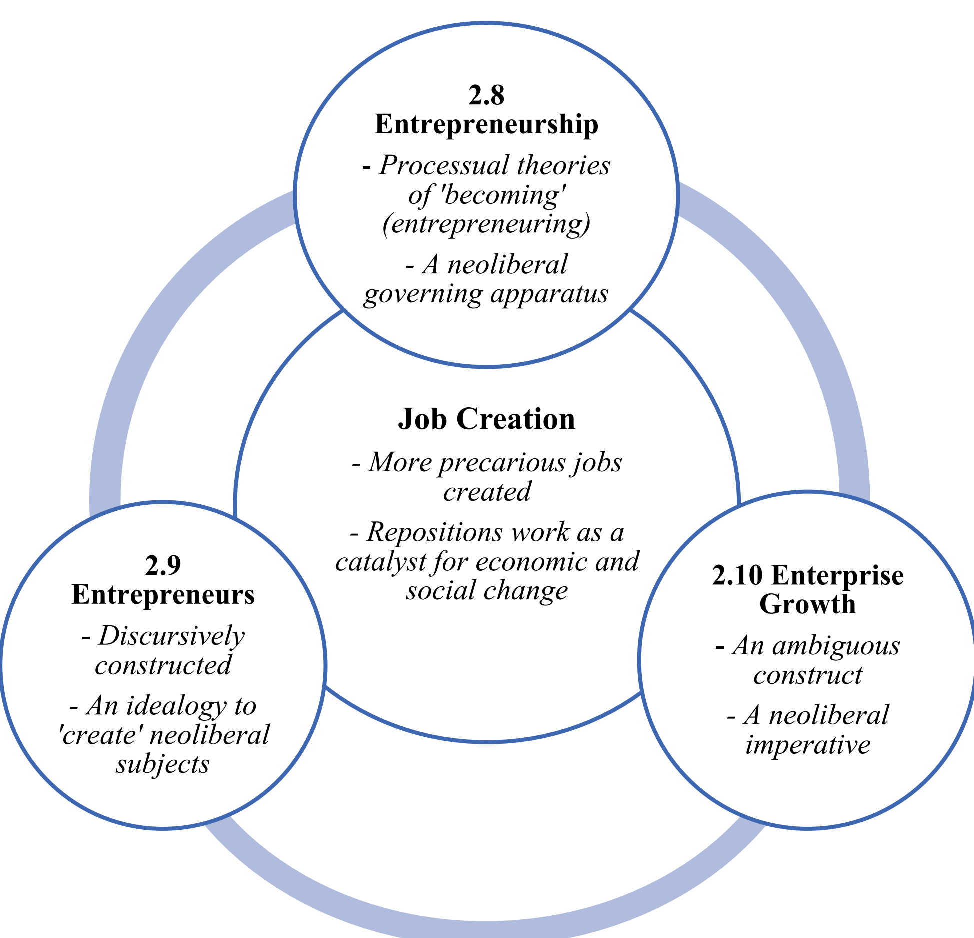


Figure 4. Critical approaches challenging entrepreneurial job-creation assumptions.

2.2 Mainstream Approaches: An Overview

In Chapter One, I identified three common challenges within the entrepreneurship literature. These were:

- a lack of a unified definition or conceptual synthesis;
- an overreliance on positivistic forms of enquiry;
- and a lack of philosophical positional transparency within empirical research.

These challenges have, according to some scholars, arisen from a search for academic legitimacy (Fayolle et al., 2016; Pittaway & Tunstall, 2016; Wiklund et al., 2019). As Frank and Landström (2016) note, this has been accompanied by an 'international isomorphism' (Aldrich, 1992, 2012) that has created an accepted uniformity that governs entrepreneurship research.

It is this acceptance of a uniform approach that has led to the majority of entrepreneurship scholarship being regarded as 'mainstream' (see Table 2). There are common assumptions implicit in mainstream conceptualisations of doing entrepreneurship, being an entrepreneur, and enterprise growth. These assumptions are:

- that knowledge about what entrepreneurship is, or who entrepreneurs are is out there in the world waiting to be discovered;
- a focus on financial and economic value creation;
- it is positive and good for society (i.e. creates new jobs); and,
- that entrepreneurs are characteristically different and identified as a separate population.

Consequently, scholars draw attention to how mainstream studies are strongly influenced by the field of economics (Salder et al., 2020; Tedmanson et al., 2012; Wiklund et al., 2019).

The foundations of the common assumptions highlighted above can be traced historically. During most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, entrepreneurship could be regarded as a fairly marginal topic in disciplines such as economics, sociology and psychology (Landström 2014; Landström & Benner 2010). The development of knowledge on entrepreneurship could mainly be attributed to individual scholars, such as Schumpeter (1912,

1934) and Knight (1921) and from the Austrian School of Economics (Kirzner, 1973). In the 1940s, a number of economic scholars began to take an interest in entrepreneurship (Landes, 1949). Later, scholars from psychology and sociology entered the field. These scholars had an interest in identifying entrepreneurial traits. For example, McClelland's (1961) trait perspectives have had a lasting impact on how entrepreneurs are regarded as characteristically different from non-entrepreneurs (Aldrich 2012; Landström, 2005).

However, a desire for academic legitimacy is only part of the field's story. The other is one of trying to be relevant by being impactful upon society, and this, to some extent, requires responding to the interests of policymakers (Wiklund et al., 2019). Public policy communities are convinced of the merits of entrepreneurship (Lundmark & Westelius, 2014; Mallett & Wapshott, 2020). Moreover, there is a widespread belief that entrepreneurship is the solution to a wide variety of problems, bearing the promise of alleviating poverty and emancipating women (Mair & Martí, 2006), resolving global environmental challenges (Embry et al., 2019; George et al., 2020), creating socially better worlds (Haugh & Talwar, 2016; Hjorth, 2013), and creating jobs (Audretsch, 2009; Coad et al., 2017; Nason & Wiklund, 2019).

In Chapter One, I introduced the historic assumption that more enterprise growth equals job generation. The idea that small enterprises are responsible for creating a disproportionately high number of jobs links to the influential work of Birch (1987). This belief still supports the *why entrepreneurship is relevant* statement, and this appears to be sustained by political ambitions to stimulate economic growth and reduce unemployment. At a global level, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2020. p. 22) report cites entrepreneurial activity as crucially important to the achievement of multiple United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including:

- SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
- SDG 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all;
- SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Similarly, to stimulate economic growth and reduce unemployment is evidenced in the European Commission's (2020, p.1) publication of *The Entrepreneurship Action Plan* the first line of which declares: *'To bring Europe back to growth and create new jobs, we need more entrepreneurs*.' At a more local level, UK policy intervention has been targeted not only to address unemployment, but also to tackle poverty. For example, the *New Enterprise Allowance*

Scheme, provides funding for unemployed individuals to encourage them back into work by starting a business (Department for Work and Pensions, 2020). Consequently, the idea of small enterprises as job creators is influential, with a persistent hold over enterprise, SME and small business policymaking (Mallett & Wapshott, 2020; Tunberg & Anderson, 2020). Notably, the measurement of entrepreneurial activity (and enterprise growth) in the UK and the EU is quantified through the number of employees an enterprise has (Eurostat, 2020). Entrepreneurial growth, in this instance, is directly measured by whether an enterprise has any employees beyond those self-employed (Eurostat 2020; ONS 2020).

The emergence of entrepreneurship as a discipline in the 1970s and its development in the 1980s encouraged a strong, and well-meaning belief, that more entrepreneurship knowledge will support policy and business practice (Fletcher & Seldon, 2016). Implicitly, many mainstream theories and concepts still assume that entrepreneurship is the same all over the world, regardless of cultural, institutional, social and spatial contexts (Baker & Welter, 2020; Welter, 2011). This, as Baker and Welter (2018) contend, has led to a highly de-contextualised research field, that influences teaching, and provides advice to entrepreneurs and policymakers. What the authors illuminate, although not explicitly, is that there exists a subjective positive feedback loop between scholarship and policy - the interests of one shape the scope of the other. This may be because for both communities, legitimacy is reliant on impact in its various forms (Wiklund et al., 2019).

Therefore, based on the assumption that more (enterprise growth, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs) are better, mainstream entrepreneurship research, as Hjorth, Jones, and Gartner (2008, p. 81) note, is characterised by a search for 'general laws.' As I explore in the following sections, these laws govern how concepts of enterprise growth, entrepreneurship. and the entrepreneur are researched by mainstream scholars (Higgins et al., 2015). I find that in much of the discussion within and around these theoretical approaches, the role of the entrepreneur (as a highly contextualised subject) is largely invisible or is predetermined. However, before reviewing the literature that informs this observation, I turn to the literature and discussion of Enterprise Growth, as this is a key concept in the 'Mainstream Approaches'. There is a separation in the literature between entrepreneurship, the entrepreneur, and enterprise growth. These face similar challenges (definitional issues, over-simplification) and tend to ask the same questions (Tunberg, 2014) – possibly because they are not mutually exclusive – yet the mainstream literature presents them as such, and this is reflected in the manner I have reviewed this literature.

2.3 Enterprise Growth

Growth has been predominantly conceptualised as a linear process, based upon predetermined inputs and quantifiable outputs (Tunberg, 2014). One common interpretation has articulated growth as a linear and cumulative phenomenon inevitable in the business process; here, the primary objective of developing a business is increasing a firm's size (Grenier, 1972).

Despite a variety of theoretical lenses, definitions of a firm's growth tend to reflect a 'change in amount' (Parry, 2010, p.8), a quantifiable indicator that can be measured over time. The type of indicator varies extensively across studies within the literature, but turnover, number of employees, business birth and death rates and sales figures are all popular measurements (Coad et al., 2017; Tag, 2015). These indicators are commonly used in datasets that are central to informing extant empirical work and policy decision-making. For example, since 2006 the OECD-Eurostat 'Entrepreneurship Indicators Programme' has used many of these indicators to track the global prevalence and impact of entrepreneurial activity. More specifically, in the UK and in the European Union, business employer demography has been used as a key indicator of entrepreneurship rates since 2006 (OECD, 2017, pp. 35 – 56; OECD/European Union, 2019; ONS, 2020). This considers two measures (European Commission, Eurostat, 2020):

- entrepreneurship in terms of the propensity to start a new business; or,
- the contribution of new enterprises to the creation of jobs.

Narratives emphasising the role and link between entrepreneurship, growth and job creation are evident in these measures. These assumptions are further supported by a body of research that examines enterprise growth, including many highly cited studies that identify why some ventures grow while others do not (Nason & Wiklund, 2019). To draw their conclusions, these studies predominately use large data sets and quantitatively driven research methods to develop conceptual models. Cumulative models presume ongoing growth within a firm is principally accounted for by employee numbers or turnover. The seminal work by Penrose (1959) serves as a useful starting point in discussing why growth has been determined in such a way.

Penrose (1959) provides a twofold definition of enterprise growth: firstly, growth as an outcome, and second, growth as a process of internal development. Much of the existing enterprise growth literature has adopted the first definition (Tunberg, 2014). This adoption is

likely associated with the economic arguments that dominate mainstream approaches and thus, growth literatures (Baker & Welter, 2020; Wiklund et al., 2019).

Growth is often presented as a metaphor of the natural world. Images of growth frequently refer to it being 'organic in nature' (Tunberg & Anderson, 2020, p.2). Closely related are the stage models of growth, assuming the firm will grow according to a set of predetermined and clearly distinguishable stages dependent on certain input factors (e.g., financial support, education level of founder). These views are mirrored in the economic approach to growth (Wach et al., 2020) that is characterised by how much a firm has changed over a period of time (Achtenhagen et al., 2010; McKelvie & Wiklund, 2010). It also infers that inputs are the determinants of growth (Davidsson, 1991). Furthermore, the importance of high growth firms for job creation (Senderovitz et al., 2016) appears to have led to the search for the elixir (Lundmark & Weselius, 2014) of the best mix of inputs to generate more entrepreneurship and growth. It is however now 'evident that the growth process is significantly more challenging and complex than stage models portray' (Macpherson & Holt 2007, p. 183), and as Storey (2011) points out, the factors affecting growth are not easy to capture or model. In fact, evidence suggests that growth is unusual, often episodic (Anyadike-Danes & Hart, 2018; Anyadike-Danes et al., 2015), sometimes traumatic (Anderson & Ullah, 2014), and even hazardous (Ng & Keasey, 2010).

In contrast to perspectives where growth is assumed as a universal economic good, social constructionist approaches (Fletcher, 2006; Tunberg & Anderson, 2020), centre the meanings of growth, especially respondents' understandings, in the co-creation of knowledge. The move to applying constructivist perspectives repositions growing as being bound by, and sensitive to, context. This context is characterised as being created in space and time; and, contingent on how growth is understood and experienced by the entrepreneur. Far from a smooth trajectory, enacting growth reflects the experience of the moment: appearing reactive rather than purposive; and messy rather than ordered. It also places the *entrepreneur* as central to the construction of enterprise growth, thus their thoughts, feelings and perceptions need to be heard to understand their role and impact.

Conceptually, Wright and Stigliani (2013) concluded that the problem is that enterprise growth is a complex construct. It is a longitudinal problem that requires fine grained theorising. They sum up the questions neglected in traditional approaches to growth, and that most relate to the role of the entrepreneur: how they grow; what decisions are made and in what context? In response, and in keeping with broader questions about entrepreneurship (Karataş-Özkan et

al., 2014), arguments have been made for adopting different approaches to understanding enterprise growth (Leitch et al., 2010a; Parry, 2010). For example, McKelvie and Wiklund (2010, p. 271) stress understanding how a firm grows should come from within. They pose the question 'what goes on within the firm while it is growing?'. From this standpoint, to understand a firm's growth, the social and managerial processes enabling or inhibiting growth, could be promisingly investigated (Korsgaard & Anderson, 2011; Tunberg & Anderson, 2020). Others have contended that the need to better understand the interaction between the entrepreneur, their growing enterprise, and the context they are a part of (Davidsson et al., 2006; Davidsson, 2016b; Hamilton, 2012) is a promising avenue of enquiry for this branch of research. This is in keeping with the 'from within' theme and begs the question: what is the role of the entrepreneur as an individual in their firm's growth?

Narratives of enterprise growth characteristically inform the ideology of entrepreneurship (Nalson & Wiklund, 2019; Ogbor, 2000). This sets an expectation that regardless of where ventures are situated or who may own them, they are destined to grow (Tunberg & Anderson, 2020). Yet, most small firms do not grow in terms of increasing the number of their employees, and those who do may struggle to maintain growth (Nalson & Wiklund, 2019). Hesse and Sternberg (2017) describe the growth of small firms as non-linear, in contrast to larger enterprises. It seems that rather than being a straightforward and universal process, small firm growth is challenging and unusual (Anderson & Ullah, 2014; Giacosa et al., 2018). Thus, understanding small enterprise growth, and how employment opportunities may or may not be created are not trivial or insignificant research problems.

However, while the recognition of the role enterprises have is irrefutable at an economic level, available research has not managed to provide satisfying answers as to *how* firms grow (Tunberg & Anderson, 2020), or more specifically, what impact and role the *entrepreneur* has in the growth of their enterprise. As growth is indicated by employee numbers (European Commission, 2020) this introduces a focus on the entrepreneur becoming an *entrepreneur*-employer. Notably, despite the emphasis on its importance over the last 30 years, the literature examining this transition is sparse (see 2.6 below).

As scholars reviewing both the concepts of enterprise growth and entrepreneurship identify, understanding the drivers of both remains partial and 'much remains unexplained' (Wright et al. 2015, p.4). Current knowledge is far from complete and continuing deterministic forms of research are 'unlikely to yield much' (Davidsson et al., 2016, p.1).

2.4 Entrepreneurship

Similar to the debate on growth, since early 2000 the literature associated with the Mainstream Approach predominantly conceptualises entrepreneurship as a process (Baron, 2014). Early attempts to theorize the entrepreneurial process have been enacted in metaphors of 'development' and 'growth'. These processes are couched in the language of so-called growing pains to describe how young enterprises mature and grow in stage models, lifecycle models and models of organizational development. The primarily conceptual nature of these models and descriptions demonstrates the field's emphasis has been on conceptual explorations and modelling. Empirically inductive studies enter the literature latterly but remain outnumbered by deductive approaches (McDonald et al., 2015).

Greiner's (1972) model described a normative-linear process consisting of different cycles of growth that young companies must tackle during various crises and moments of evolution. This has inspired many variations, based on empirical, conceptual and contextual arguments. Although the range of such models is quite broad, they are similar in relying on linear-normative assumptions. That is, they all hold that the development of a new venture follows a relatively linear, progressive and sequential process. They all suggest that these ideal-type models progress in a deterministic way (Moroz & Hindle, 2012). In short, this form of developmental theorising has been critiqued by theorists who point out its core assumptions of linearity, causality, predictability and equilibrium (Steyeart, 2007). These theorists found them to be far too abstract and general to adequately explain what happens - 'as it happens' - in the shift between stages of development (Frank & Lueger 1997; Downing, 2005).

Evolutionary and later, complexity theories (Breslin, 2008) have also been applied to frame entrepreneurial processes using both time-based and event-based pacing methods, challenging the cumulative idea of evolution (Steyeart, 2007). These perspectives are event-based as opposed to outcome-based in scope. In this view, the entrepreneur is seen as a non-normative creative force. Change emerges from small groups isolated from the main population who introduce change through new innovations (Schumpeter, 1934; Tushman & Anderson, 1986). Complexity theory explains evolutionary process as one in which 'organized systems spontaneously emerge out of chaotic systems' (Sammut-Bonnici & Wensley, 2002, p. 306). This theory attempts to explain the sporadic and often random nature of organisational creation and emergence.

Inspired by the interest that complexity science takes in ways of creating order, entrepreneurship is seen as the process of fruition, through order creation and self-emergence

(Anderson & Starnawska, 2008). These perspectives change one main assumption: that organisational emergence involves activities that develop in a non-linear and interdependent way (see also McKelvey, 2004). The use of complexity theory draws attention to the role of the entrepreneur in the process of enterprise creation, without ever detailing how or what self-emergence is (Cope, 2011).

In sum, what these perspectives share is their 'entitative' focus (Hjorth et al., 2015). That is, they presuppose several entities such as people, organizations, populations, or technologies and claim that they exist ontologically, prior to and hence independent of the process. Thus, these perspectives dismiss the possibility that these 'entities' are themselves emerging and must be understood as effects of particular processes. As a consequence of this entitative logic, many studies suggest that entrepreneurship research primarily needs a multi-level approach, but they fail to explain how these levels came to be distinguished in the first place (Clark & Harrison, 2018).

A common challenge when trying to tie entrepreneurship to a single unified concept, or model it on a set of predetermined variables, is the heterogeneity of entrepreneurial phenomena *(*Clark & Harrison, 2019; Davidsson, 2016). Different people start different types of economic activities for different reasons; through different processes; proceed at different paces; with different resource bases; and are situated within different industries, geographies, cultural and economic environments (McMullen & Dimov, 2013). How entrepreneurship is conceptualised continues to be subject to the tension between a need to simplify, whilst acknowledging the existence of these many differences.

In their review, Moroz and Hindle (2012) illuminate many points of divergence and conceptual limitations shared by scholars investigating entrepreneurship as a process. They argue that the 'heterogeneity of researchers' notions of the 'entrepreneurial process' is so diffuse that each of the 31 models they reviewed share little convergence conceptually (p. 811). A single unifying feature of the models studied is the broad belief in the importance of a process-based approach to understanding the phenomenon of entrepreneurship. They conclude 'for all the superficial use of the phrase 'entrepreneurial process' all we really have, to date, is a hodgepodge of different perspectives, using a variety of different multidisciplinary theories that investigate entrepreneurship in narrowly themed contexts' (p. 812).

The need to be both generic and distinct about the process of entrepreneurship is the 'double-barrelled' question that Hindle (2010) believes may hold the key to bridging practice and theoretical divides within entrepreneurship as a field of study. Such frameworks describe

the entrepreneurial process as a consolidation of diverse, yet universally identifiable factors (Shane, 2005). Both approaches – the generic and the specific - combine key elements of the other to provide logical frameworks of the entrepreneurial process (Kuratko et al., 2015). There are notable conceptual models that remain influential in their attempts to address existing challenges and bring a level of understanding to what appears to be highly complex phenomena, such as organisation creation, (Bygrave, 1989; Gartner, 1985) and, entrepreneurship as opportunity seeking (Shane, 2005).

From this review of the mainstream's approach to entrepreneurship, two opportunities in conceptualising entrepreneurship present themselves. Firstly, despite efforts to account for heterogeneous phenomena – ontologically, a dualistic tension remains in understanding the relationship between entrepreneur and their environment. To overcome this gives space for more phenomenologically grounded research, which is not subject to *a priori* assumptions. This may help to counteract reductionist descriptions of entrepreneurial processes by building understanding of entrepreneurship from the perspective of those who experience it. Secondly, and relatedly, is to consider how entrepreneurship research is to be better contextualised.

Context emerges as an area for further work in my review of the literature on Enterprise Growth (see Section 2.3 above). This review suggested that the ever-present ambitions for more entrepreneurs to accomplish more enterprise growth and thus create more jobs, highlights that current entrepreneurial process theories may not transcend different contexts. The following section examines this area of interest and how scholars have attempted to integrate the role of context in their studies of entrepreneurship.

2.4.1 Entrepreneurship and Context

Theorising context requires studies to address broad-ranging questions regarding *who* is involved in entrepreneurship as well as *where*, *when*, *how* and *why* they become involved, and the consequences to them and others (Welter, 2011). Perhaps more significantly, is the requirement for entrepreneurship to be regarded as not just an economic but also social phenomena (Berglund, 2015).

Within 'Mainstream Approaches' context is often treated as a separate externality, a backdrop to enterprise activity, most frequently as the *where* of entrepreneurship (Welter et al., 2018). However, such approaches do not capture the complexity of the context (Hindle, 2010; Williams & Vorley, 2015; Wright & Marlow, 2012) and fail to look beyond context as the features of a place in which entrepreneurial activity occurs (or not) (McKeever et al., 2015).

Early work to conceptualise the effect of context on the entrepreneurial actions repositioned entrepreneurship as *organisation creation* (or *emergence)* (Gartner, 1993; Gartner & Shane, 1995; Venkataraman, 1997; Verstraete, 2003) and *new value creation* (Bruyat & Julien, 2001). These process theories sought to identify both the social and economic dynamics of entrepreneurship.

Borrowing from Weick's theories of organising and of sensemaking (1979), the term 'creation' implies there is a creator. This places the entrepreneur at the centre of emergence; constructing order from the world around them (Fayolle, 2007). It also suggests that entrepreneurship takes place on the premise of an entrepreneur's capacity to translate a dream – vision - into action through the creation of business. This notion highlights the possibility of imagination as a catalyst to enterprise growth (Gartner, 1993; 2007; Kier & McMullen, 2018). Within this conceptualisation the entrepreneur becomes more than just an economic actor, but a social *and* economic actor. This opens up discussion as to what conditions make businesses become more of a reality. It indicates the significant role the entrepreneur plays in the emergence of an enterprise and the role of cognition in the creation of it. The entrepreneur is regarded in the Schumpeterian (1989) sense here, as a creative and heroic force capable of bringing about change beyond the means of a normal individual.

To move the primary field of entrepreneurship from its historically narrow focus on either entrepreneurial individuals and their characteristics *or* environmental factors behind new venture creation, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) offered the individual–opportunity nexus as a general framework to explain the different parts of the entrepreneurial process in a coherent way (Fiet et al., 2013; Venkataraman et al., 2012). Accordingly, '... entrepreneurship involves the nexus of two phenomena: the presence of lucrative opportunities and the presence of enterprising individuals' (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000, p. 218). This conceptual framework is centred on the concept of 'entrepreneurial opportunities' emphasising the process of discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities while maintaining that entrepreneurship needs to deal with the individual entrepreneur and the entrepreneurial opportunity. This work has proven to be influential inspiring lines of enquiry into entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial opportunity (Linãn & Fayolle, 2015)

Shane and Venkataraman (2000, 2001) believed that a unified theory could be achieved by investigating and conceptualising the process through which an entrepreneur 'discovers' an 'opportunity'. Their model develops a generic entrepreneurial process through a series of cyclical stages: (1) the existence of opportunities; (2) the discovery of opportunities; and (3),

the exploitation of opportunities (Shane, 2003). The model also attempts to capture the dialogical effects of the individual and the environment, as proposed by Sarasvathy (2001). Challenges to this model arise when exploring the philosophical assumptions it is based upon. For example, 'opportunity' is provided as an objective construct and is 'out there' to be discovered. This is despite framing the process of discovery as dependant on an individual's constructed knowledge. However, Shane (2003) argues that opportunities are in constant 'existence' and that this object/subject critique is irrelevant.

In a similar vein, Bruyat and Julien's (2001) *New Value Creation* concept was influential in highlighting that enterprise formation is sensitive to, and dependant on contextual factors (social, geographical, temporal etc). These scholars do not limit entrepreneurship to organisation formation, but instead incorporate Weick's theory of organisation (1979). In doing so, the scholars emphasise the 'constraining' dialogic that occurs when an entrepreneur begins to construct their enterprise and expose it to different contexts:

> The individual builds and manages something (an enterprise, an innovation, etc.), but is, at the same time, constrained and created by the object constructed (Bruyat & Julien, 2001, p. 169).

The authors propose a need to consider both the individual *and* their processes as part of an holistic 'entrepreneurial system'. However, as in Shane and Venkataraman (2000) the essential relational tension between object and subject remains unexplored. They suggest more understanding is needed of the contextual sensitivities that impact the actor and their environment. However, the scholars provide little detail into how the entrepreneur goes about constructing the enterprise, or if and how such constraints are felt, if at all. To extend this, scholars have turned to bricolage theory (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Davidsson et al., 2017) to demonstrate how entrepreneurs' actions are shaped by what resources are perceivably available to them. Taking this perspective highlights that entrepreneurs, despite operating in the same geographical *place,* do not regard it as the same *space*, and may draw different meanings that then influence different behaviours (Baker & Welter, 2020; Powell & Baker, 2014). This points to the wider and more complicated role complex contextual constructs have (like culture, or community), and perhaps why scholars identify a need to understand how context is crafted through social interaction (Welter et al., 2019; Welter & Baker, 2020).

Contemporary literature continues to echo this call for a greater recognition on the role and influence of context (Zahra et al., 2014), which is suggestive of a dissatisfaction with

broader process theory perspectives (Baker & Welter, 2020; Welter et al., 2017; Wiklund et al., 2019). For example, Brännback and Carsrud (2016) report that even Steve Blank, the inventor of the 'lean start-up model' (Blank, 2013), acknowledges the context-specificity of his model, which stems from his experiences as serial technology entrepreneur and investor in Silicon Valley. Baker and Welter (2018, p. 120) note that Blank's model is repeatedly viewed and taught as if it were a normative model for creating new organizations. They submit that a contextualized view on entrepreneurship asks for an interdisciplinary perspective, as the solution cannot be to develop an overarching theory of entrepreneurship in all contexts. Instead, Baker and Welter (2018) suggest working with disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and others, which possess some of the tools and concepts entrepreneurship scholars need to explore the variety, depths and richness of contexts.

However, there is an implicit challenge in Baker and Welter's (2018) work. While they see merit in diversifying at a methodological level, there has yet to be a consequential shift in the philosophical assumptions that anchor mainstream research. Within this challenge, the complexity of context is evident but the role the entrepreneur plays in the construction of their context is not.

A final, more practical point on conducting more contextually sensitive research links back to the imperative of growth, and how a more nuanced understanding would enable better targeting of support to those starting businesses (Brown et al., 2017; Caliendo et al., 2019; Tunberg & Anderson, 2020). For example, exploring what triggers and sustains new enterprises so that support can be better targeted may provide more opportunities for interventions to facilitate growth (Brown et al., 2017). While these arguments refer to how policy makers deal with new enterprises as a whole, there is a renewed emphasis on identifying significant episodes at firm-specific levels (Mallett & Wapshott, 2020; Brown & Mawson, 2013). Perhaps a barrier to understanding the influences on small enterprises is the heterogeneity of these firms, and how they negotiate the challenges that operating within different contexts may bring (Mallett & Wapshott, 2020).

Additionally, macro-level investigations frequently use terms such as 'small enterprise' that appear to privilege the venture at the expense of the entrepreneur(s) running it (Mallett, 2017). The provision of support for small enterprises has been criticised for failing to engage with the diverse needs of a wide range of heterogeneous firms and the entrepreneurs running them (Wapshott & Mallett, 2020). Indeed, Mallett (2019) produces evidence on the low levels of take up and impact of wider support structures in the UK. This perhaps illustrates another

aspect of the gap between theory and practice. Additionally, a significant challenge in trying to apply macro-level approaches is how to account for the 'heterogenous aspects of contexts' in 'delineating the micro-foundations of entrepreneurship' (Zahra & Wright, 2011, p 67).

This review of the literature suggests that asking the question of how an enterprise grows (Section 2.3) requires one to ask: what role the entrepreneur has; and the impact of the entrepreneurial process (or indeed enterprise growth) has upon them? These questions appear to be unexplored within the available literature. In much of the literature that seeks to holistically conceptualise entrepreneurship (Section 2.4); the entrepreneur, and their role, still remain somewhat invisible. Much of the work conceptualising who, or what, an entrepreneur is, remains separate and tends to ask: what determines an entrepreneur, and what enables someone to become one? The following section summarises how mainstream literatures have conceptualised the entrepreneur, and how the entrepreneur is perceived within mainstream approaches.

2.5 The Entrepreneur

As previously explored, a primary focus of mainstream entrepreneurship scholars has been on the founding of a new enterprise as an end in itself, or more generally on transitions to entrepreneurship from the deterministic perspective of venture creation. What seems to be a common exclusion from work conceptualising enterprise growth is the role of the entrepreneur within the process. Much of the work in this sub-field has tried to understand the entrepreneur by determining how they are behaviourally and cognitively different to non-entrepreneurs. Within this body of scholarship, ontological individualism (the idea that an entrepreneur is unique and identifiable) remains taken-for-granted and dominant: entrepreneurial activities are conceptually equated with the behaviour of the entrepreneur (Thompson et al., 2020; Hjorth et al., 2015). This leads scholars to investigate the entrepreneur's cognitive antecedents, emotions, contextual conditions and causal relations (e.g., Davidsson 2015; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006).

Historic theories of the 'entrepreneur' resulted in efforts to measure and predict the entrepreneurial personalities led to identifying a mass of traits. Despite continued criticism and rejection (Gartner, 2016), current psychological trait research still continues and can broadly be categorised into several variables. These include social competence (Baron, 2000), motivation (Collins et al., 2004; Segal et al., 2005), self-efficacy (Zhao et al., 2005), cognition

(Busenitz et al., 2003; Shane, 2003), and dealing with uncertainty (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006).

The trait school of thought is the study of successful people who tend to exhibit similar characteristics that would increase success opportunities for any emulators (Mitchell & Shepherd, 2010; Chell, 2000). Studies have suggested that characteristics of achievement, creativity, determination, and technical knowledge are *supposedly* exhibited by successful entrepreneurs (Shepherd, 2015).

There are two types of trait theory that govern entrepreneurship literature. First, single-trait explanations focused on seeking out one particular aspect of personality that could determine behaviour (Chell & Burrows, 1991; Gartner, 1989). The 1960s and 1970s saw much of the research in this area. Second, multi-trait theories attempted to identify a pattern of traits that could be used to construct a distinct personality (Mitchell et al., 2002). Both approaches tended to draw conclusions from samples of Western, white and predominantly male entrepreneurs (Gill & Ganesh, 2007). Recent studies (e.g., Watson et al., 2020; Brandstätter, 2011) still apply multi-trait approaches, although there is an absence of its application in higher impact entrepreneurship journals. Furthermore, some scholars have even sought to establish if psychological disorders (e.g. bipolar disorder) and traits associated with these disorders link to entrepreneurial intent (Johnson et al., 2018; Johnson, 2009; Moore et al., 2021; Wiklund et al., 2018).

As demonstrated so far, Mainstream Approaches are ‘dominated by objectively rational, logical-thinking’ (Bygrave, 2007, p. 3), and studies to conceptualise the entrepreneur are no exception. However, most of the time entrepreneurs ‘do not behave logically and rationally in any objective sense’ (p. 3). It has been argued that for the field of entrepreneurship to gain academic legitimacy, research should seek to *understand* those who engage in entrepreneurial activities (see also Berglund, 2015; Bjerke, 2007; Bygrave, 2007; Neergard & Ulhøi, 2007). A ‘call to action’ to apply psychological research methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurs has been made (Davidsson, 2016; Hisrich et al., 2007). Echoing this, Baum et al., (2007) emphasise that ‘despite the belief that the entrepreneur’s personal characteristics are important for new venture success, the psychology of the entrepreneur has not been thoroughly studied’ (p. 1). This has been responded to by a notable rise in cognitive psychological research (Tu-Porcar et al., 2018; Tu-Porcar et al., 2017) that aims to understand the ‘knowledge structures that people use to make assessments,

judgments or decisions involving opportunity evaluation, venture creation and growth' (Mitchell et al., 2002, p. 97).

Accordingly, scholars became increasingly dissatisfied with the historic dominance of personality theory, critiquing its use in entrepreneurship studies (Chell & Burrows, 1991; Gartner, 1989). The response was a blossoming of cognitive theories of entrepreneurship (such as Shane, 2003). Researchers focused more on what entrepreneurs *do*, initially focusing on venture creation, than on what they *are* (Gartner, 1989). Theories from social psychology were used to address these new research questions. The first of these approaches was interactionism. Interactionism in social psychology describes the interaction between the individual and their environment.

Interactionist models aimed to bring together three broad concepts; 'intentionality', 'self-efficacy' and 'situational' aspects (Bird, 1988; Naffziger et al., 1994). Intentionality was viewed as the individuals desire to achieve a specific objective (goal) or a path of objectives (Bird, 1988). Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) was the person's belief in their ability to achieve an objective based on mastery experiences, observational learning, social persuasion and judgments of their own psychological and physiological states (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994).

Social development theory is considered a forerunner of many later studies of entrepreneurial learning (Cope & Watts, 2000). For example, Gibb and Ritchie (1982) rejected personality theory and argued that it assumed entrepreneurs were born when in fact they were made. They suggested that entrepreneurship is better understood in tandem with situational factors, including the social groups to which the individuals relate (Gibb, 1987; Gibb & Ritchie, 1982). Thus, they acknowledge the fluency and changing nature of behaviours as individuals engage with their social worlds. It places the entrepreneur within the context of social change and ultimately allows space for behaviour development and learning. This arguably provided the initial foundation for subsequent work on theories of entrepreneurial learning (e.g., Cope, 2005; Ekanem, 2015; Liu et al., 2019; Rae, 2017).

The lasting influence of these approaches is in the construction of the entrepreneur as someone who is different to other individuals. Much of this research still does little to account for contextual variables, such as time or place (Baker & Welter, 2020; Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). Cultural psychologists have questioned the validity of the claims that entrepreneurs are 'different' asserting that communities, societies, and cultural contexts are the source of an individual's sense-making and actions (Gupta & Fernandez, 2008; Gupta et al., 2016; Markus & Kitayama, 1998).

In sum, what becomes increasingly evident is that the concepts of the entrepreneur, entrepreneurship and growth are inherently complex. As such, scholars are increasingly seeking to complexify, not simplify these constructs (Dimov, 2020; Tsoukas, 2017). To bring new insights into how scholars can better map enterprise growth (and entrepreneurship) there are calls for more diverse perspectives (Tunberg & Anderson, 2020; Wright & Stigliani 2013), both on a philosophical and a methodological level. More in-depth idiographic research (McKelvie & Wiklund, 2013; Wiklund et al., 2019), methodological pluralism (Leitch et al., 2010b; Tunberg & Anderson, 2020; Verduijn et al., 2017) have also been called for to extend understandings of these concepts. This demonstrates a growing shift of focus from measuring how *much* enterprises grow to exploring the more fundamental question of *how* they grow and the nature of that growth within their contexts (McKelvie & Wiklund 2010).

In Section 2.3 I established that the dominant imperative of enterprise growth is the potential for it to expand beyond the employment of its founder(s) – the entrepreneur(s). To grow beyond this point, the entrepreneur has to transition to become what I have termed the 'Entrepreneur-Employer'. In the following section I discuss the literature that is relevant to this transition.

2.6 The Entrepreneur-Employer Transition

As the previous sections have concluded, the role of the entrepreneur remains almost invisible in Mainstream Approaches. However, a notable exception is within literatures specifically addressing concepts of Human Resources Management (HRM). The following section traces key considerations of this domain. It highlights the entrepreneur's negotiation/understanding of employee management/relations as being central to the small enterprise growth process. I then consider the literature on the central proposition of growth, that of the transition from entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer.

2.6.1 Human Resource Management Perspectives

While mainstream entrepreneurship literatures examine the process of growth in its entirety, understanding how entrepreneurs negotiate and growth and manage employees is primarily afforded to Human Resources Management (HRM) literatures (Wapshott & Mallett, 2015; David & Watts, 2008).

Scholars link formalised human resources (HR) practices to employee and organisational performance (Kotey & Slade, 2005; Marlow & Patton, 2002; Matlay, 1999).

Applying the theoretical construct of HRM is largely taken as a given within much of the literature and subsequently applied broadly to small businesses (with exception of Critical Approaches) (Storey & Greene, 2010). Underpinning the HRM construct, is that HR functions add value to the organisation through the application and enhancement of employee effort (Kitching & Marlow, 2013; Marlow, 2006). There remains a broad and wholly positive assumption that the management of labour, through the application of formalised HR functions is both desirable, and beneficial (Carroll et al., 1999; Legge, 2005; Wapshott & Mallett, 2015). Contemporary empirical work continues to support this assumption, for example, Lai et al., (2016) find that smaller ventures who implement formal HR practices better survive during economic crisis, as opposed to those that do not.

Conversely, there is recognition that more often than not, the employment relationship is a subjective 'messy' process, regardless of firm size (Mallett et al., 2019). Within small firms most formal HR models applied in larger organisations are not applicable (Mazzarol & Reboud, 2020). Scholars note informal, rather than formalised approaches appear to be the norm. For example, Mazzarol and Reboud, (2020) illuminate the distinctiveness of small business HR practices and relations. Literatures highlight what is unique to small business HRM, including an inseparability between private and working lives (Verheul, 2018); a lack of social and spatial proximity (Gilman et al., 2015); high incidences of workplaces bullying and harassment (Lewis et al., 2017a); and the influence of informal practices (Ram & Edwards, 2010).

Given this, Kitching and Marlow (2013) conclude that understanding the personal dimensions of employer-employee relations in small business is crucial. This perspective emphasises the role of the entrepreneur, rather than an implementation of formal structures as key in shaping employment relationships (Kitching & Marlow, 2013). For example, scholars evidence the impact of owner-managers - much of this literature does not use the term 'entrepreneur' - putting their own capital at risk on how they manage employees. They find a tendency to avoid delegating responsibility to employees in order to retain control over the day-to-day running of their ventures (Gilman et al., 2015; Mallett & Wapshott, 2014). This has been highlighted as particularly the case in women-owned enterprises; women are more likely than men to maintain control over decision making in their ventures (Verheul et al., 2018). A lack of employee autonomy and control in SMEs has been linked to bullying and harassment behaviours (Lewis et al., 2017).

Scholars also illuminate the tensions between employers trying to grow their enterprise and the impact of regulatory interventions (Kitching & Marlow, 2013; Mallett et al., 2019). In particular employment regulations seek to formalise HR practices in small businesses, and often these do not generate their intended outcomes (Atkinson et al., 2016). Studies have evidenced that negotiating regulations is a significant challenge for owner-managers (Kitching, 2016; Mallett et al., 2019; Stumbitz et al., 2018). Kitching and Marlow (2013) surmise an inherent tension with policies encouraging growth and small enterprise expansion. Research is increasingly examining how and if HR regulatory policies and practice enable or constrain enterprise growth (Mallett et al., 2019).

Given the importance placed on enterprise growth as a means for creating jobs, this highlights a criticality to understanding how an entrepreneur becomes an employer (Coad et al., 2017). In light of this, there are few studies that have examined this transition in-depth. An exception is the recent work of Tunberg and Anderson (2020), who rather than focus on the employer transition exclusively, looked holistically at the challenge's entrepreneurs face when trying to grow their firm. They conclude that for their participants far from being simple or deterministic, achieving growth was far from easy.

The literature on the relationship between being an entrepreneur and an employer is therefore dominated by discussion of the management of employees through an HRM lens. The following section turns back to the mainstream entrepreneurship field to review the available literatures discussing the transition of entrepreneurs to entrepreneur-employers.

2.6.2 Reviewing Entrepreneur-Employer Literature

Although there is a dedicated body of work that applies to human resource functions like recruitment or selection, empirical work examining the decision to hire employees and transition to become an employer is dominated by the application of quantitative approaches. Rather than looking at *how* the transition takes place, much of the available research addresses the question of *what*, or *when*? See Table 3 below. There are a few papers that concentrate specifically on the first hiring decisions (Caliendo et al., 2019), and I have not found any that investigate this transition from the entrepreneur's perspective. Research also remains limited regarding whether the path to hiring the first employee matters or not (Dvouletý et al., 2020).

Research remains silent regarding the question of whether the path to hiring the first employee matters in relation to an enterprise failing or not. A study conducted by Caliendo et al., (2019) observed survival rates of enterprises that employed staff was below the expected

survival rate of enterprises more broadly. They found this occurs because, within their data set, many employers return to the status of non-employers. They conclude it is therefore of economic interest to better understand what makes an entrepreneur survive as an employer in the market. Similarly, there are a number of studies that find nascent entrepreneurs have no intention of growing (Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2016; Burke, 2015a; Hurst & Pugsley, 2011). This sits in opposition to mainstream enterprise growth literatures where growth is an embedded expectation (see Section 2.3 above).

Table 3. Non-employer to Employer Literature

Summary of available non-employer to employer transition literature

Research Area	Available Literature
What determines the good performance of a venture that hires employees over those that do not?	*Burke et al., 2018.*
What factors determine the decision to grow and hire employees?	*Block et al., 2018; Burke et al., 2002; Burke et al., 2008; Caliendo et al. 2019; Caliendo et al., 2014; Coad et al., 2017; Cowling et al., 2004; Fackler et al., 2019; Fairlie & Miranda, 2017; Henley, 2005; Kraaij & Elbers, 2016; Lechmann & Wunder, 2017; Millán et al., 2013; Millán et al., 2014; Patel, 2019; Petrescu, 2016; van Praag & Cramer 2001; Zhou et al., 2018.*
What factors determine the decision to not hire any staff?	*Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2016; Burke, 2015b; Dvouletý 2018; Dvouletý et al., 2019; Dvouletý & Orel, 2020; Hurst & Pugsley, 2011.*

Subsequent literature emphasises the importance of heterogeneity among entrepreneurs (Levine & Rubinstein, 2017), but rarely differentiates between the sizes of the started businesses in terms of employment. The hiring decision is analysed either by pooling all entries, irrespective of the timing of the hiring decision (Henley, 2005), or by explicitly focusing on those who hire from a non-employer position (Coad et al., 2017).

The literature converges on the question of how economic, demographic, and educational characteristics and/or access to capital influence entrepreneurs in becoming an employer. Mostly, studies use data gathered from individuals who identify that they are

employing staff for the first time in their ventures (i.e., transition from non-employer to employers). However, the results of these studies are contradictory. For example, van Praag and Cramer (2001), who use Dutch data, and Henley (2005), who uses British data, find that the hiring decision is positively influenced by higher education levels and self-employed parents. Coad et al. (2017), use Danish data to examine determinants in transitioning from non-employer to employer. However, these authors only find such influence for higher education levels, while they cannot confirm the intergenerational link. Fairlie and Miranda (2017), use US data and study the determinants of entrepreneurs hiring their first employee do not even find evidence that higher education levels positively influence the hiring decision.

Additionally, it's been found that entrepreneurs are less likely to employ staff if they have been previously unemployed (Caliendo et al., 2019, Coad et al., 2017), and that middle-aged entrepreneurs are more likely to start the hiring process (Cowling et al., 2004, Henley, 2005). Studies also find that males are more likely than females to hire employees in their firms (e.g., Burke et al., 2002, Cowling et al., 2004). What these studies fail to do, is provide ample explanation as to how or why this critical transition takes place or what is challenging about it from the perspective of those going through it: the entrepreneurs. As is common with literatures examining growth, entrepreneurship and the entrepreneur essential questions remain unanswered (Leitch et al., 2010a; Tunberg & Anderson, 2020). Theoretical and conceptual development to answer these questions is both slow and limited (Tunberg & Anderson, 2020). Therefore, the concept of the transition to entrepreneur-employer remains essentially under-explored within 'Mainstream Approaches'.

2.7 Mainstream Approaches Summary

In this section, I have traced how 'Mainstream Approaches' have carved out a narrative that assume entrepreneurship, the entrepreneur, and more specifically enterprise growth is regarded a positive force that drives job creation. In addition, measurements of growth (and entrepreneurial activity more broadly) are commonly determined by whether an enterprise is an employer or not.

In problematising this assumption, I turned to literatures that conceptualise enterprise growth, entrepreneurial processes, and entrepreneurs. I highlighted a dominance of macro-level positivistic perspectives that tend to simplify growth and the process of starting and growing an enterprise. A reliance on functionalist perspectives was also found in literatures exploring the non-employer to employer transition. I demonstrated how literatures identify the

non-employer to employer transition as critical in whether an enterprise (and indeed, the *entrepreneur*) achieves growth or not.

Individual and/or in-depth investigations into this transition are limited, and at the time of writing, were not found in my literature search. Notably, Tunberg and Anderson (2020) demonstrate how taking a phenomenological approach illuminates rather than distils the contextual complexities that mean growing a venture is perhaps far more challenging than mainstream literatures present it to be. However, a gap remains on how such an approach can be used to investigate how entrepreneurs become an employer and therefore, begin to grow their enterprise. This puts renewed emphasis on understanding the role of the *entrepreneur* beyond mainstream assumptions, and what may or may not inhibit or enable them to become an employer.

The questions raised of *how* or *why* enterprise growth happens, reflect historic yet still relevant questions being asked of the field, like 'what is entrepreneurship; and how might it be it be studied' (Gartner, 2004, p. 199; Wiklund et al., 2019). Since these observations, entrepreneurship research has diversified and embraces a multitude of methodological approaches (Fletcher & Seldon, 2016). In particular, critical entrepreneurship research has emerged as a dispersed and multidisciplinary field of inquiry. Critical literatures share a common dissatisfaction with how entrepreneurship is positioned within the scholarly community: 'as a market-based and individualist phenomenon predicated on a 'special' trait (or set of behaviours) that ignites venture creation, and, consequently, brings economic growth, innovation and more jobs' (Verduijn et al., 2017, p.18). Such a focus on entrepreneurship as a desirable economic activity, perceived unquestioningly as positive, however 'obscures important questions' (Tedmanson et al., 2012, p. 532).

In the following section, I summarise 'Critical Approaches' and how they have used a plurality of theoretical and methodological approaches to uncover new meanings and perspectives on the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship.

2.8 Critical Approaches: An Overview

Applying a critical lens to the entrepreneurship literature repositions the concepts of growth, the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship as constructs and challenges key assumptions reinforced within mainstream approaches. In doing so, what I have defined as 'critical' literature broadly separates from mainstream research at the ontological level (Pittaway & Tunstall, 2016; Anderson et al., 2009; Pittaway et al., 2018). Rather than assume that these concepts are fixed entities that can be measured and reproduced, critical entrepreneurship research tends to regard growth, the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship as socially constructed phenomena. The early seminal commentaries by Nodoushani and Nodoushani (1999), Ogbor (2000) and Armstrong (2005) were some of the first to deconstruct the ideological roots of entrepreneurship with its purported avant-garde and 'anti-management lyricism' (Armstrong, 2005, p. 48).

The critical field's predominant aim is to illuminate the often messy, heterogeneous and problematic nature of entrepreneurship (Verduijn et al., 2017). This is presented as 'a complex web of intertwined social, economic and politically framed activities' (Tedmanson et al., 2012, p. 535). It entails exploring the implied: norms; self-evidences; paradigmatic roots of entrepreneurship scholarship as a whole, including its political ideologies; dominant assumptions; grand narratives; and preferred samples and methods. In so doing studies peel away layers of ideological obscuration (Ahl, 2004; Rehn et al., 2013) in order to 'engage openly with the dark sides' (Essers et al., 2017, p. 16). These are the contradictions, paradoxes, ambiguities and tensions at the heart of entrepreneurship scholarship (Armstrong, 2005; Jones & Spicer, 2009; Verduijn et al., 2014).

Contributions studying entrepreneurship as hegemonic discourse (Armstrong, 2005; Nadin et al., 2020; Verduijn et al., 2017) expose dominant assumptions and their consequences (Jones & Spicer, 2009; Johnsen & Sørensen, 2017). Such approaches argue how entrepreneurial discourse reproduces capitalist ideologies (Da Costa & Saraiva, 2012; Olaison & Sørensen, 2014). Scholars conclude that the discipline is complicit with existing systems and implied dynamics of economic exclusion, exploitation and oppression (Olaison & Sørensen, 2014). In this vein, critical research is sensitive to how entrepreneurship may work as an ideological support of an economic system (Olaison & Sørensen, 2014; Williams & Nadin, 2012, 2013). Arguably one of the greatest contributions of the critical approach is the revelation that entrepreneurship does not necessarily offer a solution to the crises of capitalism (Jones & Murtola, 2012). Conversely other researchers submit that the encouragement of entrepreneurship is structurally linked with capitalism in such a way as to make it flexible and

resilient (Harvey, 2014). This prolongs rather than changes the contradictory nature of entrepreneurship as an activity (Dey, 2016; Dey & Lehner, 2017; Harvey, 2014).

As Section 2.4 examined, Mainstream Approaches theorising entrepreneurial activities are dominated by assumptions of determinism that present entrepreneurship as a planned activity that follows a linear process (Steyaert, 2007; Verduijn, 2015). In trying to move beyond this taxonomy, processual perspectives reconceptualised entrepreneurship as 'entrepreneuring' (Steyaert, 2007); a socially complex, ongoing, non-linear and inherently open endeavour (Verduijn, 2015).

Taking a processual perspective effectively transgresses ontological realism as the dominant paradigmatic orientation of entrepreneurship research (Verduijn, 2015; Steyaert, 2007). In line with this, feminist approaches have long offered productive insights into how women are perpetually stigmatised or even written out of official accounts of entrepreneurship (Achtenhagen & Welter, 2011; Ahl & Marlow, 2021; Marlow, 2020).

Postfeminist and feminist perspectives have been instrumental in revealing the gendered nature and gendered subtext of the entrepreneurial subject (Essers, 2009; Lewis, 2014b, 2017; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2014; Pritchard et al., 2019). This scholarship brings to the fore the barriers women entrepreneurs encounter due to the entrepreneur being positioned as masculine (Marlow, 2014, 2020). Additionally, postcolonial perspectives have been used to analyse minority entrepreneurship, and gender issues (Essers & Tedmanson, 2014). Scholars illustrate the whiteness and otherness implicit within entrepreneurship research, excluding people of colour, women, and many 'other' entrepreneurs from being viewed as successful (Ozakazanc-Pan, 2017). Seldon and Fletcher (2016, p. 142) refers to these perspectives as 'standpoint critiques.' These unite in a desire to voice the viewpoints and realities of individuals or entire social groups that are placed at the margins of society by those in positions of privilege, and are thus, invisible in the mainstream research reviewed in Part One. Much of the work within critical literatures seeks to challenge implicit biases that reconstruct how the entrepreneurship, and the entrepreneur, are researched and discussed.

Ultimately, attempts at advancing a more critical understanding of entrepreneurial phenomena reveal pluralistic conceptualisations of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneur. In exploring entrepreneurship through this lens, a 'hegemony of the positive' is revealed and challenged (Olaison & Sørensen, 2014, p. 24). Critical Approaches disclose mainstream entrepreneurship as overwhelmingly concerned with positive outcomes, including enterprise growth as a means for job creation (Fletcher & Seldon, 2016).

However, as I will explore in the following section, Critical Approaches are subject to their own implicit biases that have shaped the direction of what is researched. I begin in 2.9 by exploring how Entrepreneurship is reconceptualised in critical works as 'Entrepreneuring' (Steyaert, 2007). After this, I turn to discuss how repositioning entrepreneurship as an inherently social activity led to studies exploring the possibility for entrepreneurship - or entrepreneuring - as a means for social change.

In 2.10 I discuss how critical gendered perspectives challenge mainstream constructions of the entrepreneur. I subsequently explore how critical literatures apply a neoliberal theoretical lens to better understand how and why the entrepreneur is curated in mainstream scholarly and popular narratives. Finally, in 2.11, I discuss the role and influence of neoliberalism more broadly. I show why unravelling neoliberal ideologies is significant in understanding the imperative of growth (Section 2.3). An imperative that dominates contemporary understandings of entrepreneurship as both an economic and social phenomenon.

2.9 Entrepreneurship

In my review of Mainstream Approaches investigating entrepreneurship (Section 2.4), I found that these literatures predominantly conceptualise entrepreneurship as a process (Baron, 2014). In this section I review how critical literatures have challenged these conceptions, and repositioned entrepreneurship as predominantly a social - rather than economic - activity (Calás et al., 2009).

2.9.1 Entrepreneurship: 'Entrepreneuring'

Processual perspectives conceptualise entrepreneuring as an ongoing, continuous, non-linear and inherently open (Hjorth, 2013; Hjorth et al., 2015; Sørenson, 2006; Steyert et al., 2011). This entails moving away from theorising entrepreneurship in terms of taxonomies, hierarchies, dichotomies, segmentation, stages and (sequential) steps. This means moving away from any conceptualisation featuring categories that temporarily 'make it easier for us to grasp reality but also hide underlying complexities' (Cooper, 2005, p. 1689). Much of this work grounds itself in a relational ontology (Benjamin, 2015) that attempts to not only understand the world, but also our relation to it and accepts that both of these continually interact upon one another (Hjorth, 2013).

Notions of becoming, change, creativity, disruption and indeterminism are main ingredients of a processual approach (Hjorth et al., 2015). To take a processual perspective requires the researcher to unpack states, events and entities, in order to be able to reveal complex processes (Hjorth, 2013). Consequently, it entails abandoning linear conceptualisations of processes, with the present being seen as a moment between the finished past and the future (Hjorth, 2013).

Such contributions help to conceptualise entrepreneurial life as something that can never be finished. They stipulate potentiality (Hjorth, 2004), and lived actuality including everyday mundane activities (Engstrom, 2012) in new venture emergence. This never-ending notion links to studies exploring the transition to becoming an entrepreneur as a 'boundaryless career' (Braches & Elliot, 2017; Hytti, 2010; Marshall et al., 2020; Marshall, 2016). It does not follow any neat path, but rather a messy one where initial ideas change and evolve over time. Occurring through action and interaction, with ups and downs, guided by coincidence and by what is at hand (Baker & Nelson, 2005), more than by intentions, goals and plans (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018; Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2020). Therefore, *Entrepreneuring* literally becomes 'wayfinding' (Verduijn, 2015, p. 639; Nayak & Chia, 2011), inclusive of all the small steps of everyday life (Boutaiba, 2004).

This has encouraged some scholars to apply liminality as a conceptual lens (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018; Gross & Geiger, 2017). Applying this approach to the 'betwixt and between' of entrepreneurial processes these scholars believe they can better observe how creative organising actions and improvisational behaviours occur. This highlights what goes on 'in-between' entrepreneuring processes (Cardon et al., 2012; Hjorth, 2005). The term 'liminality' was coined by the anthropologist van Gennep (1960) to refer to these potentially creative transitions. In entrepreneurial terms, liminality has been used to indicate transformative stages (Anderson, 2005) or spaces that allow entrepreneurs to discover their true selves (Brooker & Joppe, 2013; Henfridsson & Yoo, 2014).

2.9.2 Entrepreneurship: A Means for Social Change

Feminist, and post-feminist research has been at the forefront in repositioning entrepreneurship as a means of social change (Calás et al., 2009; Kickul & Lyons, 2020). Non-economic conceptualisations have received increasing support by scholars who identified entrepreneurship's economic codification and asked: 'What if we have been thinking about entrepreneurship the wrong way?' (Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011, p. 114). This question

prioritised the social rather than economic impact of entrepreneurship (Bandinelli, 2020a). In approaching entrepreneurship as a social phenomenon (Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011), the entrepreneurship-as-social-change tradition (Steyaert et al., 2019) realigns the conceptual premise of entrepreneurship. It is regarded as an instrument that can effectively tackle social problems. Indeed, most definitions appear to still build on the Schumpeterian (1989) idea that the logics of capitalism - as propagated by Friedman (1962) - and embodied in the entrepreneur, are appropriate tools for achieving social justice (Fayolle & Matlay, 2010).

Capitalist logic is built on the assumption that economic freedom is causally related to political freedom (Forder, 2019; Pryor, 2010). This draws from Friedman's (1962) supposition that capitalism is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for political freedom. With regard to freedom, Rothschild (2003) emphasises that Friedman's (1962) discussion focuses primarily on 'negative' freedom. This encompasses an individual's ability 'to make the most of their capacities and opportunities according to his own lights, subject to the proviso that they do not interfere with other individuals to do the same' (Rothschild, 2003, p. 548). Rothschild (2003) concludes that Friedman does not consider 'positive freedom,' which concerns opportunities, or the *freedom to* do something. Rather he focuses on constraints, and the idea that capitalism provides the conditions to provide the *freedom from* something. Thus, entrepreneurship becomes embodied as not just as a social or economic force but reconceptualised as an emancipatory activity (Goss et al., 2011; Jones & Murtola, 2012; Rindova et al., 2009; Weiskopf & Steyaert, 2009).

An implicit assumption within these literatures is that entrepreneurship, when repositioned as a social rather than economic force, has inherently good consequences. That is an ability to free individuals from constraint (Bandinelli, 2020b). In so doing, critical entrepreneurship studies reinforce entrepreneurship's relationship with various ethical and political challenges and opportunities. Broadly, entrepreneurship is positioned as a means: for eradicating poverty (Alvarez & Barney, 2014; Bruton et al., 2013); for intervening into the social fabric of societies (Steyaert, 2011); as emancipatory (Rindova et al., 2009); and an empowering force (Al-Khaled & Marlow, 2018). Consequently, studies that have addressed these notions empirically, primarily focus on marginalised groups (i.e., migrants and women) in developing economic regions (Al-Dajani et al., 2015; Haugh & Talwar, 2016; Pergelova et al., 2019).

These solution focused assumptions influence how 'context' is depicted (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2019; Anderson & Gaddefors, 2016). For example, 'deprived' or 'depleted'

(Anderson et al., 2019) communities are frequently conceptualised as a singular context, or more accurately, a setting in which entrepreneurship is expected to occur and be a force for good (Al-Dajani et al., 2019). However, there have been criticisms of presumptions that enterprise can fix communities labelled as deprived (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017; see also Southern, 2011). The motivation behind these approaches is founded in the liberal ethical principles of equality and freedom. However, they form a discourse that does not always reflect the everyday realities of being an entrepreneur, or conducting entrepreneurship, in a multiplicity of contexts (Welter et al., 2017; Williams & Williams, 2017).

By considering issues of context, critical work provides a platform for reflecting on the social consequences of entrepreneurial activity, not simply seeing it as solely an economic phenomenon (Verduijn et al., 2017). However, by reducing local or community contexts to 'place' overlooks the richness of the circumstances in which entrepreneurship occurs (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2019). In any community setting, factors such as income levels, geography, and resources are only part of context. To fully understand the context for enterprise in local communities, an examination of social practices is also relevant (Bjerke & Rämö, 2011). As Gaddefors and Anderson (2019) note, there remains a limited understanding of how circumstances and practices are woven together locally and influence how enterprise is valued in a community.

These local effects raise questions over the social changes that some critical literature proposes. For example, the potential for entrepreneurship as a means to emancipation (Dey & Steyaert, 2016; Huault et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2016) and/or empowerment (Gill, 2013; Gill & Ganesh, 2007) have been challenged in studies exploring entrepreneurs in more 'everyday' westernised (Welter et al., 2017) contexts. Thus, given entrepreneurship's claimed social change potential within these literatures', the complex web of social, cultural, environmental, temporal, political and geographic influences become important considerations when interpreting them (Baker & Welter, 2020; Welter et al., 2019).

A more recent development within the critical entrepreneurship literatures is the growing recognition of the role of neoliberalism in emphasising the role of entrepreneurship as a means of delivering social change. Understand where 'Mainstream' and 'Critical' narratives converge on this premise leads to literatures that examine the role and influence of neoliberalism. They explore how such narratives of enterprise growth, entrepreneurship, and the entrepreneur are constructed.

2.10 The Entrepreneur

Mainstream Approaches conceptualising the entrepreneur are focused on either identifying certain 'entrepreneurial traits', or specific mental processes that can be developed (see Section 2.5). Broadly this body of work is concerned with *what,* and *who* an entrepreneur is, or who they have the potential to be.

In contrast, Critical Approaches focus on *why* and *how* the entrepreneur is presented in certain ways. From a Critical perspective, 'The Entrepreneur' is an elusive figure, formed from implicit assumptions and pedestalled as a symbol of freedom and economic success. It has been noted that these representations shape expectations and provide frameworks for interpretation (Adamson, 2017). It is both sense-making (Weick, 1979) and sense-giving, influencing what people - The Entrepreneur - expect of themselves and others (Mavin et al., 2016).

Feminist and post-feminist critiques have provided a substantial contribution in shaping this field of inquiry. Since the early 1990s, literature has explored the influence of 'gendered ascriptions' (Nadin et al., 2020, p. 4) on women's entrepreneurial activities. This work reveals how a masculine bias shapes the assumptions underpinning entrepreneurship and positions women in deficit (Marlow, 2014, 2020; Rouse et al., 2013). This multifaceted argument has been expounded by a range of critical reviews, conceptual analyses and related empirical illustrations (Ahl & Marlow, 2021; Marlow, 2020; Marlow & McAdam, 2013; Nadin et al., 2020). For example, studies have found how media representations of female entrepreneurs influence the strength and direction of participant's entrepreneurial aspirations in terms of what is desirable and attainable (Braches & Elliot, 2017; Eikhof et al., 2013; Nadin et al., 2020; Stead, 2017). The woman entrepreneur is presented as marginalised and trivialised. The type of entrepreneurship done by women reflects a focus on family and domestic responsibilities (Byrne et al., 2019; Smith 2012; Stead, 2017; Radu et al., 2008). The result is the reproduction of gendered stereotypes, perpetuating the mythologised heroic male-entrepreneur (Garlick, 2020; Orlandi, 2017). Although relevant literatures adopt different approaches, the consensus is that the ontological foundations of mainstream entrepreneurship presume a normative masculinity (Ahl & Marlow, 2018; Al-Dajani et al., 2015; Gherardi, 2015; Lewis, 2014; Smith, 2013).

Indeed, it is further suggested that entrepreneurial identity is constructed as a performed male dominated paradigm (Giazitzoglu & Down, 2017; Rumens, 2017; Rumens & Ozturk, 2019). There is a burgeoning literature on entrepreneurial identity focusing on the privileging

of maleness and masculinity in representations of entrepreneurial success (Garlick, 2017, 2020; Ogbor, 2000; Smith, 2010, 2013). It has been found that success is portrayed via possession of designer clothing, particular behaviours, and imagery (Connell, 2016; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). From this perspective the entrepreneur is the embodiment of hyper-masculinity (Rumens, 2019).

The gendering of entrepreneurial success has also been investigated through post-feminist lenses (Nadin et al., 2020; Pritchard et al., 2019; Rottenberg, 2019; Ahl & Marlow, 2018). These insights have brought attention to the role and influence of neoliberalism in how we conceptualise the entrepreneur (e.g., Whiting & Pritchard, 2020). Echoing developments in the conceptualisation of entrepreneurship (see Section 2.9.2), scholarship exploring the intersection between neoliberalism and entrepreneurship is a small but rapidly emerging area of critical enquiry (Ahl & Marlow, 2021; Bandinelli, 2020a, 2020b; Cook, 2020; Scharff, 2016b). Much of this work takes inspiration from scholarship examining the intersection of gender and neoliberalism (Baker & Kelan, 2019; Cullen & Murphy, 2017; Gill, 2007; Gill & Scharff, 2013; Scharff, 2011). Within these studies, a small body of this work has begun to explore what has come to be termed ‘the psychic life’ of neoliberal subjects. This scholarship primarily draws on discourse analysis to trace what constitutes the neoliberal self (Baker & Kelan, 2019; Gill et al., 2017; Scharff, 2016a, 2016b, 2017). The term is drawn specifically from the work of Scharff (2016b), who appropriates it from the seminal text ‘*The Psychic Life of Power*’ (1997) by Butler. In sum, the term, ‘the psychic life’, is employed in this small body of research to show primarily how neoliberalism constitutes subjects at work.

In the following sections I review how taking a critical neoliberal approach brings new insights to how the entrepreneur is constructed (Section 2.10.1); and why neoliberalism may have a pervasive role in shaping who the entrepreneur ought to be (Section 2.10.2).

2.10.1 Curating the Entrepreneur: The Role and Influence of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is central to scholarly debates and inquiries into the contemporary functioning of power and socioeconomic inequality (Choat, 2019). It is no secret that neoliberalism has been an influential ideology in the creation and endurance of entrepreneurship discourses within the UK (Mallett & Wapshott, 2015, 2020). However, despite its recognised influence, entrepreneurship research has been criticised for failing to unpack the ways in which ideologies rooted in neoliberalism and entrepreneurship interact (Ahl & Marlow, 2021; Baker and Welter, 2020). In response, a growing body of critical literature addresses the role of neoliberalism in

the creation of enterprising subjects (Dardot & Laval, 2019; Bröckling, 2016, Brown, 2015; Rose, 1992, 2017; Scharff, 2016b). Within this body of scholarship, it is probably fairly uncontroversial to say that the influence of Foucault (1926-1984) is felt within this field of work.

In his genealogical explorations of the role and influence of neoliberalism, Foucault (1982/2008) delimits the entrepreneur not merely as an economic output, but as a self-optimising individual who uses their self as the competitive object of ongoing investments and improvements (Dean, 2018). Foucault offers a conceptual framework for understanding how discourse expands the norms and practices from the realm of entrepreneurship to individuals (Birch, 2017; du Gay, 2004). Central to this, lies the realisation that rather than forming a particular type of organisation, or a set of behaviours, aimed at creating innovative products and services, entrepreneurship forms a discourse which is intimately related to existing relations of power and control (Adams et al., 2019; Dardot & Laval, 2014; Martilla, 2018). This demands that individuals should conduct their lives and shape their selves, as they would manage an enterprise (Dey, 2014; Dey & Steyaert, 2016).

Neoliberal ideological narratives construct entrepreneurship as not only an economic, but also a social force that permeates life in seemingly innocuous ways (Armstrong, 2005; Bandinelli, 2020b; du Gay, 2004; Jones & Spicer, 2009; Zahra & Wright, 2011). Contemporary scholarship has begun to trace the influence of these ideological narratives that converge in their promises of freedom, choice and wealth (Rose, 2017). An ever-growing repertoire of empirical work traces how these ideologies are found in UK government entrepreneurship and small business policies (Ahl & Marlow, 2021; Dardot & Laval, 2019; Dean, 2014; Heilbrunn & Iannone, 2019; Wapshott & Mallett, 2020). A lasting conceptualisation deriving from Foucauldian inspired research, is that constructions of the entrepreneur form part of the apparatus of political governance (Dardot & Laval, 2019; Dean, 2014). In contrast to the extensive body of work that approaches neoliberalism as a governing apparatus, entrepreneurship scholars have turned to examine the impact of neoliberalism on our everyday lives – our thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Scharff, 2016a, 2016b). This follows Gill and Scharff's (2013) encouragement to consider how governing practices 'quite literally get inside us to materialise or constitute our subjectivities' (p. 8).

Moving away from Foucault, this perspective embeds itself within literatures examining the curation of the entrepreneurial self, and how neoliberal thinking has become embodied and lived out (Scharff, 2016b) in our everyday lives (Christiaens, 2019, 2020;

Mavelli, 2017; Paltrinieri, 2017). The following section traces the emergence of the entrepreneurial self and its potential as an area for further investigation.

2.10.2 The Entrepreneurial Self

In Part One, Section 2.5 of this literature review, I explored how the entrepreneur is conceptualised in Mainstream Approaches. I demonstrated how traits-oriented literature tends to characterise the entrepreneur in particular ways (risk-taking, decisive, self-confident, opportunity focused). Implicit within these conceptions, is that that being autonomous is a core assumption behind constructions of the entrepreneurial self (Gill & Ganesh, 2007). This desire to realise a fully autonomous self is central to the neoliberal ideology of individualism. Unravelling this notion brings new insights into why the entrepreneur has been constructed in this way. The 'entrepreneurial self' emphasises political and social freedom for self-determination and self-actualisation. Traditionally, these conceptions have been somewhat in conflict; classic liberal philosophers and political conservatives championed utilitarian individualism, but advocates of the welfare state, or democratic socialism, champion expressive individualism (Watkins & Seidelman, 2019). Neoliberalism unifies these two traditions into an ultra-individualist conception of the person as the entrepreneurial self: the ultimate neoliberal subject (McGuigan, 2014).

Within a neoliberal system, the responsibility to create better societies and achieve utopian ideals of freedom is placed upon individuals, rather than collectives or centralised state structures (Birch & Springer, 2019). Within this, notions of freedom are framed and used in terms of the 'autonomy' of the individual (Dardot & Laval, 2019). Entrepreneurial narratives accept this idea of personal responsibility as means to individual success. One must buy into a very particular notion of entrepreneurial freedom which makes you personally responsible to achieve it (Cook, 2020). Neoliberalism capitalises on autonomy as being, or aspiring to be entrepreneurial, in that individuals must 'own' everything that happens to them and thus continually self-regulate (Bröckling, 2016).

Neoliberalism is often positioned as a form of emancipation that is felt in all parts of our lives both public and private (Rose, 2017). With artificial constraints removed, the extent to which individuals realise this natural autonomy is limited only by the amount of personal capital they are prepared to invest to achieve it. This shift of responsibility makes us all become seekers of something: self-determination, maximisation of our health (Cederström & Spicer, 2015), our bodies (Moore & Robinson, 2016; Pritchard et al., 2019), our work (Musílek et al.,

2020) and our lifestyles through consumption. The 'unemployed become job seekers; refugees become asylum seekers'; tourists become thrill seekers; and entrepreneurs become fortune seekers, a search that is from this perspective, never-ending (Rose 2017, p. 4).

Emerging from this, is a shifting of the meaning of work as a site that enables neoliberal ideals to be realised (McRobbie, 2015; Bandinelli, 2020b). The fashioning and curation of the self becomes part of the tasks to be fulfilled at and through work. In this respect, the process of self-fashioning, far from being spontaneous acts of self-expression resemble a set of skills that must be learned and mastered (Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017; Gill & Pratt, 2008). An individual's lifestyle and self — if meeting the demands of the market — become a unique selling proposition of the entrepreneurial worker and thus leads to the commodification of the self (Bandinelli, 2020a). Empirical studies investigating the rise of 'digital entrepreneurs' (Cook, 2020), have examined the use of social media and self-branding as a site for the subjectification of the neoliberal, entrepreneurial self (Arvidsson et al., 2016; Martinez Dy et al., 2018). As Rose (1999, p. 6), writing prior to the rise of social media, noted, 'the enterprising self will make a venture of its life, project itself a future, and seek to shape itself in order to become that which it wishes to be'. On these platforms one can choose to be anyone you wish to be: a site of true autonomy (Miller & Rose, 1990). However, to be successful in promoting one's identity and lifestyle, conformation as to what the market demands must take place, thus limiting the extent to which one can ever truly be one's self (Ashman et al., 2018; Arvidsson et al., 2016). Thus, self-expression through starting an enterprise, despite being packaged as a means to feeling free, is the very basis of capital exploitation (Lazzarato, 2009). A consequence of this, is that it creates a need to better understand the level of commodification entrepreneurs experience (Egan-Wyer et al., 2018).

As discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter, within the mainstream literature entrepreneurs are understood as autonomous individuals with varying degrees of freedom to choose what kind of a person to be and what enterprise to grow. This emancipated, autonomous self is then free to choose to be anyone it wants to be. To understand this on an empirical level, the concept of 'subjectification' (Butler, 1997; Davies, 2006) is applied to provide different insights into how we become who we are, and what we are.

Subjectivity perspectives seek to understand what is forming and shaping the entrepreneurs from *within* (Gill & Scharff, 2013). To do so requires an understanding of both how entrepreneurs live out their day-to-day lives, and the universal features of their worlds. For example, Scharff (2016b, p. 12), makes a significant contribution in demonstrating the

value of this approach. Scharff (2016b) evidences how neoliberal ideologies appear to constrain rather than encourage entrepreneurs. Further studies demonstrate how coworking spaces operate as apparatuses for the production of subjectivities, that are recognised as central to the organisation and meaning of work in neoliberal societies (Bandinelli, 2020a). Governance has also been found to operate at the level of emotions and feelings, shaping what is deemed appropriate and even intelligible (Ehrstein et al., 2020). The role of entrepreneurship education has also been examined, particularly within universities, as complicit in the creation of radical entrepreneurial subjects (Berglund et al., 2020; Frederiksen & Berglund, 2019).

In the final section I introduce literature that explores the never-ending nature of entrepreneurship as a vehicle to achieve 'success'. To do so neoliberal regimes rely on our ability to imagine and desire a utopian ideal of success; they suggest that entrepreneurship and growing an enterprise is a means to achieve it (Dardot & Laval, 2019).

2.11 The Growth Imperative: The Limitless Promises of Neoliberalism

In this chapter I have explored the assumption that more enterprise growth is a solution to a variety of problems; particularly job-creation. This belief appears implicit within Mainstream Approaches that are convinced of the economic potential, and some Critical Approaches, convinced of the social potential of entrepreneurship. This continues to impact upon public policy by reinforcing the merits of encouraging more entrepreneurship (Lundmark & Westelius, 2014; Mallett & Wapshott, 2020). As discussed in 2.9.2 the conceptualisation of entrepreneurship as a route to social change has led to work suggesting it is the solution to a wide variety of problems (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018). These include bearing the promise of alleviating poverty and emancipating women (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018; McAdam et al., 2020; Mair & Martí, 2006), resolving global environmental challenges (Embry et al., 2019; George et al., 2020), creating socially better worlds (Haugh & Talwar, 2016; Hjorth, 2013), and creating jobs (Audretsch, 2009; Coad et al., 2017; Nason & Wiklund, 2019).

A growing body of critical scholarship remains committed to challenging the assumption that more entrepreneurship (whether social or economic) is a good thing (Marlow, 2020; Fletcher et al., 2019; Martinez Dy et al., 2018). As Judt (2011, p.2) remarked, 'ill fares the land' that buys into these fads without understanding their biases and their history. An emerging body of critical work is doing just this, particularly in unravelling the links between entrepreneurship and neoliberal ideology.

Scholars point to how dominant positive narratives surrounding entrepreneurship obscure a number of detrimental effects (Acs et al., 2016; Parkkari & Verduijn, 2017; Zahra & Wright, 2011, 2016). For example, evidence suggests that encouraging entrepreneurial attitudes towards employment fuels widespread under-employment in the form of the 'gig' economy (Burtch et al., 2018). Outsourcing and sub-contracting of public sector services has led to a rise of insecure temporary work for many (Kendzior, 2018; Lazzarato, 2009). This coincides with contemporary transformations in work, as labour has become more individualised and immaterial (Jones & Murtola, 2012; Rose, 2017). Precarious forms of self-employment have replaced many secure permanent jobs (Dvouletý & Lukes, 2016; Harvey et al., 2016). Furthermore, entrepreneurial earnings are highly skewed at both the highest and the lowest ends of overall income distribution (Martinez Dy et al., 2018). The self-employed often fall into the lowest income groups and earn less than equivalent waged work (Clark et al., 2017). While entrepreneurship and self-employment do not often refer to the same phenomena, it is common within relevant literatures to conflate the two (Carter, 2011, Carter et al., 2015; Martinez Dy et al., 2018; Østergaard, 2019). However, self-employment continues in much of the literature to be uncritically presented as entrepreneurial activity within contemporary enterprise culture (Martinez Dy et al., 2018). This activity is portrayed as the means by which to achieve personal and professional liberation, while contributing to national well-being (Dardot & Laval, 2019; Cook, 2020). In sum, entrepreneurship is positioned as a means to better yourself, your environment, and to gain control over your life. It is within this representation of entrepreneurship that the impact of neoliberalism is felt the most.

In the context of a deregulated neoliberal system (Marttila, 2013) the assumed emancipatory potential of entrepreneurship arises from an analytical association between individualism, autonomy and attainment (Dannreuther & Perren, 2013; Perren & Jennings, 2005). Fundamental to this are notions of voluntary entrepreneurial intention and orientation (Mousa & Wales, 2012): the individual propensity to recognise and pursue opportunities through new enterprise creation. Indeed, a persistent focus of the entrepreneurship literature is the conundrum of varying levels of entrepreneurial orientation and intention, or why some people act entrepreneurially while others do not (Greene et al., 2013; Parkkari & Verduijn, 2017; Wales et al., 2013). Implicit within this enquiry is the notion that entrepreneurship is essentially liberating and meritocratic and, therefore is desirable and accessible to all (Martinez Dy et al., 2018). In this conception, to become an entrepreneur requires no qualifications and no application process. Attainment is reliant on the energy, determination and creativity of the

individual to identify and enact opportunities. Success, therefore, is seen as an indicator of individual effort that manifest in the dogmas of neoliberalism, within which, the only barrier to achieving success is you (Rose, 2017).

Recent trends within critical scholarship attempt to better trace how neoliberalism works as a regime of subjectivity, asking: just how does it come to govern us (Gill & Scharff, 2013)? The answer has, according to Bandinelli (2020a) been lurking in the entrepreneurship literature and Schumpeter's (1989) conceptualisation of the entrepreneur, and indeed the harnessing of the 'entrepreneurial spirit' (p. 16). This suggests that becoming an entrepreneur, or indeed being able to grow an enterprise, comes from *within*. Additionally, in 2.4.1, I introduced Gartner's (1985) concept of *organisation creation* (or *emergence)* (Gartner, 1985; Verstraete, 2003). I highlighted how these used Weick's theories of organising and of sensemaking (1979) in conceptualising 'creation'. Not only does this imply that the entrepreneur has the capacity to order and create from the world around them (Fayolle, 2007), it also suggests that starting an enterprise is dependent on an entrepreneur's capacity to translate dream (visions) into action through the creation of business. This early theoretical work suggested it is the entrepreneur's ability to imagine that is central in achieving enterprise growth (Gartner, 1993, 2007).

Applying critical neoliberal perspectives to this notion begins to bring new insights into how Gartner may have come to such a conclusion. It is perhaps a reflection of the Reagan/Thatcher era ultra-neoliberal discourses of the time (Mallett & Wapshott, 2020). The use and exploitation of our ability to imagine has been identified by Dardot and Laval (2019, p. 63) as central in what they regard as *'limitlessness as a regime of subjectivity'*. Within this regime (a neoliberal system), *entrepreneurial imaginaries* are constructed to cajole and encourage individuals to behave and act in ways the system desires.

Constructed imaginaries include narratives that promise enterprise as a route to 'take control of your life' and: be emancipated (Rindova et al., 2009; Al-Dajani et al., 2015); be empowered (Al-Dajani et al., 2019; Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013); and change the world (Kickul & Lyons, 2020). Both mainstream and critical entrepreneurship literatures form part of this system, and perhaps are unaware of their contribution to it (Gill, 2017).

Scholars are increasingly challenging and exploring the limits of entrepreneurship exposing the realities of individuals trying to achieve its promises (Berglund & Johansson, 2007). For example, the emancipatory potential of entrepreneurship is increasingly being called into question (Jennings & Jennings 2016; Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018). Verduijn et al.

(2014) use Laclau's (1996) conceptualisation of emancipation to reposition entrepreneuring as 'intimately related to oppression' (p. 98). Rindova et al. (2009, p. 478) argue that if we view entrepreneurial projects as an emancipatory effort then this calls for a focus on 'the factors that cause individuals to seek to disrupt the status quo and change their position on the social order in which they are embedded – and, on occasion, the social order itself'. Such a perspective is endemic of neoliberal narratives that privilege entrepreneurship as a 'vehicle of self-realisation' (Dardot & Laval, 2014, p. 265).

2.11.1 Growth and The Entrepreneur-Employer

Critical literatures are yet to fully explore the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition. Questions and insights begin to arise when theorising the imperative of growth from a critical neoliberal perspective. Neoliberal systems - like the UK's - position individual enterprise growth as a form of success. This success is not only supposed to be felt at the individual level - in becoming the autonomous and free entrepreneur - but achieving success through growth is positioned as generating local, regional and even national social and economic change. The entrepreneur within this system has the capacity to change unemployment (Coad et al., 2020), poverty levels, and workplace inequalities (Gill et al., 2017; Kelan, 2008). The doing of entrepreneurship in this sense, has limitless potential.

However, creating the *appearance* or *promises* of freedom, choice, self-actualisation, autonomy, control, and wealth are highlighted as essential elements in neoliberal subjectification. The use of these elements exploits the power of our ability to imagine: the imaginary dimension. These fantasies create illusions of completeness: the possibility of reconciliation between some mythical origin and a future utopian ideal. To obtain this ideal, however, individuals must subscribe to an entrepreneurial way of life (Bröckling, 2016; Dardot & Laval, 2019). To understand the impact of neoliberalism is to recognise how it is established and maintained by this imaginary dimension, specifically the 'entrepreneurial imaginary' that offers a more desirable and more fulfilling way of life (Dardot & Laval, 2019, p. 65).

Notions of entrepreneurial ideals of success are bound by the logic of capitalism that requires continued growth (Dardot & Laval, 2019). This suggests a growing crevasse between entrepreneurial discourses and the lived realties of entrepreneurs trying to achieve these promises (Gill, 2014; Olaison & Sørensen, 2014). Studies employing the use of visual methods offer rich empirical work providing insight into how and why such conceptions of entrepreneurial success or intent are constructed. In addition, they contribute the

deconstruction of gendered ideal neoliberal subjects (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Garlick, 2020; Nadin et al., 2020; Pritchard et al., 2019; Smith, 2009, 2010; Swail et al., 2014). However, there is limited work available that adds to the empirical investigation of Scharff (2016b), thus more contributions could be made to better understand the impact of neoliberalism (and thus, '*entrepreneurial imaginaries*') on those growing their enterprises in everyday neoliberal contexts.

In pursuing the neoliberal imperative of more growth, it can be assumed that this would require the entrepreneur to move from sole entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer. The Mainstream literature investigating this transition as explored in Section 2.6. is sparse and deterministic. This transition has yet to be fully explored in the Critical literature. However, available critical HRM literatures suggest more constraints (in the form of regulations – (Kitching, 2016; Mallett et al., 2019) make the entrepreneur-employer transition a challenging and even a constraining process. This suggests that examining the transition in greater contextual depth will provide some insight into what may inhibit or enable enterprise growth.

2.12 Critical Approaches Summary

In Part Two of this chapter, I reviewed contributions to Critical Approaches that challenge and reconceptualise Mainstream Approaches to entrepreneurship, the entrepreneur and enterprise growth. In doing so Critical Approaches broadly situate themselves as ontologically distinct from Mainstream Approaches in that they regard key concepts (entrepreneurship, the entrepreneur, enterprise growth) as socially constructed phenomena (Ramoglou & Tsang, 2017a, 2017b).

Beginning with entrepreneurship, I discussed how Critical Scholars apply processual perspectives to overcome the fixed and linear conceptions of Entrepreneurship available in Mainstream Approaches. Theories of entrepreneuring (Hjorth, 2015; Steyaert, 2007) sought to reposition entrepreneurship as a never-ending and complex endeavour. By emphasising the relationality of entrepreneurship, critical perspectives examine the potential for social change that practicing entrepreneurship may bring about. In particular feminist perspectives sought to reposition entrepreneurship as a means for empowering and emancipating marginalised groups (Calás et al., 2009). However, in doing so, rather than continue to challenge the overly positive economic assumptions that dominate mainstream literatures, this particular stream of work has reinforced their own positive assumptions, but from a social perspective (Fletcher, 2018).

Gendered perspectives also play a crucial role in challenging Mainstream constructions of the entrepreneur as autonomous, wealthy, white and male. This discussion leads to more contemporary approaches that have sought to understand the role and influence of neoliberalism in the curation of the entrepreneur (Ahl & Marlow, 2021; Martinez Dy et al., 2018). A body of emerging work has begun to trace the extent of this influence in how neoliberalism shapes all our lives, and how neoliberal ideologies seek to shape us all into the ultimate neoliberal subject: the entrepreneur (Dardot & Laval, 2014, 2019). In particular, entrepreneurship scholars are beginning to trace the impact of these narratives upon entrepreneurs themselves (those who have started their own enterprises) (Scharff, 2016b).

In sum, this review of the Critical Literature raises avenues of further inquiry, which is to establish how and if neoliberalism impacts upon the everyday experiences of entrepreneurs, and specifically, those attempting to fulfil the neoliberal imperative of growing their enterprises. A notable question remains: if entrepreneurs are encouraged to do is grow and create jobs within a neoliberal system – like the UK – why aren't they?

2.13 Chapter Summary

The aim of this chapter is to problematise literatures examining the assumption that entrepreneurship and therefore enterprise growth are means for job creation. The number of employees an enterprise has is a central measurement for entrepreneurial activity and progress. Thus, shifting from non-employer to employer is regarded as a critical transition in achieving enterprise growth. In examining mainstream approaches to growth and entrepreneurship, I identified that much of the work is ontologically realist, employing functionalist methodologies to explore what has been identified by critical literatures as a predominantly social and relational phenomena. The result is that many perspectives simplify enterprise growth and entrepreneurship to a series of linear steps, distilling complexities rather than seeking to explain them and leaving the impact of the entrepreneur almost invisible. Literatures that have examined the role of the entrepreneur as an employer tend to remain exclusively within the human resources domain. Therefore, they use HRM as their conceptual lens, merging various facets of enterprise growth into known HR functions (e.g., recruitment, selection) in order to identify which of these enable enterprise growth or not.

The importance of understanding when and what may impact an entrepreneur transitioning to an employer is an emerging area of investigation. In my review of the studies conducted on what is deemed a critical transition, they exclusively employ quantitative

approaches. Rather than asking 'when' or 'what' might enable the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition; a more fundamental question emerges of 'how' this transition takes place from the perspective of those going through it: the entrepreneurs.

The second part of my review turned to critical perspectives of entrepreneurship. Much of this work is situated within the constructivist paradigm, regarding entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship and growth as socially constructed phenomena. Some studies within this critical field apply a range of methodologies to challenge mainstream assumptions that position entrepreneurship, and the entrepreneur as a positive heterogeneous economic force. Critical work repositions entrepreneurship as a social activity and has identified its potential to effect social as well as economic change. This is particularly the case for deprived communities marginalised individuals (Williams & Williams, 2017; Shaw et al., 2017).

Rather than challenge mainstream assumptions that paint entrepreneurship as an overwhelmingly positive activity, some critical perspectives appear to still perpetuate this, but from a social and ethical perspective. Within popular 'entrepreneurship as job creation' narratives, both mainstream and critical assumptions could arguably be influential in the continued propagation of the assumption that the increase of one (more entrepreneurs/entrepreneurship) leads to the other (more jobs) being fully realised.

Finally, I examined literatures that seek to explain the growth imperative, and why entrepreneurship is entangled as both a social and economic means for progress. This entanglement led critical literatures to explore the role and influence of neoliberalism. Through this lens, neoliberalism is regarded as a regime of subjectification. This perspective illuminates how entrepreneurial discourses work to shape individuals into the ultimate neoliberal subject: the entrepreneur. I identify that enterprise growth, and becoming an entrepreneur employer, is perhaps an imperative of neoliberalism. Consequently, it has been suggested that neoliberal and entrepreneurial discourses construct what the entrepreneur ought to be. These constructions have the potential to impact on the everyday lives of entrepreneurs in neoliberal contexts.

In the following chapter (Theoretical Perspectives), I introduce my theoretical framework and my own philosophical position. I then set out how taking a phenomenological position will enable me to build a better understanding of the nature of the transition from entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer, and the potential impact of discourses on the transition.

Chapter 3
Theoretical Perspective

3.1. Introduction
3.2. Ontological and Epistemological Positioning
3.3 Addressing Ontological Divides in Entrepreneurship Research
3.4 The Value of Phenomenology as a Meta-theoretical Position
3.4.1 The Rejection of Dualism
3.4.2 Intentionality of Consciousness
3.4.3 The Lebenswelt
3.4.4 Section Summary: Applying Interpretative Phenomenology to My Research
3.5 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: An Epistemic Framework
3.5.1 Phenomenology
3.5.2 Hermeneutics
3.5.3 Idiography
3.5.4 The Phenomenological Concept of 'Experience'
3.6 Research Questions
3.7 Chapter Summary

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the implicit ideological assumptions within 'mainstream entrepreneurship' literature. This is particularly the case with literatures examining the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition, which consistently utilise positivistic forms of enquiry. Chapter 2 reveals that although this transition has been repeatedly highlighted as a critical step (Coad et al., 2017; Dvoultý, 2020) in growing an enterprise, and is used as a global measure of entrepreneurial activity more broadly (EU Commission, 2020; GEM, 2020), no existing studies (at the time of writing) have examined this transition in-depth, or from the perspective of those experiencing it. Therefore, I submit that this transition is an under-explored phenomenon in the available literature (both mainstream and critical). This provides an opportunity to apply a phenomenological lens as a starting point from which to build further understanding of this transition, and what may or may not enable it (Hlady-Rispal et al., 2016; Van Burg et al., 2020; Van Burg & Romme, 2014).

Applying such an approach also meets the demands of scholars who have reasoned for more plurality in how entrepreneurship is researched. For example, Grant and Perren (2002) and more recently Van Burg et al., (2020) argue that multiple paradigms within the entrepreneurship domain are needed on the basis that they can 'enable debate, friction, creativity, and ultimately new theories and understandings' (Grant & Perren, 2002, p. 202). Therefore, in answering such calls for a pluralist agenda (see also Van Burg et al., 2020), I align my research with interpretivist traditions (Gephart, 2018). Interpretivism, is based on a lifeworld ontology that argues that all observation is theory and value laden. Moreover, interpretivist investigations of these social worlds are not, and cannot be, in the pursuit of detached objective 'truth' (Cassell et al., 2017).

In this chapter I introduce and provide justification as to why phenomenology, and more specifically interpretative phenomenology, and its application through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), form an epistemic framework inform my research approach and design. Phenomenology is both a philosophical stance and a research approach. It investigates how individuals make sense of perceived phenomena (Eberle, 2014). These philosophic perspectives underscore the work in phenomenological inquiry, as a way to comprehend subjective experience and gaining insights into people's motivations and actions (Eberle, 2014). To achieve the level of insight needed, cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom is necessary (Butler-Kisber, 2019, p. 60).

Therefore, this research is governed by a relativist ontology and epistemological subjectivism; this recognises that research participants are exposed to multiple realities constructed from various experiences throughout their lives (e.g., their education, upbringing, age, familial influences, religion, gender) (see Larkin et al., 2019).

Before introducing the core philosophical tenets of phenomenology in Section 3.4, this chapter begins by explaining my own ontological and epistemological positioning in more depth (Section 3.2). In doing so I address what ontology and epistemology are, and how positioning research has led to an ontological polarisation within 'mainstream' and 'critical' entrepreneurship literatures. In Section 3.3 I explain why identifying and understanding existing ontological divides was significant in deciding and justifying the use of phenomenology as my theoretical framework. Section 3.4 introduces the value of applying a phenomenological approach from an ontological standpoint and describes how a phenomenological inquiry of entrepreneurial experiences can overcome the ontological challenges within the study of entrepreneurship.

Subsequently, Section 3.5 deals with my epistemological framework. I demonstrate how the theoretical perspectives of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography form a comprehensive epistemic framework of exploration that my chosen methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), is founded on. What constitutes experience, 'experience' as a concept, and a phenomenological understanding of 'experience' form the basis of my research questions. Therefore, in Section 3.5.4 I discuss how these concepts are understood and applied in my research.

Finally, in Section 3.6, I introduce the thinking behind my research questions. This section brings together the key points from my literature review and this chapter. I explain how by taking a phenomenological stance, I have explored the experiences of entrepreneurs who transition to become an entrepreneur-employer and thus provide a more in-depth understanding of this transition. The explanation of how I conducted and used IPA as a method is detailed in the following Research Methods chapter.

3.2 Ontological and Epistemological Positioning

The terms ontology and epistemology are variously defined in dictionaries and textbooks. Yet what were once distinct constructs have become increasingly blurred over time (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). As described in the following sections of this chapter, this blurring introduces a level of challenge when attempting to position research within a particular paradigm.

However, the definitions provided below share key features that characterise ontology and epistemology as constructs.

Ontology is concerned with what exists (Bell et al., 2018). It can be described as a theory of being in that it attempts to elucidate what it means for something to exist, to 'be there'. Ontology also asks questions about what kinds of things exist and make up the world (Cassell et al., 2018; Grandy, 2018). A person's ontology identifies the things they assume exist, or those that cannot. Therefore, all theories are based on an ontology because they presuppose that certain entities or processes exist (Potter, 2016). Therefore, ontology refers to the taken-for-granted assumptions upon which we build our understanding of the world (Bell et al., 2018).

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge: its possibility, its scope, its limits and the processes by which it can (or cannot) be acquired (Potter, 2016). It addresses questions about what characterises actual knowledge (as opposed to attitudes, beliefs or ideas about something), about what can be known, how we acquire knowledge and how certain we can be about its validity, truth or value (Bell et al., 2018; Hibbert et al., 2010). All claims to knowledge are based on epistemological assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge and how 'true' knowledge can be produced; therefore, all claims to knowledge are supported by a theory of knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 2016).

While my research sits within interpretivist traditions, broadly, my views on *how* and *what* is researched situates itself within the constructivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2016; Packard, 2017). Constructivism adheres to a relativist rather than a realist social ontology (i.e., social 'entities' are not real but merely conceptual) and holds to an anti-positivist rather than an empiricist epistemology (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It presupposes that individuals are agentic in that their actions are not determined by observable factors, although they may certainly be influenced by them. Social phenomena are viewed as voluntaristic rather than deterministic (Grandy, 2018). For instance, individual action must be understood at the individual level in terms of the meaning individuals give to those actions in relation to social norms. Social reality is relative to the individuals involved and tied to the particular context in which they find themselves (Lincoln et al., 2011).

Ontologically, my views are relativist; I take the view that there is no objective, universal 'truth' and that 'truths' are relative to individuals and the lifeworld they inhabit (Cunliffe, 2016; Grandy, 2018). Things exist, because we (as humans) have granted them existence within our lives. This view has implications from an epistemological perspective

that would imply that my epistemological position is subjectivist. In effect, this positions knowledge as constructed (i.e., not already existing) through my (the researcher's) own impressions of what I choose to research. Lincoln and Guba (2016) term this as 'transactional subjectivism'. This places an emphasis on the relational dynamics through which knowledge becomes knowable. The *transaction* of knowledge is, therefore, highly subjective; mediated by a number of factors of the person in receipt of that knowledge. For instance, what gender they identify as, sexual orientation, if they have experienced fatherhood/motherhood will all impact the individual experiences of the entrepreneurs in this study. Knowledge, then, is not 'out there to be discovered', but dependant on the time, place and person it is generated by (Lincoln & Guba, 2016, p, 30).

The methodology, or how I choose to acquire knowledge, is constrained by the ontological presupposition of relativism and epistemological presupposition of transactional subjectivism. This assumes a need to choose a set of tools that explore, or uncover, the sense- and meaning-making activities that construct an individual's reality, and to understand how my own realities impact the knowledge I create. Thus, hermeneutics and dialectic methods are regarded as suitable tools (Mason & May, 2020; Tomkins & Eatough, 2018).

However, situating my theoretical perspectives prior to my empirical findings forms the illusion that my views are somewhat binary, and that they will not evolve as my research progresses (Berger, 2015). Speaking figuratively, philosophies of science create an arena, the sands of which are littered with the debris of ontological and epistemological hand to hand combat (Wilding, 2019). For a doctoral student, it is a confusing and at times, an intellectually bruising place to be. Evoking a less martial discourse, Presskorn-Thygesen (2013) helpfully talks about ontology and epistemology respectively as being continua, and that each continuum exhibits poles. On the ontological continuum, the poles may be described like this: to some researchers, sometimes referred to as ontological realists, there is one observer-independent, real world. To other researchers, sometimes referred to as ontological relativists, this is not the case (Kastberg, 2016). As aforementioned, ontology is contingent on, or relative to, an observer's point of view (Katsberg, 2016). Guba and Lincoln (2016) reinforce this by arguing that constructivist research is based upon a relativist ontology, which subscribes to the view that there are 'multiple realities' because reality is constructed subjectively in the mind of each person depending on the person and their context' (p. 32). However, is it really the case that conducting research into how people give meaning to their experiences presupposes that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual? Further, as Willig (2016) queries, is it really

ontological relativism that underpins a researcher's commitment to honour participants subjective experience? In forming my research questions, I have assumed that:

- Entrepreneurs and their experiences exist, even without my exploring of them (as a social entity);
- That the entrepreneurs 'become' an employer;
- The transition from non-employer to employer is experienced as a recognisable transition;
- The researcher (me) and my own experiences exist and interact with that of my participants.

These assumptions echo realist thinking, but in no way do they sit at the polar ends of the relativist/realist continua. My assumptions here are arguably realist as they point to a phenomenon (a shared experience, a meaning) that has ontological status (Fox & Allred, 2020). The assumption here is that they exist as a mental, emotional and/or experiential structure; that would be there even if the participant did not give an account of it to the researcher (Willig, 2016).

As Crotty (1998) notes, an ontological stance implies a particular epistemological stance and vice versa. This echoes Geertz's (1980) prediction on the 'blurring of genres' across forms of inquiry/differing perspectives. Such a blurring is captured in contemporary debates surrounding the duality that exists when fully committing to constructivism as ontologically relativist (Willig, 2016). This happens when collapsing the ontological and epistemological concerns into one, that Bhaskar (1978) termed an 'epistemic fallacy'. This realism-relativism dualism presents two contrasting views of what constitutes reality. One view proposes that there is a singular external reality which can be accurately and objectively captured by the researcher (realism). The second proposes that what is experienced as 'real' depends upon the mindset of the person who is experiencing it and that there is no 'reality' beyond such subjective realities (relativism) (Barad, 2007; Barkin, 2020).

The researcher's views about what exists (ontology) and how we can come to know about it (epistemology) are distinct concerns (Creswell & Poth, 2016). A realist ontology does not automatically imply a commitment to epistemic objectivity. Similarly, an acknowledgment that people interpret the world differently does not necessarily imply that what is being interpreted (e.g., a bodily sensation, or a visual stimulus) is not itself generated by something that has independent ontological status (e.g., a biochemical process or a social system) (Fox &

Allred, 2020). In addition, people's interpretations and social practices themselves can be seen to constitute a 'reality' that exists independently of what the researcher may have to say about it (Cassell et al., 2018). Focusing on internal subjective realities and/or negotiated social realities does not necessarily make the research non-realist (Willig, 2016). Asking research questions about *what* people think, feel and experience is suggestive of a certain 'out-thereness' (Willig, 2016, p. 17) to those actions. This is especially true if the researcher believes that their research can access and represent wholly or at least partially in some form those lived realities.

In raising this philosophic object-subject tension, that can be polarising to the novice researcher I am in no way attempting to provide a definitive account of this dilemma nor suggest that I adhere to it. My intent is to raise this tension as influential in my thinking on how to address (some) assumptions implicit within existing entrepreneurship literature. In this light, the following section explores how applying this existing philosophic tension to entrepreneurship resulted in me taking a phenomenological approach to this research.

3.3 Addressing Ontological Divides in Entrepreneurship Research

Ontological divides are identified as a broad concern for the management discipline more generally (van Manen, 2007; Thompson, 2011). This is partly due to communities of research and practice that are embedded in different knowledge systems; research favours rigor, while practice favours relevance (Ramoglou & Tsang, 2017b; Sharma & Bansal, 2020). Observers suggest a micro (individual) and macro (structural) divide that occurs because scholars typically focus on only one part of the 'vast economic and social systems in which individuals and organisations are embedded' (Molloy et al., 2011, p. 582; Shah, 2006).

It becomes challenging to conceptualise entrepreneurship without holding some theory of what it is in the first place, if one is coming from a constructivist position. This paradox poses particular challenges for those interested in providing an explanatory account of what entrepreneurship is, how it is best understood, and how it is practiced. There are, as the literature review alludes to, a wide range of historically prevailing views about exactly what 'doing entrepreneurship' is, or who an entrepreneur is, and this raises some challenging issues (Wiklund et al., 2019; van Burg et al., 2020). These can be broadly ontologically categorised into taking either a realist (mainstream) or relativist (critical) approaches. Mainstream approaches to entrepreneurship focus primarily on the mental processes within individuals as they interact with other individuals and their surrounding environment. Entrepreneurs are seen to possess certain cognitive traits that exist independently of the situations in which they act.

Similarly, the process (or doing) of entrepreneurship is conceptualised as a series of identifiable, and replicable linear steps in the context of enterprise creation and growth. Such approaches to identifying the entrepreneur and/or entrepreneurship tend to be ontologically realist and epistemologically committed to objectivity and/or mentalism (Grégoire et al., 2011).

Critical approaches are concerned with entrepreneurs, as embedded in socially constructed meaning systems that largely determine both their identities as entrepreneurs, and legitimate courses of action (Cohen & Musson, 2000). Thus, suggesting they lean towards a more ontologically relativist view, where discursive methods are readily used. Discursive approaches to entrepreneurship emerged as part of a growing interest in the role of language in organisation studies. Researchers began to acknowledge stories as forms of knowledge construction (McMullen, 2019; Orr, 1996) and that language is often used to accomplish rather than represent things (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). There was a recognition that identities and attitudes may be relational and discursive rather than resting firmly within individual minds (Gergen, 1991).

In the entrepreneurship field, this critical, and predominantly discursive turn, has mainly been framed in opposition to an overly individualistic view of the entrepreneur (Holmquist, 2003). Discursively oriented researchers are not particularly interested in salvaging the notion that entrepreneurs are members of a homogeneous and extraordinary group (Gill, 2017), 'rather than see entrepreneurs as masters of their own creation, entrepreneurial identities are formed in the webs of actualized discourses' (Steyaert, 2007, p. 464). Consequently, their focus is not on individuals and their stable traits or cognitions. It is on the way individuals engage discursive resources to construct narratives and storylines that make sense of both their identities and their actions (Henry et al., 2016).

As shown in the examples above, mainstream and critical approaches both contribute to our understanding of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial action. However, both approaches have their limitations. Mainstream ontologically realist approaches tend to share a view of action as critically caused by situation independent schemas and scripts. Critical ontologically relativist approaches instead focus on how ventures and entrepreneurial identities are constituted within a framework of publicly available and more local discourses (Gill & Larson, 2017). However, by focussing on the influence of stable discourses, discursive traditions can downplay the richness and ambiguity of an entrepreneur's lifeworld (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

There is a risk that by focussing from the outset on taking either a polarised realist or relativist position, researchers may abandon the richness of the entrepreneurial lifeworld. In the specific context of entrepreneurship, empirical abstraction in combination with generality may downplay the ambiguity and uncertainty that is so often said to characterise the situations faced by entrepreneurs (Berglund, 2007, p. 68). Phenomenological approaches seek to overcome these shortcomings.

Rather than asking if entrepreneurship exists and in what form, which would be the ontological problem, a phenomenologist would ask: what is the nature of it? However, the 'nature' of something, from a phenomenological perspective is more than just identifying it through a series of observable variables. A phenomenological approach is based on the principle that human beings (entrepreneurs) cannot be studied in isolation from their lived worlds (context) in which they interact and live. From a phenomenological standpoint, individual experience is the foundation of knowledge and constitutes what is real or not. As I expand on in the following section (3.4), I felt that choosing a phenomenological approach was a way of bridging the divides present in the literature.

Further, Harris, Johnson and Souder (2013, p. 451) suggest that 'many of the interesting gaps to be filled by empirical research may be in phenomenological understanding rather than in questions about theoretical axioms.' They argue that starting with theory (i.e., deductive approaches) is a restrictive rather than a generative tool for creating knowledge in management research more broadly. Therefore, phenomenology has been proposed by scholars (both within the entrepreneurship field and management discipline more broadly) as a beneficial starting point for theory generation and bridging ontological divides (Berglund, 2015; Berglund et al., 2018; Chia, 2003; Nayak et al., 2020).

A review of the methodological shortfalls identified by various entrepreneurship scholars (Baker & Welter, 2020; Welter et al., 2017; van Burg et al., 2020), justifies the taking of a phenomenological perspective as a suitable form of inquiry. Four authors influenced my thinking: Cope, Gill, Berglund and Packard. Cope's (2005, 2011) papers offered phenomenological inquiry as a potential approach to examining entrepreneurship. Gill (2014, 2020) explores phenomenology as an underutilised approach to organisation research. Berglund (2015) identified a need to take a phenomenological perspective as necessary in bridging the gap between cognition and discourse to 'side-step' some key paradoxical and theoretical issues present in the entrepreneurship field of study. Finally, Packard (2017) suggests phenomenology has huge promise in addressing some of the ontological and

epistemological tensions that present themselves. Packard suggests that the approach can provide a more comfortable platform to begin entrepreneurship research.

Phenomenological inquiry is widely used within the social sciences and is often employed to describe a research perspective that is distinct from, and set-in opposition to, more positivistic forms of inquiry (Gill, 2013). Although phenomenology is located within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 2017), it has a distinctive epistemic framework; sharing a set of common principles (or concerns) in how knowledge about phenomena is generated.

The proliferation of phenomenologically informed methods (Giorgi, 2011; Smith, 1996; van Manen, 2017a), have drawn criticism (Paley 2017, 2018; van Manen, 2018; Zahavi, 2019a, 2020). Critics question whether such approaches can qualify as phenomenological if they either ignore or misinterpret the aims of phenomenological philosophy. This highlights a potential tension between phenomenologically informed qualitative research and phenomenological philosophy.

In the section that follows I address this tension. I briefly introduce an overview of phenomenology as a meta-theoretical position that has informed this research. It is my hope that by highlighting fundamental phenomenological principles, I acknowledge the influence of phenomenology within my chosen methodology. Subsequently, I explain my chosen methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1996). This is to ensure my research can be understood to be theoretically positioned as phenomenological. To do so I acknowledge key philosophical influences that have shaped my way of thinking in choosing IPA a suitable epistemic framework.

3.4 The Value of Phenomenology as a Meta-Theoretical Position

The etymology of ‘phenomenology’ derives from two Greek words: phainomenon (an ‘appearance’) and logos (‘reason’) (Pivcevic, 1970). The philosophy of phenomenology was first developed by Husserl (1859-1938), whose seminal works were later extended by Schutz (1899-1959). Heidegger (1889-1976), Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Sartre (1905-1980) and Levinas (1906 – 1995) (1996) are also considered as influential proponents (Zahavi, 2017, 2018). Phenomenology relates to the study or description of phenomena, or what appears in our worlds. A ‘phenomenon’ then is anything that becomes salient to someone in their consciousness. The aim of phenomenology is to reveal the ‘essences’ of experiences or appearances (phenomena), to uncover their underlying ‘reason’ (Cope, 2005; Pivcevic, 1970).

Phenomenological philosophy aims 'to bring philosophy back from abstract metaphysical speculation wrapped up in pseudo-problems, in order to come into contact with the matters themselves, with concrete living experience.' (Moran, 2000, p. xiii).

The philosophical debate over the nature of truth, reality and knowledge has challenged our assumptions over what is or may not be scientifically attainable (Eberle, 2014). As discussed in the previous section, such debates are readily revealed by the distinct ontological divide present within the entrepreneurship field. Phenomenology has critiqued reductionism, objectivism and scientism; arguing instead for providing detailed accounts of human existence (for example, Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) (Luckmann, 1989). In these accounts, subjects are understood as embodied, socially and culturally embedded beings in-the-world. By regarding humans as being-in-the-world, phenomenology has long offered ways out of a number of theoretical problems and paradoxes (Zahavi, 2018, 2019b). There, exists a great diversity of thought within the phenomenological movement and more than anything, it offers diverse lenses to examine the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship.

The major phenomenological tenets can be summarised into four major themes: (1) the rejection of the dualism between consciousness and matter (objects); (2) the intentionality of consciousness; (3) a presuppositionless philosophy; and (4) the Lebenswelt (the lived-world) (Zahavi, 2018, 2019b). I summarise these four guiding principles and how they form the basis of phenomenological thinking below. Following this, I demonstrate the value in applying them to my own research.

3.4.1 Rejection of Dualism

One of the major themes of phenomenology regards the nature of the real and the ontological dichotomy within many areas of philosophy between an inner world of 'private experience' and an outer world of 'public objects' (Zahavi, 2018, p. 23). It is this perceived ontological separation between consciousness and matter, reality and appearance, that phenomenologists actively reject. The concern is not for *what* an object is, but in *how* an object displays itself in an individual's world. No assumptions are made about what is or is not real; rather descriptions of phenomena begin with how one experiences things. As Moran explains (2000, p. 15), 'the whole point of phenomenology is that we cannot split off the subjective domain from the domain of the natural world as scientific naturalism has done. Subjectivity must be understood as inextricably involved in the process of constituting objectivity'. It is also an acceptance that perceptual experiences are constant interplays between absence and presence (what is invisible

and visible). For example, when we pick up an object, we always experience more than what is intuitively presented to us, there are always parts of an object which are not sensually available to us (Crowell, 2013). Therefore, objects interacted with are never experienced in isolation but surrounded by and situated in a horizon that affects the meaning of what we see (Crowell, 2005).

3.4.2 Intentionality of Consciousness

To understand why phenomenology rejects the division of reality into separate categories such as minds and bodies, subjects and objects, one must examine a key concept behind phenomenological thinking – the intentionality of consciousness (Gill, 2014, 2020). Phenomenology portrays consciousness as intentional and our consciousness is always directed toward an object (Cassano, 2017). In simple terms, this concept infers that the description of experience shows it always to be the experience *of something*. Moran (2017b) uses the term 'aboutness' to illustrate the intentionality of conscious experiences. As he goes on to explain, 'every act of loving is a loving *of* something, every act of seeing is a seeing *of* something' (Moran, 2017b, p.16). From a phenomenological standpoint, it is impossible to divide one's experience from what it is that is experienced (Moran, 2018). Consequently, there is no independent objective reality waiting to be discovered through rational, empirical, 'scientific' methods. For the phenomenologist, the only 'real' world that can be described with adequacy is that which is pre-scientifically and subjectively experienced (Moran, 2018; Paley, 2017).

3.4.3 A Presuppositionless Philosophy

A third major theme of phenomenology (and one of the prime motivating factors behind Husserl's work) is the desire for a philosophy that was free from presuppositions. In the physical sciences, it is *presupposed* that reality is composed of physical objects that exist and can be investigated through empirical means (Eberle, 2014). In sharp contrast, a cornerstone of phenomenology is the rejection of all presuppositions concerning the nature of the 'real', any judgments about such matters should be suspended until they can be founded on a more certain basis (Pettit, 1969; Cope, 2005).

At an epistemological level, a distinction is made between the aims of descriptive phenomenology proposed by Husserl (1924/1999) and the interpretative phenomenology of Heidegger (1927/1962) (which informs both IPA and my own research approach). In the application of descriptive approaches, the task is to explore and reveal the essential types and

structures of experiences (Burrell & Morgan, 2017). To provide a careful and authentic description of ordinary conscious experience, Husserl argued, it is necessary to suspend all prior scientific, philosophical, cultural and everyday assumptions and judgements (Moran, 2017a, 2018). Husserl proposed applying the epoché in phenomenological investigations to achieve this (Zahavi, 2017).

The purpose of the epoché is not to neglect or exclude reality from research but to suspend or neutralise a certain dogmatic *attitude* toward reality (Zahavi, 2019b). This attitude is an implicit ontological bias in the existence of a mind-independent reality (referring back to ontologically realist beliefs). This realist assumption is so fundamental and deeply rooted that it is not only accepted by the positive sciences, but it also permeates our daily pre-theoretical life, for which reason Husserl calls it the '*natural attitude*' (1926/1999, p. 60). By suspending this attitude and being aware that reality is always revealed and examined from some perspective or another; reality is not lost from sight, but for the first time made accessible for a proper investigation (Husserl, 1926/1999). Thus, by effectuating the epoché, Husserl ultimately came to embrace the view that reason, truth, and being are essentially interlinked, and that the right place to locate objectivity is in, rather than beyond, the appearing world.

Heidegger (1927/1962), in contrast, argues that human beings are always already engaged in interpretative meaning-making activities (Zahavi, 2019a, 2019b). Interpretation is a basic structure of our intentional life and is consequently not only permissible, but unavoidable in the collection and subsequent explanations of others and our own experiences. This informed Heidegger's conceptualisation of hermeneutic phenomenology and informs the theoretical principle of IPA (as explored in Section 3.5.2).

The question of whether a proper phenomenological investigation and analysis requires one to perform the epoché has not only been discussed within phenomenological philosophy (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020), it is also very much a question that has been hotly debated within qualitative research. Giorgi (2008, 2011) in particular has insisted that no scientific research can claim phenomenological status unless it is supported by some use of the epoché. This would suggest IPA is not phenomenological as it does not lend itself to applying the epoché. Morley (2010) extends and agrees with this view. Zahavi (2019a, 2019b, 2020), disagrees claiming there are other features of philosophical phenomenology that are far more relevant to the qualitative researcher (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012; Zahavi, 2018; Zahavi & Martiny, 2019), such as the lifeworld (explored below) and experience (explored later at Section 3.6). While I do agree with Zahavi (2018, 2019b), I see merit in the deliberate reflexivity that applying the

epoché demands, but only in relation to being aware of certain prevailing attitudes towards the phenomena under investigation (entrepreneurs, and more specifically the transition from entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer).

If the requirement to applying the epoché is being attuned to one's biases, and the biases implicit within the field of study that may impact and induce my research, it is an activity that I see merit in doing. On the other hand, to carry out the epoché in a literal sense demands 'suspension' of these biases or attitudes. It is the concept of 'suspension' that I do not believe is possible to achieve, and nor does it fit with the interpretative phenomenological position my research aligns itself with. In existential and hermeneutic phenomenology, as proposed by the likes of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, 'bracketing' is considered, ultimately, an untenable project. According to the existentialists, we are already thrown into our world and cannot extricate ourselves from it (Conklin, 2006; Hibbert et al., 2010). Based on the work of LeVasseur (2003), Creswell and Poth (2016), and Zahavi (2019b) it is suggested that 'perhaps we need a new definition of époche or bracketing, such as suspending our understandings in a reflective move that cultivates curiosity' (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 81). Taking heed, I have, throughout this study, deliberately taken time to be reflexive. However, at no point can I claim to have suspended any of my existing biases. As a way of addressing this challenge, at least in part, I have attempted to acknowledge them in written reflections within this thesis and at various stages throughout the research process.

3.4.4 The Lebenswelt

The final major theme of phenomenology discussed here concerns the notion of the 'lived-world', described by Husserl (1936/1970) as the *Lebenswelt*. The lived-world represents the world of ordinary, immediate experience and is the background for all human endeavours, the concrete context of all experience (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Existential phenomenologists such as Heidegger (1962), Merleau-Ponty (1945/1982) and Sartre (1948/2004) developed the concept of the Lebenswelt, emphasising the importance of *being-in-the-world*, thereby enabling phenomenology 'to consider the totality of human relationships in the world in terms of the individual's concrete experience' (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 63). The basic premise of interpretative phenomenology is that human beings cannot be studied in isolation from the world-context (lived-world) in which they interact and live. The lived-world is considered as the realm of immediate human experience (Halling & Carroll, 1999, p. 98) from the perspective of the reflective meaning-making individual. Therefore, the lifeworld is what all knowledge is

both grounded in – including both our lived subjective knowledge and the objective knowledge of scientific abstraction – and presupposed by (Garfinkel & Liberman, 2007).

This, again, positions itself in contrast to Husserlian descriptive phenomenology (1936/1970). Interpretative phenomenology emphasises that the investigation of human existence is not one of 'bracketing' the world through the suspension of the natural attitude. In trying to describe the lived-world from the viewpoint of a detached observer one becomes too removed from the inherent situatedness of human existence (Mason & May, 2019). Heidegger (1962), Sartre (1948/2004) and Merleau-Ponty (1945/1982) are regarded as key proponents of this existential phenomenological movement.

3.4.5 Section Summary: Applying Interpretative Phenomenology to My Research

In this section I link phenomenological principles described above to my chosen area of research, demonstrating where phenomenology adds value as a theoretical frame to studying the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition. The rejection of dualism and intentionality of consciousness are fundamental guiding principles in that they dictate that we, as humans, are unable to separate what we do from who we are. In an epistemological sense, to study and begin to really understand something like entrepreneurship is to study it in its contextual totality. Scholars such as Cope (2005), Bygrave (2007), Berglund (2015), and Packard (2017) highlight how studies trying to articulate the entrepreneur or entrepreneurship as a fixed or identifiable entity struggle in the conceptualisation of it (Wiklund, 2019; Wiklund et al., 2019). Van Burg et al. (2020, p. 4) identify characteristics such as uniqueness, heterogeneity, volatility and mundanity that make entrepreneurship ripe for ontological plurality and a variety of qualitative approaches. These authors focus on grounded theory and ethnography in their paper. I would go further; arguing that this justifies taking an interpretative phenomenological stance. Interpretative phenomenology explicitly commits to understanding the differences (uniqueness) that exists within an individual's experience. It accounts for what might be common across numerous experiences and therefore extends the level of interpretation to what commonly occurs across a number of individual's worlds.

Finally, I turn to the Lebenswelt and the commitment to building an understanding of ordinary lived worlds. This also relates to Van Burg and colleagues (2020, p. 6) interest in the examination of the 'mundane'. Interpretative phenomenology's commitment to understanding the lived world relates to the building of an in-depth understanding of the ordinary, everyday thoughts, actions and practices of entrepreneurs in a variety of contexts. This is a recent and

rapidly evolving avenue of interest for entrepreneurship scholars (Aldrich & Ruef, 2018; Baker & Welter, 2020; Welter et al., 2017).

To study 'everyday' entrepreneurship (Welter et al., 2017), qualitative, and especially phenomenological research is especially well positioned to extend understanding about aspects that are not deemed visible. For example, there is the possibility to extend our understanding of how: sensemaking; relation to entrepreneurial identity(ies); control; and cultural embeddedness impacts on the entrepreneurial experience. Furthermore, it illuminates how social constructs such as the entrepreneur, gender, family, and community may enable or inhibit the transition to becoming an employer. Moreover, attending to ordinary entrepreneurial actions goes beyond an ontological individualism that focuses on what entrepreneurs do, and rather attends to relational, embodied, mediated and organised aspects of these practices (Thompson et al., 2020), situating the individual in their entrepreneurial context (Van Burg et al., 2020).

Much of mainstream entrepreneurship research is focused on explaining and understanding innovation and growth, often with particular reference to High Growth Firms (HGFs) and what makes them 'unique' (Aldrich & Ruef, 2018; Wiklund et al., 2019). However, most ventures are classified as rather 'mundane, commonplace small businesses' (Van Burg et al., 2020, p. 6) that simply reproduce pre-existing organizational forms (Aldrich & Ruef, 2018). Yet these 'mundane' businesses are what make up the majority of enterprises in the UK, and many of them do not hire any staff at all (ONS, 2020). Therefore, I would argue that if entrepreneurship and its success continue to be measured by how many ventures (indiscriminate of whether they are classed as HGFs or not) employ staff, then understanding the experience of those employing their first member(s) of staff is of significance.

Additionally, in contrast to mainstream literatures, critical research highlights how loaded the construct 'entrepreneur' is (Essers et al., 2017) and how this may impact on those who are classed as such (Marlow, 2020). Therefore, it would be pertinent to understand how narratives of entrepreneurship impact upon those actually doing it: the entrepreneurs.

Linking these points to my own chosen research topic, the employer transition, reveals where applying a phenomenological approach can add value. Understanding how individuals experience the transition to entrepreneur-employer (as interpretative phenomenology dictates), provides a starting point for better understanding this critical step in growing an enterprise. Additionally, the added value of interpretative phenomenology, and particularly my chosen epistemic framework, IPA, introduced in the next section, is that it allows for an examination

of how commonly accepted narratives of enterprise and entrepreneurship (like those identified in Section 2.8 of my literature review) impact on one's lived experience of being an entrepreneur.

3.5 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: An Epistemic Framework

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) forms a distinct epistemic framework (Shinebourne, 2011). Chapter 4 details how I have applied IPA as a research method. However, as the theoretical foundations upon which IPA is built are central in the formation of my research questions these foundational underpinnings are explored in this section. In addition, while the philosophical principles of interpretative phenomenology are a dominant influence, the more practically applicable elements of hermeneutics (Section 3.5.2) and idiography (Section 3.5.1) are explained as part of my wider justification for applying and using an interpretative phenomenological theoretical framework.

My research does not seek to understand entrepreneurship as a construct (Critical Approaches), or that the entrepreneur is identifiable as a distinctive set of cognitive traits and/or deterministic entrepreneurship processes (Mainstream Approaches). Instead, it is concerned with understanding what entrepreneurship is from those who experience it first-hand. This is known as examining 'lived-experience'. For conceptual clarity, I also provide an explanation of what is meant by 'experience' and more specifically, 'lived-experience' from a phenomenological perspective in Section 3.5.4.

IPA was first articulated by Smith (1993, 1996) and since its inception, an increasing number of researchers have viewed IPA as an evolving framework of understanding, as highlighted by its creators (Smith, 2019; Smith et al., 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Eatough & Smith, 2017) and current IPA researchers (Boden et al., 2019; Smith, 2019; Wagstaff et al., 2014). IPA positions itself between post-positivism, extreme relativism and social constructionism (Willig, 2013). IPA was originally regarded as a qualitative approach which moved 'beyond the divide between cognition and discourse' (Smith, 1996, p. 261). Current research postulates that the word 'divide' is too 'strong' for more recent IPA positions and that it could be more usefully described as *facilitating a connection* between 'cognition and discourse' (Smith et al., 2012). Notwithstanding this change of emphasis, locating IPA in an epistemological 'middle ground' allows:

- the existence of a reality independent of the knower;

- an exploration of cognition, particularly perceptions, thoughts and attention processes;
- an acknowledgement of the important role of language in making sense of and articulating our experiences; and,
- the assumption that individual subjectivities are embedded within their personal, social-economic and cultural histories.

IPA draws on a number of theoretical approaches to inform its distinctive epistemological framework. These are *phenomenology*, *hermeneutics*, and *idiography*. In the following section, I detail each of these, before turning to an explanation and summary of my research questions.

3.5.1 Phenomenology

IPA values the participants own perspectives on their experiences and relies on the researcher taking a phenomenological stance. This involves, as Zahavi (2019a, 2020) notes, a need to commit to some, but not all, phenomenological principles (as outlined in Section 3.4). IPA is concerned with how the person binds and integrates discrete elements of: perceptions, memories, judgements, assumptions, and beliefs about something into one unified, meaningful experience (Husserl, 1936/1970). This positions the research participant (in my case, the 'entrepreneur') as the 'experiential authority' (Yancher, 2015) in the research project. Meaning that individuals understand their own experiences more than any other. In the 1980s, Giorgi's (2011) phenomenological method, based on Husserl's philosophy, became influential in applied psychology. Other approaches have followed, for example, van Manen (1997/2016) 'hermeneutic phenomenology'.

Debates - mainly between van Manen (2017a, 2018, 2019) and Smith (2018) - on how 'phenomenologically committed' IPA is are ongoing. Latterly, Zahavi (2019a, 2020) highlights that both scholars raise concern as there are clear misinterpretations of Husserl (1962/1982), Heidegger (1972/1962), Sartre (1948/2004) and Marleu-Ponty (1945/1982). The potential impact of these issues on this research is covered in more detail in the discussion of the application of IPA in the research methods chapter (Chapter 4).

3.5.2 Hermeneutics

IPA is in line with the interpretative *hermeneutic* tradition, rather than descriptive traditions within phenomenology (Smith et al., 2012; Smith 2019). Hermeneutics is derived from the Greek verb, *hermēneuein*, to interpret and the noun *hermēneia*, interpretation (Backman, 2016), Its aim is to make meaning explicable (Tomkins & Eatough, 2018). As with phenomenology, hermeneutics can be seen as an ongoing project, a form of practical philosophy, comprising a wide range of thinkers and diverse traditions (Brennan, 2016; Tomkins & Eatough, 2018). However, it has been noted that within these traditions, there is a fair amount of 'definitional vagueness' (Gallagher, 1992, p. 3).

In general terms, the field of hermeneutics has two main branches; one concerned with the activities of interpretation, the other concerned with the philosophy of understanding (Bowie, 2016; Palmer, 1969). The former addresses the practical issue of how to interpret data, whereas the latter is more abstract and conceptual. Indeed, the former tends to generate rules and standards, exerting a direct influence on methodology; the latter provides guiding principles rather than procedures, which has an indirect influence on methodology (Bowie, 2016).

For instance, the works of Schleiermacher (1838/1998), Dilthey (1958) and Heidegger (1962) are described as representing a move from an 'authorial intent to the linguistic turn', followed by a further shift to 'dialectical hermeneutics' through the work of Gadamer (1989), Habermas (1967) and Ricoeur (1981) (Sandage et al., 2008). An alternative mapping orders these thinkers and their works into three approaches: conservative hermeneutics (Schleiermacher (1838/1998) and Dilthey (1958); moderate hermeneutics (Gadamer (1989) and Ricoeur (1981) and radical hermeneutics (Heidegger (1962), and also Derrida (1989) and Foucault (1993/2019) (Gallagher, 1992, p.10). I will focus briefly on three of these thinkers, Schleiermacher (1768-1833), Heidegger (1889 – 1976) and Gadamer (1900 – 2002) in order to illustrate their influence on IPA.

One of the most dominant ideas in hermeneutics is that of the hermeneutic circle (Thompson, 2018). The circle is a simple yet powerful symbol, moving away from linear towards more iterative, integrative thinking (Tomkins & Eatough, 2018). The circle emphasises understanding as relational and referential; we understand something by connecting it with something we already know through comparison, contrast or juxtaposition. There is no unified definition of this circle (Bleicher, 2017). Instead, different theorists work with circles to emphasise their own particular interests and concerns. Schleiermacher, a key scholar in the

development of modern hermeneutics (Bowie, 2016), uses the notion of the hermeneutic circle to connect whole and parts, making them mutually dependent and co-constitutive (Bleicher, 2017). The whole can only be understood as it relates to the parts, and vice versa, the parts can only be understood as they relate to the whole (Schleiermacher, 1998, p. 23). Not only does Schleiermacher connect whole and parts, they suggest the whole relates to the whole context: culture, customs, discourse, conventions, and the personal circumstances from which the author of the text is writing (Tomkins & Eatough, 2018). Context, in this case, forms an integral aspect of hermeneutic understanding. Hermeneutic experience is therefore inseparable from the cultural and discursive setting in which - and from which - it emerges (Mason & May, 2019). Moreover, Schleiermacher (1998) highlights the significant relationship between the general and the particular by relating whole to general and part to particular. It suggests that, for Schleiermacher, general and particular are not either/or approaches, but instead, they are intimately interrelated; we cannot have one without the other (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020).

Moving to Heidegger (1962), we see the notion of hermeneutic circling used differently and more radically. Heidegger shifts the emphasis away from what takes place *within* understanding towards the question of how any sort of understanding is possible in the first place (Mason & May, 2020). Heidegger's philosophy marks a decisive shift in the hermeneutic tradition from the procedural to the existential, from method to ontology (Brennan, 2016). In Heidegger's view, before we come to understand anything explicitly, we already have a preconception or presupposition of it - a fore-having (*Vorhabe*). The fore-having is conditioned by a foresight (*Vorsicht*) and fore-conception (*Vorgriff*) that we may have in an experience (Bowie, 2016). As Heidegger explains, 'an interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us' (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 191-2). This definition of hermeneutic circling involves manoeuvring between pre-understanding and understanding (Mason & May, 2020). This means surfacing, interrogating and revising one's pre-conceptions and assumptions as one gathers more information about the phenomenon of inquiry.

Finally, Gadamer (1989) develops the concept of temporality to reveal Schleiermacher's and Heidegger's circles as mutually illuminating, rather than contradictory. For Gadamer, hermeneutic circling is a process whereby 'the anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes actual understanding when the parts that are determined by the whole themselves also determine this whole' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 291). Gadamer's view like Heidegger's, emphasises that the key hermeneutic element is the interpreter's pre-understanding (Tomkins & Eatough, 2018).

In IPA, Smith (2019) labels the practise of hermeneutics as *double hermeneutics*: the participants try to make sense of experience (the first hermeneutic layer), upon which the researcher makes his/her own interpretation (the second layer). Smith et al., (2012) stress that the purpose of IPA is to attempt as far as possible to gain an insider perspective of the phenomenon being studied, whilst acknowledging that the researcher is the primary analytical instrument. The researcher's beliefs are not seen as biases to be eliminated but rather as being necessary for making sense of the experiences of other individuals (Eatough & Smith, 2017). This helps resolve some of the challenges of the epoché as described in Section 3.4.3. The hermeneutic researcher, and the double hermeneutic (Smith, 2019), lie at the heart of how the interpretation of lived experiences takes place during the research process, and indeed beyond. What is already more familiar in the literature of IPA is the way researchers are also meaning-making agents who, in their analysis, are trying, through interpretative engagement with the participant, to make sense of the phenomena they are presented with. This posits the researcher as the primary analytic instrument (Smith et al., 2012).

3.5.3 Idiography

Idiography constitutes the third and final theoretical underpinning of IPA. The terms idiographic and nomothetic were first used in English by Allport (1937, 1962) who borrowed the terms from the writings of the German philosopher Windelband (1893-1998). Allport (1937), following Windelband (1984/1998), described nomothetic knowledge as knowledge of general laws, and idiographic knowledge as knowledge about unique events, entities, and trends (Hulbert & Heavey, 2001). As applied to IPA an idiographic approach aims for an in-depth focus on the particular, and commitment to a detailed finely textured analysis, that is not possible in nomothetic research studies which focus on aggregated data (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 1995).

IPA research is conducted at the idiographic level. As posited by Windelband, (1893/1998), this term has traditionally been associated with the study of 'individual' persons. Hence, the study of any specific situation or event might also be called idiographic. IPA often uses the term in such a way that it draws upon both these meanings. Exemplar studies concentrate on specific individuals as they deal with specific situations or events in their lives (Smith, 2019). Smith et al., (2012) contend that individuals can offer a unique perspective on their engagement with phenomena, therefore for researchers, individuals can become the unit of study. Thus, 'a commitment to an idiographic psychology is obviously closely linked to the

rationale for case-studies' (Smith et al., 1995, p. 163). The 'doing' of the idiographic method is covered in detail the following chapter, Section 4.3.7.

3.5.4 The Phenomenological Concept of 'Experience'

What is an experience, and how do we interpret meaning from them? These are two questions that I will provide more clarity on in the following two sub-sections. While these may be considered better suited to the Methods section of this thesis, as they appear concerned with levels of analysis, understanding what constitutes an 'experience' is central to ensuring my research questions are suited to a phenomenological study – particularly in terms of scope.

3.5.4.1 What is an 'Experience'?

An explanation of experience based on Dilthey (1976) is provided by Smith et al., (2012, p. 2). In their discussion they present a hierarchy of three different levels of experience. First, there is an elemental level; in which a person is constantly caught up, unselfconsciously, in the everyday flow of experience. At the second level a person becomes aware of what is happening this then leads to the beginning of what is termed 'an experience' (Smith et al., 2012, p. 2) as opposed to just the continual flow of the everyday. Finally, there is a comprehensive level where the experience has larger significance within a person's life-history. This comprehensive experience is made up of 'units of experiences' (Dilthey, 1976, p. 210) and it is these units that are the focus, mostly, of IPA research studies. Smith et al., (2012) illustrate the comprehensive level through the example of a person undergoing major surgery and the impact this has. The parts: receiving the diagnosis; preparing for surgery; recovery; and so on, may be separated in time, but it is suggested are linked by a common meaning. This draws on earlier ideas about the importance of understanding a person's experience of the body during illness and health (van Manen, 1997/2016).

For Heidegger (1962), presence is necessary as 'Being' is an experience of being-there and he expressed as *Dasein*. This, for Heidegger is what differentiates us as humans to other life-forms. Being is an ever-evolving situation of recall, revision, and readjustment; it is in response to what we do and do not pay attention to. Thus, it is through our experiencing, that our connection to the world becomes apparent; influencing the meanings that we give to being human. There are, of course different perspectives on how such experiences and the meanings we give them should be understood. Dilthey (1976) believed that it is possible to 'understand' other people's experience (*verstehen*) by participating in their activities, which allows us to

draw out latent aspects of our '*Erlebnis'*. This concept is based on an understanding that to comprehend another's experience one has to also experience it for themselves. For instance, to understand football hooliganism, we attend football matches (Taylor, 1994); to understand making art we do art (Becker, 1982); and to understand pedagogy we participate in classrooms (Linehan & McCarthy, 2001). In short, Dilthey puts 'experience' at the heart of understanding human activity and participation at the heart of understanding experience (Sullivan & McCarthy, 2005).

Aspects of Dilthey's ideas, however, were critiqued by Gadamer (1975). Dilthey saw our common *Erlebnis* as facilitating inquiry through the similarity between the researcher (or in Dilthey's terms 'historian') and the 'object' of the research (historical experience of others). In contrast the researcher, according to Gadamer, approaches the object of study from their own particular historical perspective and not from the perspective of the 'object'. In this sense, there is as much dissimilarity between researcher and participant, as similarity. So, whilst an assumption of IPA is for researchers to interpret data through the lens of their own experience, as influenced by their own psycho-social history and their comprehension of the extant literature (Smith, 2019); they do so in relation to the participant 'lived experience'.

IPA uses the concept of 'lived experience'. Experience is said to be lived and thus can be reflected upon. The idea of reflection is central to the understanding of experience and to the practice of research in IPA (Smith et al., 2012). Drawing from the phenomenology of Husserl (1962/1982) (Finlay, 2011), and other theorists such as van Manen (1997, 2017b); lived experience reflects a fundamental distinction of awareness that is more than just passing, but rather is asserted and significant. Lived experience is encapsulated in IPA by describing a sequence of layers, each representing an increased degree of reflection (Smith et al., 2012, p.189). The first layer is based on Sartre's (1968) concept of 'immediate flow experience' that involves a minimal level of awareness or pre-reflective reflexivity. The second involves intuitive, undirected reflection including daydreams, imagination and memory. The third layer involves attentive reflection and occurs when an experience becomes something of importance, it is registered as significant and requiring attention. Finally, there is deliberate controlled reflection in which there is a formal analysis of pre-reflective reflections on past events (Smith, 2019).

These layers represent what is referred to as the bandwidth of the individual when undertaking their reflections alone (Smith, 2019). The researcher enters this so-called reflective loop of the individual, to facilitate them to provide an account of their reflections. Thus, when

being interviewed the individual will recount some reflection which they have already done, but the researcher should provoke additional reflections. In methodological terms, the researcher conducts the fourth layer: a formal reflective phenomenological analysis on the interview transcript (Smith et al., 2012).

In summary, IPA seeks to engage with the person making sense of a comprehensive experience rather than discrete elements of that experience. IPA especially examines the meaning the person is making of their comprehensive experience. What is meaning and how can I use IPA to search for it? The next section turns to examine what is meant by the 'meaning' of experiences within IPA.

3.5.4.2 Searching for 'Meaning'

While IPA can be applied to a wide range of issues, it comes into its own when examining peoples' perceptions of experiences that are happening to them and engage with what Smith (2019) terms 'hot cognition'. Such experiences force participants to reflect on what has happened and their attempts to make sense of their meaning. Consequently, the experience engenders much cerebral activity, and that cognition is emotionally laden.

What turns an event into an 'experience' (as defined in Section 2.5.4.2) is the significance given to it by the human participating in, and potentially changed by, what is happening. Such experiences can be relatively current and discrete. What makes an ongoing situation apposite for IPA is the presence of hot cognition. For example, whilst an entrepreneur may have fired an employee for stealing years ago; it may still be something they are wrestling with. They could be still doing a lot of cerebral and emotional activity regarding it, as they attempt to find the meaning in what has happened. Human beings are sense making creatures (Smith, 2019) and that sense making is reflected in the meaning of what is being made sense of.

Implicit within this notion, is that people are intrinsically self-reflexive, sense making agents that are interpreting their engagement with the world. Taylor describes us as 'self-interpreting animals' (1994, p. 189). This assumes that being human involves endeavouring to find meaning in what is happening to us.

Table 4. Typologies of Meaning

Smith's (2019, p. 2) suggested typologies (levels) of meaning.

Type of question	Level of Analysis	Focus of IPA Study
What does that mean?	Literal	x
What does *he/she/them* mean?	Pragmatic/textual (puzzle)	**xxx**
What does it *mean?*	Experiential (significance)	**xxxxx**
What does it *mean* for my identity?	Existential (significance)	**xxx**
What does my life *mean*?	Existential (purpose)	xx

Smith (2019) suggests the type of questions we ask reflects the 'level of sense making' we are engaged in (p. 2). Table 4 is Smith's suggested typology of meaning, to help guide IPA researchers and demonstrate how levels of meaning interweave, almost inextricably with one another. The suggestion being that 'things only have meaning in a field, that is, in relation to the meanings of other things' (Taylor, 1994, pp. 181-182). The levels of meaning are unrelated to the layers of experience described previously, and Smith (2019) clarifies that his typology (Table 4) is formed to guide the IPA researcher on where to focus their analysis of the experiences under investigation.

The first level is literal, in that it simply seeks a definition of something and nothing beyond that. Progressing to the second level, reflects a human's broader concern with what something or someone *actually* means beyond what is textually in front of us. The third level introduces the notion of experiential significance, i.e. 'what does it mean to me that I fired my employee for stealing?' Thus, this level is concerned with the experiential significance of the events that have happened and is the central point of focus for an IPA study. The final two levels move the meaning making beyond just the experience. to turn the sense-making introspectively. Questions such as 'who am I?' or 'what does life mean anyway' are existential in nature and are at the highest levels in terms of an individual's search for meaning.

To summarise, meaning making is the result of a complex interaction between our experiences and how we subsequently make sense of them. The final column in Table 4 shows where the researcher should focus to search for meaning when conducting an IPA study. Although each level is intricately interwoven, the core concern of IPA is at level three; 'what is the experiential significance of what is unfolding?' However, an inevitable and intrinsic requirement of that task is an engagement with the prior literal and pragmatic components of

meaning (Smith, 2019). To put this more simply, I need to understand what the person meant when they said something, in order to understand what this thing means for their life. However, a key limitation is that the primary vehicle for communication is language, specifically in the form of text. Other modes of constructing meaning are briefly summarised in the next section. Understanding of these very much informed my choice of methods (detailed in the following chapter). It ensures my methodology remains consistent with, and complements, the phenomenological commitments of my study. My method was chosen in order to gain a deeper understanding of a participant's lived world without personally participating in it.

3.6 Research Questions

As this chapter discussed, assumptions influence every part of the research process, and can be drawn from the questions we want to ask (Cassell et al., 2018). A closer reflection on assumptions in a body of literature can reveal that conflicting results stem from fundamentally different assumptions that reflect different theoretical perspectives or even paradigms (Alvesson & Skolberg, 2020; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013a,). In the case of alternative perspectives of entrepreneurship research, there is not so much a 'gap as a chasm' (Jennings et al., 2005, p.147). Encouraging research outside the boundaries of functionalism, especially if it has a radical perspective, at least satisfies the criteria of filling a gap in the literature; but in itself, provides insufficient justification.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.1, Alvesson and Sandberg (2020; 2013a) raise the issue of a tendency to 'gap-spot' rather than problematise dominant research perspectives. By problematise, they infer that this happens when core assumptions of a particular body of literature are challenged (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013a, p.138). The suggestion is that 'gap-spotting' lends itself to the tradition of knowledge accumulation, rather than knowledge deconstruction and subsequent construction, leading to the potential for new insights. From my point-of-view, there is a challenge with mainstream entrepreneurship studies' preoccupation with deductive, quantitative, hypothesis-testing research. The challenge is not in the applied methodologies being used, as they serve a purpose. The problem is that the lack of explicit discussion on underlying basic assumptions in entrepreneurship research tends to imply an un-reflective attitude to the hidden claims and perspectives following from use of these methodologies. As some scholars reflect, this may be down to some institutional structures (i.e., academic publication outputs) that privilege some methodological approaches over others (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013a; Wiklund et al., 2019).

Behind known statistical methodologies in the social sciences are several unarticulated assumptions about ontology, epistemology and axiology that are problematic when applied to empirical entrepreneurship research. These assumptions are possibly overlooked to make the phenomenon of entrepreneurship possible to investigate. Applying these depicts entrepreneurship as a logical mechanism in society caused by some variables and affecting others, and thereby reducing the complexity of the observed phenomenon. Drawing once again on Pittaway and Tunstall (2016), such assumptions can be broadly categorised into three areas:

- Aim to be a science, as opposed to be a 'social science';
- Disregarding the role of social context, structures and institutions (Baker & Welter, 2020);
- Assuming entrepreneurship is about 'special' individuals.

Within these, a dualistic world is assumed, where entrepreneurs, opportunities and technologies exist independently of each other. Done successfully, this research arrives at clear conclusions about correlations and cause-effect-relations in a much-simplified world. Such conclusions allegedly make it possible to predict and stimulate the entrepreneurial homo-economicus into further bold endeavours. Such knowledge is also presented as objective, free from disturbing interactions between researcher and the subjects of study. The production of these forms of knowledge thereby borrows legitimacy from the reality-depicting, truth-seeking natural sciences (Boje et al., 2019). Distilling this further, deterministic perspectives tend to result in generalised views on the outcomes associated with who and what an entrepreneur is, and how entrepreneurship is conducted (Ahl & Marlow, 2018).

Addressing prevailing assumptions resulted in a notable rise of critical approaches that use a range of theoretical lenses to challenge and question dominant thinking within (and indeed, outside) the field of entrepreneurship studies (Marlow, 2020). These theoretical perspectives challenge ideological assumptions (e.g., that entrepreneurship is a force for good) and shape how the 'entrepreneur' is perceived more widely (Essers et al., 2017; Tedmanson et al., 2012). Additionally, more focus on the contextual factors impacting the entrepreneur and their journey, and a call for studies to investigate the 'everydayness' of entrepreneurship have been made (Baker & Welter, 2020; Wiklund et al., 2019). Such calls suggest a shift in focus towards gaining a more granular understanding (Nayak et al., 2020) of entrepreneurial phenomena.

Consequently, my decision to take a phenomenological perspective is in part motivated by a need to understand entrepreneurship from those experiencing it first-hand, free from the constraint of existing entrepreneurship theories and assumptions. Additionally, I am motivated by the explicit guiding framework that interpretative phenomenology provides, and its particular commitment to the idea that human beings cannot be studied in isolation from the world-context (lived-world) in which they interact and live (Smith, 2019). To maintain this frame of reference, I use the phenomenologically informed concept of experience (as explained in Section 3.5.4) in my research questions.

The scope of my experiential focus of being an entrepreneur is on the transition from entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer, as described in Chapter 2. I return to the mainstream assumption my research stems from: the theory of job-creation, or the historic belief that entrepreneurship is causally related to the availability of more jobs and the subsequent creation of them (Mallett & Wapshott, 2020).

The challenge to find and hire a first employee has been identified as a significant issue for entrepreneurs and venture growth (Coad, et al., 2017). According to recent UK estimates many enterprises are classified as non-employing businesses, comprising the founder only (ONS, 2020). This suggests that while a high proportion of individuals enter self-employment, growth presents a significant challenge for many. Considering job creation is cited as one of the most beneficial outcomes of entrepreneurship (Birch, 1979; Acs, 2006; Acs et al., 2009), little is known about the experiences of this critical transition.

Therefore, the first objective of this study is understanding the nature of finding and hiring a first employee as a critical step in entrepreneurial venture growth (Caliendo et al., 2019; Coad et al., 2017). My second objective is to identify what may enable or inhibit the transition from entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer. As this transition is currently an under-researched phenomenon, this will facilitate a better understanding of how entrepreneur-employers can be supported further, and where future research could focus. My final objective is triggered by an interest in the application of an innovative qualitative methodology. This is in response to calls for more pluralistic approaches within the field of entrepreneurship (Van Burg et al., 2020).

Consequently, within this thesis, the experiences of entrepreneurial job-creation are investigated. This investigation heeds the calls of critical scholars to explore the everyday entrepreneur (Welter et al., 2017), whilst also ensuring that mainstream assumptions are brought to the fore and challenged, rather than accepted. In adhering to phenomenological

commitments that demand a reflexive methodology like IPA, the theoretical perspectives that guide my research are to some extent, a response to a need for more ontological/epistemological transparency within the entrepreneurship field. These have shaped and framed the overarching research question and relevant sub-questions that are outlined below:

1. How do entrepreneurs experience the transition from non-employer to employer?
    a. What are the potential enablers or inhibitors to this transition?
    b. What is the impact of this transition from the entrepreneur's perspective?

Asking a broader primary research question (1) is reflective of the phenomenological frame my study takes (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017). My literature review highlights a number of different avenues of critical thought that I will engage with in my discussion chapter to elucidate the findings from my field work. My secondary questions are posed to extend the level of practical relevance and contribution of my work. Thus, I seek to understand what challenges or benefits becoming an entrepreneur-employer may have and if they are contextually bound. This is with the objective of suggesting how entrepreneur-employers can be supported further, and where future research could be focused.

3.7 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce interpretative phenomenology as the theoretical frame informing my study. I began with discussing my ontological position as sitting between realism and relativism, noting that in even asking my research questions, both positions are implied. By taking a phenomenological approach, I take a middle ground that accepts the interaction of both. After discussing the value of taking such a position in an entrepreneurship study, I introduced my intended epistemic framework upon which my methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is based upon. In the following chapter Research Methods, I introduce the methods used, including justification of using a co-creative method, adapted for this study: the Lego Interview. In addition, I also provide a detailed discussion of the fieldwork that took place and my reflections on the research process.

Chapter 4
Research Methods

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Selecting IPA as a Methodology

4.3 Combining Creative Methods with IPA

4.3.1 Exploring Different Modes of Meaning Construction and Analysis

4.4 The Lego Interview Method

4.4.1 Lego Serious Play

4.4.2 Explicitation (Phenomenological) Interview

4.4.3 Relational Mapping and Interview Arc Approach

4.5 Conducting Fieldwork

4.5.1 The Pilot

4.5.2 Pilot: Key Learning Points

4.5.3 The Main Study

4.5.4 Choosing Participants

4.5.5 Collecting Data

4.5.6 Data Preparation

4.5.7 Data Analysis

4.6 Ethical Considerations

4.7 Research Quality

4.8 Reflexivity

4.8.1 The Researcher's Role: Achieving Critical Distance

4.8.2 Dealing with the Unexpected: Reflections from the Field

4.8.3 Lodgers in My House: Reflections on Conducting IPA Analysis

4.8.4 Acknowledging the Doctoral Process

4.8.5 Using Lego as an Analytic and Self-Reflexive Tool

4.9 Meet the Participants

4.10 Chapter Summary

4.1 Introduction

The principal aim of my study is to develop a detailed phenomenological conceptualisation of becoming an entrepreneur-employer. To do this, my first objective is to understand the nature of finding and hiring a first employee as a critical step in entrepreneurial venture growth (Caliendo et al., 2019; Coad et al., 2017). My second objective is to identify what enables or inhibits the transition from entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer. As this transition is currently an under-researched phenomenon, this will facilitate a better understanding of how entrepreneur-employers can be supported further, and where future research can focus. Additionally, understanding the potential inhibitors or enablers of this transition and moving beyond them, this research seeks to provide 'theoretical insight' (Mouly & Sankaran, 2004, pp. 1452-1457) into the impact of this transition from the entrepreneur's perspective.

My final objective stems from an interest in the application of an innovative qualitative methodology (Clarke & Holt, 2019; Van Burg et al., 2020). Consequently, the previous chapter introduced phenomenology as the theoretical framework for this study and detailed how its key philosophical tenets shaped the ontological and epistemological positioning of my research. Subsequent to this, I detailed the three theoretical pillars that Smith and colleagues (2012) used to develop my chosen methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to meet this final objective. Therefore, my approach has been to take a phenomenological position by using IPA to address the research questions introduced in Chapter 3, Section 3.6:

1. How do entrepreneurs experience the transition from non-employer to employer?
   a) What are the potential enablers or inhibitors to this transition?
   b) What is the impact of this transition from the entrepreneur's perspective?

This chapter explains my methodology: the process of how I collected, prepared and analysed data to address my research questions. I begin, in Sections 4.2 to 4.4, by providing a summary of the methods used in my study, and a justification for taking this approach.

Section 4.5 details the 'nuts and bolts' of the data collection, preparation and analysis phases of my fieldwork. This section includes a detailed summary of how I analysed my raw data according to IPA's six stages outlined by Smith et al., (2012), before turning to discuss ethical considerations in Section 4.6.

In Section 4.7, I turn to consider issues of research quality, positioning these within broader debates while also considering how a quality piece of phenomenological research can

be achieved. Taking a more reflexive tone, the final sections of this chapter, (Section 4.8), are dedicated to understanding and negotiating my role at different points in my research process. Finally, images and descriptions of each research participant's Lego self is available in Section 4.9, this is followed with a chapter summary in Section 4.10.

4.2 Selecting IPA as a Methodology

It is now generally accepted that research questions and the purpose of the particular research study demand appropriate methodological approaches, or in some instances a combination of approaches (Ward & Shortt, 2020, 2018; Bell et al., 2018; Cassell & Poth, 2016). Phenomenological approaches are gaining momentum within the entrepreneurship domain (Berglund, 2015; Raco & Tanod, 2014; Seymour, 2006). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1996) has been used to explore entrepreneurial learning from failure (Cope, 2005; Heinze, 2013; Mandl et al., 2016), entrepreneurial leadership (Kempster & Cope, 2010; Lewis, 2015), creativity (Patten, 2019), performance (Tasnim et al., 2014), sustainability (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018) and embeddedness (McKeever et al., 2015).

The purpose the previous chapter was to lay the groundwork and theoretical justifications for my applying a methodology that utilises IPA. As the previous chapter set out, my research is informed by the theoretical perspectives of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, which form the foundations of IPA. These guide the research design, including the methods and analytical framework.

My aim was to detail the experience of becoming an entrepreneur-employer from a phenomenological standpoint, and this required me to gather detailed, first-person accounts of this transition. To do so demands immersing yourself into your participant's world, whilst also remaining sensitive to your own (Goldspink & Engward, 2019). The phenomenological interview was an obvious choice of method, but has its limitations (Crawford et al., 2020). For example, it does not always lend itself to gaining the level of experiential insight needed for a good IPA study as it relies solely on the use of verbal communication (Boden et al., 2019; Woodward, 2016, 2020). As I explore below, this led me to choosing an elicitation tool (Lego) and integrate this into the phenomenological interview (Woodward, 2020).

4.3 Combining Creative Methods with IPA

While visual and creative methods are becoming firmly embedded as approaches in organisation and management research (Höllerer et al., 2019), I endeavour to distinguish my work from this 'visual turn', where scholars have begun to pay closer attention to the 'visualisation' within their areas of study (Boxenbaum et al., 2018; Bell at al., 2014; Steyaert et al., 2012). This work tends to concentrate on the analysis of pre-existing or created in-situ images (Rose, 2016; Warren, 2018). In contrast, my research explicitly uses objects as material (and arguably visual) elicitation tools together with standard interviewing techniques. Parallels can be drawn to the other methods, such as participant produced drawing (Ward & Shortt, 2018) and various photographic approaches (Warren, 2018). Warren and Shortt (2018) contend that formerly mentioned creative methods, have received less attention than photographic methods and are still very much the exception as opposed to the norm, in organisational research.

Within this body of scholarship, it is accepted that complex ideas are made sense of and transported not only through words, but also through visual and material artefacts (Taylor & Statler, 2014). This can trigger a range of cognitive, emotional and other responses (Boxenbaum et al., 2018). Overall, there has been a growing interest in 'how matter matters' (Carlile et al., 2013), the role of visuality (Bell et al., 2014) and the comparison and consideration of visual and material dimensions of organisations and institutions (Jones et al., 2017). For example, recent work by Crawford et al. (2020) highlights the 'power' of what they term as a 'long interview' that incorporates the use of 'material objects and spaces' to elicit rich data through a 'show-and-tell process' (p. 2). As discussed in the previously, IPA's focus on distilling experience and the meanings participants draw from them, rely on interpretations that are nuanced and demonstrate reflexive depth beyond generalising. Exploring how meanings can be communicated beyond verbal or textual forms, led me to investigate different potential modes of meaning construction used in research.

Within the entrepreneurship field the use of visual and creative methods is still a rarity. Studies into gendered constructions of entrepreneurship make effective use of visual methods (notable examples include Duffy & Hund, 2015; Pritchard et al., 2019; Smith, 2014; Swail et al., 2014; Swan, 2017; Swail & Marlow, 2018). There are also promising methodological developments in utilising visual methods to understand entrepreneurial identities (Clarke & Holt, 2017, 2019). The importance of metaphors in theorizing entrepreneurship has also been considered (Lundmark & Krzeminska, 2019). Recently, Van Burg et al. (2020) called for more plurality in methods used, including making better use of 'visual aids help to split or combine

pieces of fragmented data, allowing scholars to test assumptions, discover new meanings, and make sense of emerging patterns' (p. 11).

Perhaps the work that most closely resembles my own is that of Clarke and Holt (2019). Although their publication came after my data collection phase, the authors decision process in using drawing to explore entrepreneurial experiences follows a similar logic to my own. This is a promising development within the field and signals that entrepreneurship is a ripe field for visual/creative methodological exploration. More broadly, entrepreneurship research has yet to fully exploit visual methods or multi-modal approaches (Wiklund et al., 2019; Van Burg et al., 2020). IPA studies using photo-elicitation (Silver & Farrants 2016), visual voice (Williamson, 2019), and found images (Bacon et al., 2017) exist, but are yet to be found in the entrepreneurship field.

4.3.1 Exploring Different Modes of Meaning Construction and Analysis

Visuality and materiality are regarded as distinct modes of constructing and communicating meaning (Jones et al., 2017). Building on the work of social semiotics, a mode is defined as "socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning" (Kress, 2010, p. 79). In social semiotics the study of modes has evolved through different steps (Höllerer et al., 2019; Höllerer et al., 2018). Although some research suggests that the visual and the verbal modes substitute for one another (Gehman & Grimes, 2017; Garud et al., 2018), most research points to complementary, mutually reinforcing roles. For example, Boxenbaum et al., (2018) show how the visual mode and the verbal mode play complementary roles at different stages of the social construction of a rational myth. Cartel et al., (2018) also identify complementary elements between the visual and verbal modes in the theorisation of an innovation. These findings have led to calls for increasingly 'stronger' multimodal research (Zilber, 2018). This requires regarding material, verbal, visual, and other modes not as separable, but as co-emergent (Zilber, 2018).

This suggests there is value in not only using Lego as an elicitation tool, but also in including any material/visual data (images of Lego constructions) as part of the analysis. However, to incorporate visual data into the analytic stages would require further investigation into how alternative modes interact (or indeed intr-act, as per Harman, 2018) with the verbal realm. Combining visual analytic techniques alongside textual has yet to be fully developed or utilised within IPA's analytic framework (see Section 4.5.7 for a detailed overview of this). Attention so far has been paid to the benefits of visual methods rather, than the development

complementary visual analytic frameworks (with the exception of Boden et al., 2019 and Boden & Eatough, 2014). Although achieving this may be beyond the scope of this thesis, I believe that this is an avenue for further methodological development.

Empirically, this requires further investigation into the interaction of material, visual and verbal realms through from a phenomenological perspective (Tilley, 2020). Hermeneutic phenomenology commits itself to revealing meanings that 'lie hidden' within a given phenomenon (Heidegger 1962, p. 59). Therefore, interpretative 'detective work' (Smith et al., 2012, p. 35) would be suited to revealing meaning within visual and material data (Boden et al., 2019). Within the management and organisation field there are a number of existing visual analytic frameworks (examples include, Bell & Davison, 2013; Pritchard, 2020; Rose, 2016; Shortt & Warren, 2012, 2019). Nonetheless, there remains scope to develop better integrated analytic frameworks for co-emergent material, visual and verbal data, which would be suited to the use of material methods similar to the one used in this study.

I fully acknowledge the potential in combing textual, visual and material data analysis, and the insight this can allow for. I believe this is a valuable opportunity for future research that can work to answer the call of Zilber (2018). However, within the scope of this research, I made the early decision that this was too much of a methodological leap to achieve within the parameters of this study. In addition, limited guidance on selecting and combining visual analytic framework with IPA meant, that for this study at least, I restricted the use Lego to the data collection phase as I go onto outline in the following section.

4.4 The Lego Interview Method

Having established my primary method of data collection as the research interview, I identified some key limitations. These are an overreliance on a participant's ability to reflect; and for participants fully communicate their reflections within a given timeframe (Ward & Shortt, 2020; Woodward, 2020). Therefore, my attention turned to choosing a complimentary creative method as a tool to aid elicitation.

A turning point was discovering the work of Gauntlett (2007, 2013) and his use of Lego Serious Play as a focus group elicitation tool. I felt that using Lego would be accessible and easy to use, and a potential way to avoid inevitable 'but I can't draw' statements (Ward & Shortt, 2018; Ward & Shortt, 2020). Three approaches influenced the Lego interview method and are outlined in the following sections:

- Lego Serious Play (an ‘arts-based’ method, first used by Gauntlett et al., 2006) (see Section 4.4.1);
- Explicitation interview framework (phenomenological interviewing; Petitmengin 2006) (see Section 4.4.2);
- Relational mapping approach (Boden et al., 2019) (see Section 4.4.3).

The final method used in this study is detailed in Figure 5 on the following page.

Figure 5. The Lego Interview Method

Stage One: Building Rapport

- Set out the Lego on the table, using containers to organise. Provide a 'build area' in the middle (Figures 8 and 9). You can ask the participant if they'd like to help.
- Ask the participant to build and provide a name for their 'Lego self'. This is what they would be referred to throughout the study (Figure 7). Take your time with this. I would also build myself at this point too, to demonstrate my own engagement.
- Ask the participant to talk through their build and explain this is how the interview will be structured. Explain that all Lego pieces as and when they wish, or not at all, there are no boundaries.

Stage Two: Building Talk

- As models are being constructed encourage participants to talk through constructions.
- Label each model with a description of the participants choosing and photograph in situ. Assign models a number (or letter) to identify the order in which they were built (e.g., Figures 15 and 21).
- Participants may deconstruct or reconstruct existing models. Record all changes. (demonstrates the non-linear and improvisational nature of interviewing style).

Stage Three: Deconstructing Talk

- Invite participants to talk or build anything else they felt was significant. (In my experience this often led to additional and more personal insights being disclosed).
- Ensure time is taken to review all the Lego models constructed (they will reflect the interview arc).
- Finally, go through all the images taken to ensure participants are happy and no identifiable features are present in them.
- Put the Lego away, participants may help which can form part of the debrief.

4.4.1 Lego Serious Play

The use of Lego as a research method is not novel and has been used as an arts-based method across a number of studies, as well as across a range of disciplines such as sociology (Woodward, 2016; Mannay & Edwards, 2013), media and culture (Gauntlett, 2007; Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006), tourism (Wengel et al., 2016; Wengel et al., 2019) and as an ethnographic participatory approach (Dixon, 2016). With the exception of Mannay and Edwards (2013), most researchers have used the LSP (hereafter LSP) method adapted by Gauntlett (2007) which involves group work.

LSP was originally a business consultancy tool developed by the Lego® Group from the mid-1990s (Roos & Victor, 1999). It was an activity designed for groups of adults, guided by a facilitator, in which participants would build metaphorical models using Lego bricks. The models would typically represent their experiences of activities, structures and communications within their organisations. Through externalising thoughts or constructs, by building them in Lego– they would go on to combine and review their built meanings. Then, to build ideas for initiatives or strategies, in response to this construction. Although not explicit, some of the thinking behind this approach links to Weick and colleague's (2005) exploration of the human process of 'sensemaking'. Unusually, LSP invites people to build in *metaphors.* For example, my own research journey could be represented with interconnected metaphors such as an owl representing knowledge, flowers reflecting personal growth and a wall of bricks surrounding them representing the limitations I felt.

The central premise of LSP as a 'thinking tool' is not uniquely tied to business consultancy. Gauntlett (2007) worked with Lego to develop LSP as a research tool, using an adapted form of LSP to explore how people thought about their own identities. Gauntlett modified the process in different ways in response to feedback that the LSP method was too 'prescribed', contradicting its original purpose of reintroducing adults to the benefits of play. Previous versions made heavy demands in terms of material, time (one to two-day sessions), people (a trained LSP facilitator required for every session) and required following a strict methodology. The result of Gauntlett's developments led to an 'open source' release of Lego Serious Play in 2010. It sought to introduce a more flexible and lightweight approach to its implementation, whilst retaining some of its original thinking behind the concept. The development demonstrated that Lego could be used to represent abstract experiences, feelings or ideas. Participants could also construct physical representations of relationships or a

challenging situation. It provides not only a visual but also material stimulus that enables a creator (and others) to examine, review and discuss the concerns that are represented.

The physical building of non-physical phenomena, and particularly relational aspects of particular experiences, appealed to the limitations I had previously identified. Although Lego is not totally unique as a tool for representing ideas and concepts, it is distinct from what can be done with other materials. Similar processes could be conducted with modelling clay, pen and paper. What differentiates Lego is the ease and speed with which it can be assembled and revised.

There are several limitations with the use of Lego, as prescribed by Gauntlett (2007, p. 136). The first was that his method was designed to be used in groups. It was also still, quite a prescribed method, which took into account a number of steps. It relied on the original LSP method of a process in which individuals build metaphorical models, then share their stories, and subsequently work with each other. Gauntlett's work was centred around asking groups of individuals to build their identity and involve clear timeframes for building and then talking their build out to the group (p. 138). As part of the four-hour process, Gauntlett includes a warmup to slowly familiarise participants with using Lego in the way the session demanded.

More broadly, using objects in interviews is common in sociological or anthropological studies (Woodward, 2019). This has been termed as using or applying 'material methods'. Such methods can be used for a whole range of purposes, including understanding more fully the material world or using materials to develop ways of generating data. The use of materials (like Lego) adds another dimension to data collection and introduces several implications. Namely, as Woodward (2020) suggests, there is need to consider how one orientates oneself to things and what I think within the bounds of this research project, things are – object, materials that coalesce, becoming's, processes or sets of relations.

Am I using a thing, an object, or a material? Paying more attention to terminology I use implies a particular ontological position (Woodward, 2020) and in the following section I briefly consider how.

4.4.1.1 Looking Through a Material Lens

The use of the word 'object' assumes an 'out-there-ness', something self-evident because it just is. Ingold (2010), writes that it is obvious that his office is full of objects. However, when stepping outside, he falters in assigning a tree as an 'object' and asks why this is. Through addressing this simple question, Ingold (2010) demonstrates the limitations in thinking of the

material world as made but extends to make us think about the wider environment in which *things* are situated (Woodward, 2020). Does this make a tree a thing, if it is not an object? Ingold later defines a thing as 'gathering of materials in movements…and to witness a thing is to join with the processes of its ongoing formation' (2012, p. 436). In this regard, things then are always becoming within changing contexts; this implies that it is what people do with things – practices – become part of the thing themselves. This would perhaps be a more suitable term for Lego, within the bounds of this research. The participant's interaction with things (Lego) creates more things, it captures Lego as changing and emergent within the research process. It also alerts me, as the researcher to think more broadly about the entire process of using things and the effects/affects they may have on the research process.

On the other hand, if a Lego model, is an object, then what about the verbal description that participants provide along with it – is that a thing? Thinking of it in this way, as Woodward (2017) suggests challenges assumptions of things as bounded entities, something tangible and solid. By examining the descriptions as material, provides an entirely different way of looking at verbal data, interrogating it in terms of how it is connected to or with other things (the interviewer, the interview room, table, the Lego pieces). The substance of words (sounds waves, air etc) as well as the effects it has on those in contact with it. This challenges the separation of Lego from the interview, or indeed as a separate method entirely, it provides a way of embedding it firmly within it. Such thinking can be related to organisational scholars Orlikowski and Scott (2008) and their concept of 'sociomateriality'. Regarding the use of objects/things/materials as forms of 'technology' within the research process provides ample room for further thinking (Davies & Riach, 2018). Presenting such methods through an ontology of separateness (Orlikowski, 2010), (which is *not* the position this research takes) cannot account for the multiple and dynamic ways in which the social and material are constitutively entangled, does little to account for the role or potential they have as research tools.

4.4.2 Explicitation (phenomenological) Interview Framework

Finding a suitable framework that explicitly integrates the qualitative in-depth interview with phenomenological philosophy was something of a challenge. Høffding & Martiny (2016), propose a framework simply entitled 'the phenomenological interview'. Their framework proposed that the interview is informed by certain phenomenological commitments and in turn informs a phenomenological investigation. To do this, they drew on elements of the

'explicitation interview' (Maurel, 2010). The explicitation interview, is a form of guided retrospective introspection (Bedin et al., 2019; Vermersch, 1995). Explicitation interviews, take inspiration from so-called 'Ericksonian language' and also the non-directive interview techniques of psychologist Rogers (1985), which stipulate the use of a specific kind of open question in contrast to closed questions (Petitmengin, 2006, pp. 250–255). Such language that is empty of content, namely language which refers to the subject's experiences without introducing and naming the content of the experience beforehand (Petitmengin, 2006). Open questions do not already presuppose more knowledge than they aim to gather, whereas closed questions introduce biases in their formulation and already suggest possible answers to the questions, as well as concepts useful for verbalising them.

Open questions, in this context, should be directive and guide the interviewee to focus on the concrete and singular experiences that the interviewer is interested in understanding (Petitmengin 2006, p. 252). This is done by reformulating the last piece of description into a question and inviting the interviewee to check and further develop the accuracy of the reformulation. Thus, the aim of this technique is to arrive at the degree of 'granularity' (Vermersch, 2009, p. 51), where the targeted pre-reflective 'layer' of lived experience becomes discursively apparent. This approach links classical principles of phenomenological reduction, but also does not subscribe to commitments that IPA does not, like the epoché for example.

There are limitations to this framework, Petitmengin (2006) argues that there are objective indicators that can be used in order to identify whether the interviewee actually is in a preferred speech position. These indicators can, for example, be the vocabulary used to give the descriptions. The direction of the eyes when giving the descriptions, the flow of the descriptions and the bodily gestures. Employing the framework in its entirety requires become familiar with its extensive guide (Vermersch, 1995). The interview framework provides specific practical devices to ensure that the interviewee directly verbalizes his pre-reflective experience, a key requirement in meeting phenomenological commitments. I felt that by employing such techniques, would mean that I would at least to some extent be aware of and meet some key phenomenological principles. What was not clear, however, was how to incorporate the use of Lego into this framework, which led me to at my last piece of my methods puzzle: the relational mapping approach.

4.4.3 Relational Mapping and Interview Arc Approach

Whilst IPA guidance often suggests using a semi-structured interview schedule (Smith et al., 2012), I have established that this is something I feel isn't suitable in meeting the phenomenological commitment of this research. Instead, I decided on using an "interview arc" format, consisting of a "build-talk-build-talk" to provide a structure to the interview encounter (Boden et al., 2019). The "interview arc" approach extends this idea by structuring the interview around touchpoints, which aid the participant through a journey or in the case for my study; a transition, in the same way a novel may follow a narrative arc. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 48) argue that a phenomenological interview should involve "wandering together with" the participant, and this approach draws on that ethos. The schedule is far less prescriptive than a typical semi-structured interview. Most of the interviewer's contribution involves spontaneous enquiries into the participant's emerging image and their verbal responses when engaging with the Lego. This, I thought fit well with the use of the elicitation framework and it's questioning guide.

The relational mapping interview is structured around four touchpoints. Instead of the standard ten or so interview questions, there are fewer main questions but many more prompts and probes. The researcher is even less concerned with sticking to his or her agenda, beyond using the arc as a support to navigate around the four touchpoints. This provides space for participants to flesh out their comments. To do so, the interviewer can enquire into position, colour, content, or form by making simple observation statements, which are typically enough to elicit more detail from the participants. For example, "you're wearing a crown"; "you chose a shark." This draws on phenomenological principles including curiosity - or maintaining a state of wonder – (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2004), and dwelling (being patient with what is unfolding) (Dahlberg, 2006).

With a chosen exploratory tool (Lego), a phenomenological interview guide (elicitation) and an interview structure (interview arc and relational mapping); I formed the theoretical foundations of the Lego interview method detailed in Figure 5.

4.5 Conducting Fieldwork

The following section covers the nuts and bolts of the fieldwork phase of my research (conducted from August 2018 – March 2019). Ethical approval for all phases of research was granted by the Swansea University, School of Management Ethics Committee. My fieldwork

began with piloting the Lego interview method (as described in Figure 5). Following a successful pilot (discussed in Sections 4.5.1 – 4.5.2) the main study was conducted. Explanation of the main study is organised as follows:

Sub-sections 4.5.3 – 4.5.5 cover the data collection phase of research:

- 4.5.4 Choosing Participants
  - 4.5.4.1 Overview of Study Participants
- 4.5.5 Collecting Data

Sub-sections 4.5.6 – 4.5.7 detail the preparation and analysis of the data collected:

- 4.5.6 Data Preparation
- 4.5.7 Data Analysis

Following this in Section 4.6, ethical considerations are discussed.

4.5.1 The Pilot

The research method piloting process took place June - August 2018. As this was a relatively novel method of collecting data, there was little practical guidance extant in the literature to inform my approach. Therefore, the aim of the pilot study was to test the protocols developed (Figure 5) and Lego's potential to encourage deeper reflections during an interview. A secondary objective was to establish the viability of the research topic and participant recruitment criteria. In this section, I summarise how the pilot informed my thinking for the main study.

Since this study is concerned with exploring the transition from non-employer to employer, participants needed to have experienced the hiring of their initial employee(s) and be able to recall their experiences in detail. The transition will be explored in depth and it was felt that more recent experiences of the phenomena would enable participants to reflect more readily. Participants had to live and work in South Wales, but selection was not based on industry, age or gender.

I obtained approval from the Swansea University, School of Management Ethics Committee (Appendix B.1) to conduct the pilot study. I prepared an information sheet (Appendix B.2) and a consent form (Appendix B.3) to encourage potential participants to make an informed decision in choosing to take part in the study. The ethical issues surrounding the of visual data (Clarke & Holt, 2019; Clark & Sousa, 2018) were considered in depth.

Specifically, the anonymisation of images was paramount in preserving participant's confidentiality. Images of Lego models were photographed at the beginning of the interview, with no identifying features of the participant or their business present. The participant was asked to build a Lego version of themselves and choose a pseudonym. They were informed that their pseudonym is how they would be referenced in any published study findings in this thesis. Audio was transcribed verbatim by me and all identifying features (e.g., names, locations, business names) of the participant were removed at this stage.

Pilot study participants who met the initial selection criteria were recruited using my own personal networks. Three potential participants, who met the selection criteria, were contacted with detailed information about the study, including a participant information sheet (Appendix B.2). Three participants responded to the initial email. After subsequent email correspondence to discuss the study, one female participant was recruited to take part. The participant was fully informed that they could withdraw at any time without reason, and all data collected from would be confidential.

The need to build rapport and create a safe space to facilitate disclosure from participants was a consideration that was pertinent in the initial method design. The use of Lego as part of the interview process could cause some participant's discomfort due to unfamiliarity or its association as a toy. As its name indicates, the intention behind Lego Serious Play makes use of the notion that as adults, we can benefit from engaging in play. When using the term play, associations are immediately made to children. There is a growing body of evidence highlighting the potential benefits of playful behaviours (Kane, 2005). Such behaviours are said to emphasise freedom, remove responsibilities, reduce self-consciousness and limit feelings of shame. An environment where these behaviours can be embraced requires the creation of a non-judgmental space. The pilot provided a setting in which to trial how a participant would respond to using Lego and inform thinking on 'scene setting' for the approach taken in the main study.

4.5.2 Pilot: Key learning points

The pilot was successful in that no changes were made to the method used in the main study. The timing and length (approx. 3 hours) of the interview worked well overall. The familiarisation process took longer than expected, and also continued throughout the interview as the participant grew more confident with the Lego. The participant commented that this was a useful exercise and made them feel more comfortable. It was evident that flexibility in the

approach is needed as the length of familiarisation and the time taken to reflect on their models was dependent on the participant's confidence in using Lego.

A useful part of the pilot project was the learning I gained from the practical aspects of taking photographs. An unexpected development was that the participant took a far more active role in this part of the process than I initially thought. In taking the photographs, she took the camera from me a number of times and even began labelling models herself too. I ensured that participants in the main study were given the option to take photos (using my camera) if they wished. I found no issues conducting the interview and chose deliberately not to transcribe or analyse data for a few days. I reflected in my journal that this may have been due to the demands I put upon myself in the interview in maintaining a relational distance between myself and the participant.

One of the obvious strengths was the participant's clear enjoyment in using Lego throughout the interview. Despite initially declaring 'I'm not very creative', she was surprised at her own development and the depth of her reflections. Surveying her models, the participant exclaimed 'I can't believe I came up with some of these!' What was pertinent, was that as the interview progressed the models became increasingly sophisticated (see Figure 6 below). This suggests two points of learning that were used in the main study. Firstly, the process of familiarisation with Lego appeared to take place throughout the entirety of the interview rather than in the time I had set out at the beginning. Secondly, capturing and observing the construction process fully engaged both myself and the participant in the hermeneutic process (See Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2), in keeping with IPA.

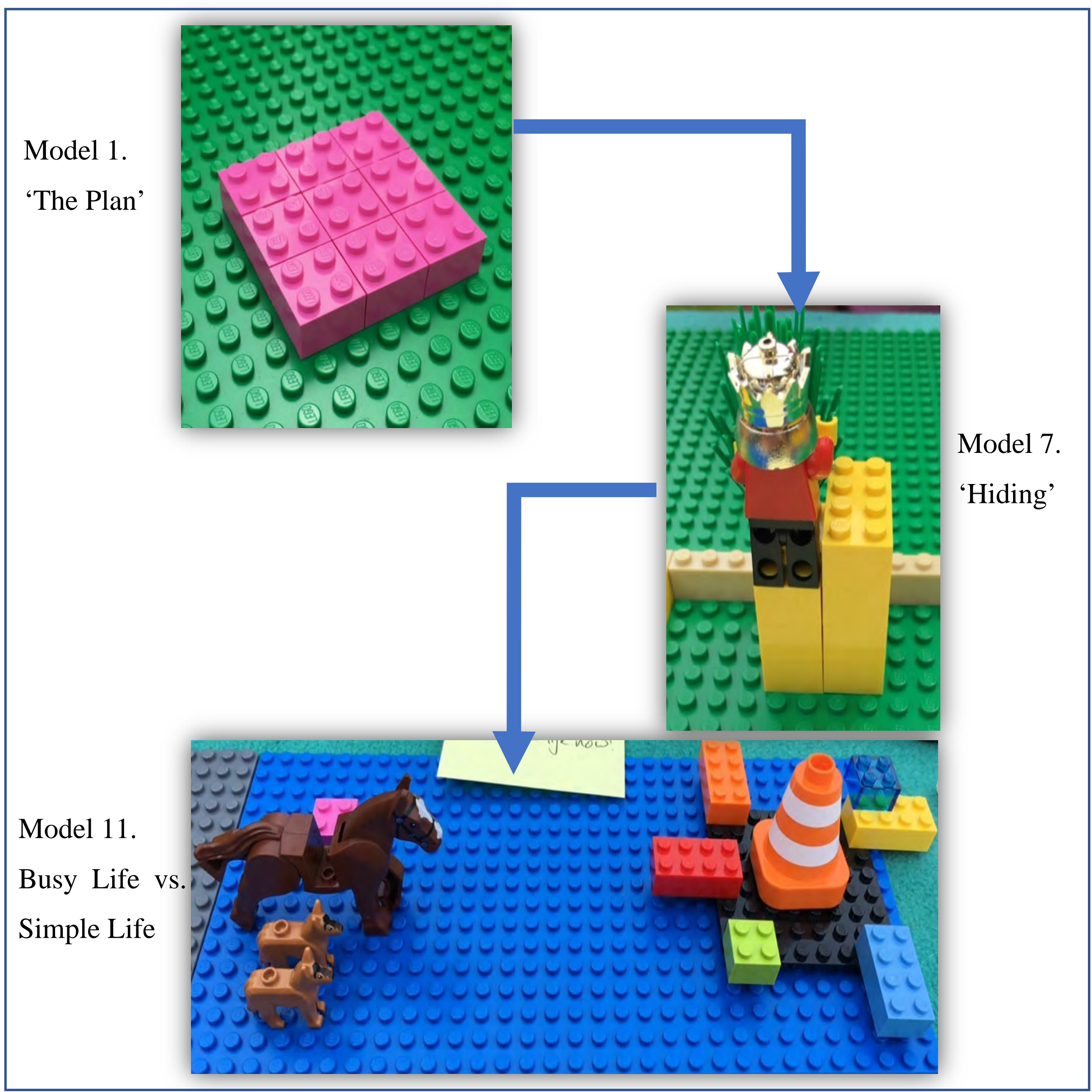


Figure 6. Participant's models during different stages of the interview.

In summary, I found Lego to be a very effective tool and the interview process worked well in that, it wasn't overly structured. It enabled the participant to reflect on their experiences in more depth, constructing increasingly complex objects and revealing unknown meanings. This was also guided, in part, by my use of open questions and probes as advised in phenomenological interviews. I believe that the use of Lego also introduced an element of fun into the research process, resulting in high levels of engagement from the participant. I found that the use of a creative method complemented IPA and enhanced it as an approach. The data was detailed and rich, I was able to interpret data systematically and rigorously achieving the

experiential level IPA requires. Consequently, I felt fully justified in choosing this approach for my main study.

4.5.3 The Main Study

After evaluation an initial analysis of the pilot data, I applied and gained ethical approval for the main phase of data collection. As the pilot was deemed successful, the main study informed and mirrored the process taken. This section details participant recruitment and how the data collection process, using Lego, worked in practice. In addition, I provide reflections from the field, including dealing with the unexpected. Ethical considerations are discussed in the subsequently in Section 4.6.

4.5.4 Choosing Participants

IPA is deeply committed to idiographic approaches and this inevitably has consequences for sample size. There is an ever clearer and more robust articulation for smaller sample sizes, not just in IPA, but in qualitative approaches more broadly (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Eatough & Smith, 2017). Pragmatically, a number of factors determine sample size. Having completed an IPA study for my MSc thesis, I was aware of the time needed to commit to the case-by-case approach (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The full IPA analytic process is detailed in Section 4.5.6 – 4.5.7.

As my literature review reveals, much work has already taken place using a gendered theoretical lens. In keeping with the spirit of an explorative IPA study, no theoretical assumptions were made for the purposes of this study, including that of gender. Therefore, this study explores both male and female experiences of becoming an entrepreneur-employer.

With these factors in mind, ten participants from across South Wales were selected to take part in the main study, (four males and six females). As homogeneity was deemed to be present at the phenomenological level these were a diverse set recruited in terms of age and industry. Homogeneity was in a common experience of hiring their first employee into their venture that all the participants shared. This phenomenologically homogenous sample was sought, rather than one determined by characteristics. Any divergences between each case would make for further insights to be explored and illuminated (see also Van Burg et al., 2020).

Taking this approach fulfils the idiographic commitment of IPA. One clear advantage of a single person case study is that they 'offer a personally unique perspective on their

relationship to, or involvement in, various phenomena of interest' (Smith, 2012, p. 29). Moving beyond single person cases, IPA studies more commonly use small and situated samples so that each individual can be attended to idiographically before attempting a comparative analysis of participant material (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Participants were recruited using purposive and snowballing sampling strategies. Those who met the initial selection criteria were sent an email containing details about the study contained within an information sheet (Appendix C.2). Fortunately, I did not face participant recruitment issues and the inclusion of Lego was a point of intrigue for many participants. For example, one participant (Bruce) fed-back that they enjoyed the interview and recommended it to another entrepreneur in their network as a 'useful process'. Two participants were recruited in this way. As in the Pilot Study, participants who met the selection criteria were contacted about the study, detailed information was provided in a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C.2). After subsequent email correspondence to discuss the study and answer any questions a time and location was agreed for the interview to take place. Participants were fully informed that they could withdraw at any time without reason, and all data collected from would be confidential and anonymised in the transcription.

4.5.4.1 The Research Participants

Below I introduce the ten participants (Table 5) and their Lego selves (Figure 7). Further detail, including the participant's own descriptions of their Lego self is available later in this chapter in Section 4.9: Meet the Participants.

Table 5. Participant Characteristics

Participant demographics and relevant business information

Pseudonym	Industry	No. Employees	Age of Venture (years)	Employer (years)	Age	Gender (F/M)	Pro-nouns used in Thesis
Alex	Leisure	30	6	0.5	35-40	F	She/her
Bobbie	Technology	2	2	1	35-40	F	She/her
Maximus	Manufacturing	3	4	0	25-30	M	He/him
Bruce	Service	6	2	1	35-40	F	She/her
Warrior	Health	4	3	1	30-35	F	She/her
Phoenix	Service	10	6	0	25-30	M	He/him
Melissa	Service	1	5	2	30-35	F	She/her
Bish	Agriculture	3	4	0	25-30	M	He/him
Joe	Construction	4	7	3	40-45	M	He/him
Tree Lady	Food and drink	4	5	3	30-35	F	She/her

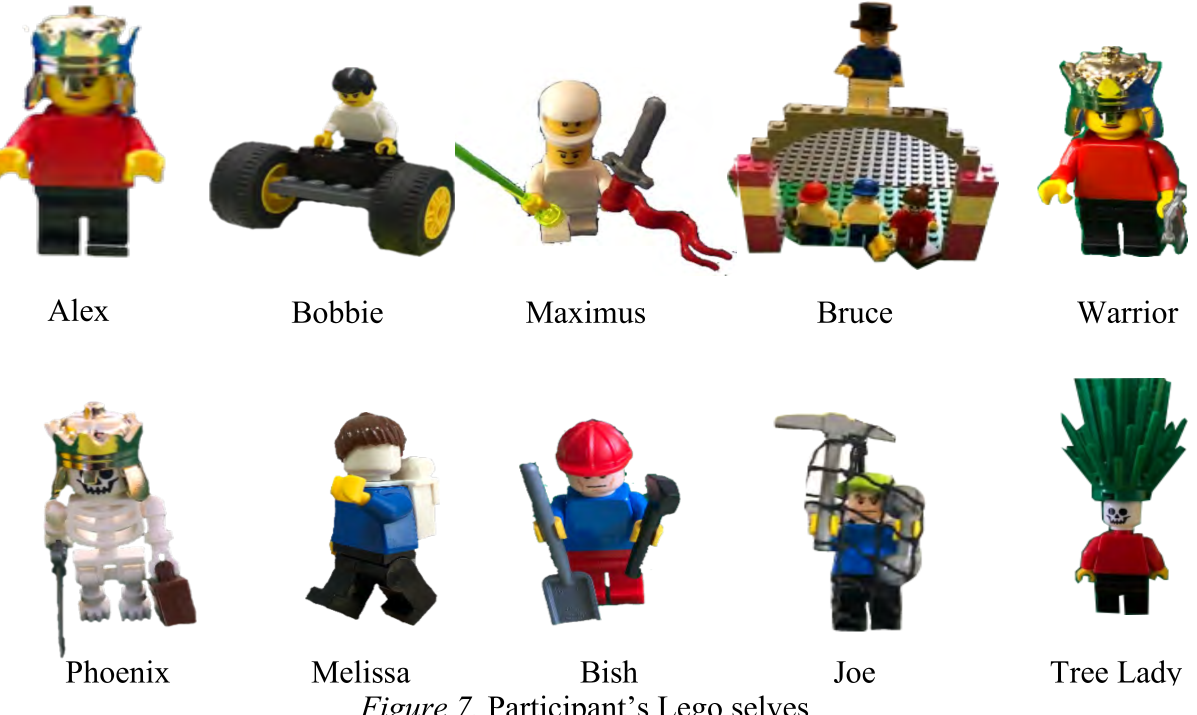


Figure 7. Participant's Lego selves

4.5.5 Collecting Data

All of the interviews took place at the participant's businesses (across South Wales) or in a place of their choosing. Most of the time, we were tucked away in make-shift offices, or back rooms of industrial units. Often, this meant that interviews were around desks hastily cleared away, or in two cases the interviews were conducted on the floor as space was limited.

I would ask the participants to help me set-up and encourage them to explore the Lego during this process. I found this was a useful time to settle the participant and begin to engage them. I would use this time to just give an overview of what to expect and reiterate this in the next phase of the method 'Building Rapport'. In addition, after we had finished the interview, rather than just bring everything to an abrupt halt. I'd use the clear-up as a form of informal debrief time.

Figure 8. Organisation and set-up process of the Lego

Participants would help to clear away the pieces and use this time to 'decompress'. The interview and the depth of reflection participants would provide, was often very personal in nature. Often at the end of the interview this decompression time helped them to resurface and comprehend the experience. Figure 9 below demonstrates a before and after of one of the interviews that took place.

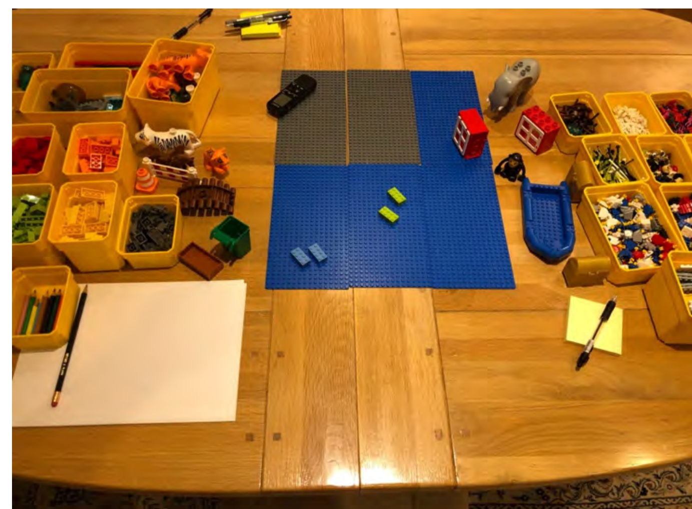


Figure 9. Before (L) and after (R) an interview, demonstrating the Lego set-up.

As part of the method, participants were asked to build a Lego model of themselves (Figures 7 and 10) and also choose their own pseudonym that they would be referred to in the research. This for me, was when I began to record the interview (using a Dictaphone). In what was to follow not only was this useful from an anonymisation perspective, but the Lego itself became an important and unexpected focal point for participants, which was continually constructed and reconstructed throughout the interview.

Figure 10. Examples of participant's Lego selves

4.5.6 Data Preparation

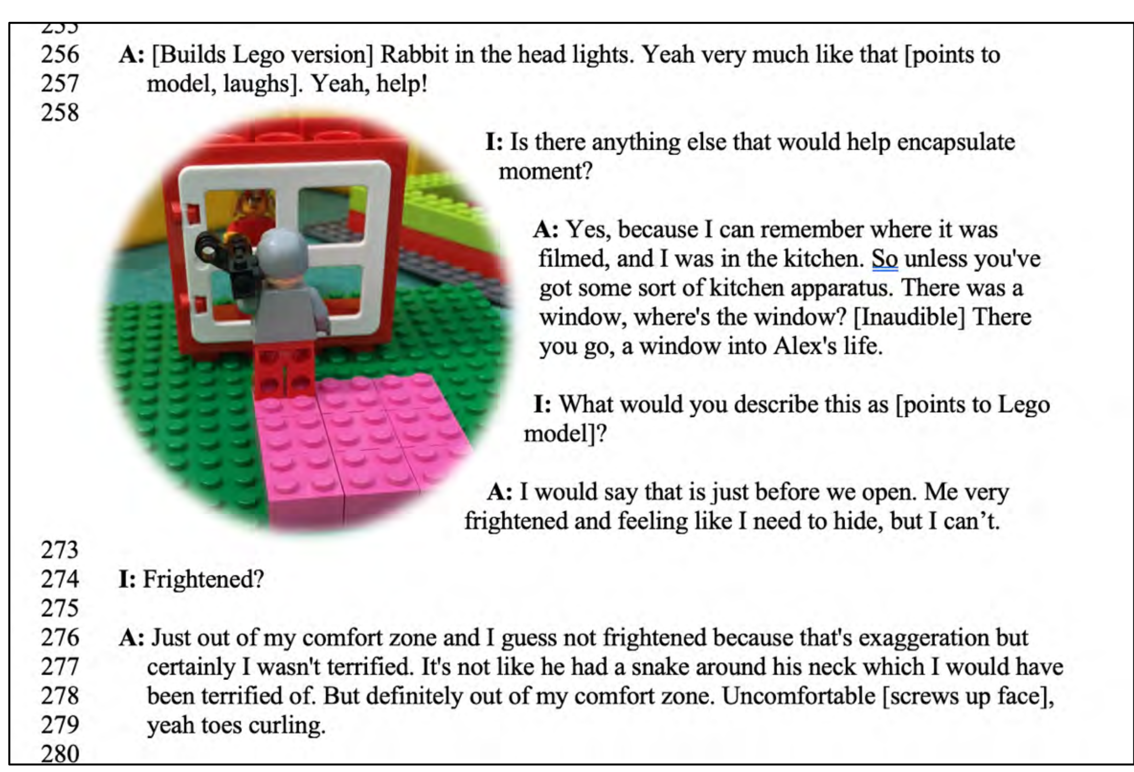
Data in the context of this research, consisted of images of Lego models (taken using an iPhone camera), the recorded raw data (done using a Dictaphone), and subsequently the transcripts of each interview. In line with current GDPR (May, 2018) regulations, the process through which data (images, recordings, transcripts) was collected, stored and anonymised was carefully mapped (Appendix C.8).

Anonymisation of the recorded data took place during the transcription phase. A university approved transcription service was used to transcribe interviews. After transcripts were returned, they were checked for accuracy against the relevant recording and to ensure full anonymisation had taken place. Transcripts were orthographically transcribed in accordance with the principles of Hepburn and Bolden (2017). These principles include:

- Transcribing what you hear people say and not what you we think they should say. This includes capturing people's errors.

- Capturing details of how people talk, not just what they say (Hepburn & Bolden, 2017, p. 11).

All identifying features were removed from the data at the point of transcription. In preparing the transcripts for analysis, all photos of Lego models were double checked for anonymity then placed into the transcripts alongside the corresponding textual description of them (Figure 11).



256 **A:** [Builds Lego version] Rabbit in the head lights. Yeah very much like that [points to
257 model, laughs]. Yeah, help!
258

I: Is there anything else that would help encapsulate moment?

A: Yes, because I can remember where it was filmed, and I was in the kitchen. So unless you've got some sort of kitchen apparatus. There was a window, where's the window? [Inaudible] There you go, a window into Alex's life.

I: What would you describe this as [points to Lego model]?

A: I would say that is just before we open. Me very frightened and feeling like I need to hide, but I can't.

273
274 **I:** Frightened?
275
276 **A:** Just out of my comfort zone and I guess not frightened because that's exaggeration but
277 certainly I wasn't terrified. It's not like he had a snake around his neck which I would have
278 been terrified of. But definitely out of my comfort zone. Uncomfortable [screws up face],
279 yeah toes curling.
280

Figure 11. Transcript with image of a Lego model placed alongside relevant description.

4.5.7 Data Analysis

IPA is not a prescriptive methodology and allows for individuality and flexibility of approach (Eatough & Smith, 2017). IPA is systematic in its analytic procedures, but whilst 'there is a basic process to IPA (moving from the descriptive to the interpretative), the method does not claim objectivity through the use of a detailed, formulaic procedure' (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 97). Coding and thematising in IPA are based on a set of underlying principles (see Smith et al., 2009) that involve:

(1) movement from the descriptive to the more explicitly interpretative (coding);
(2) moving from the specific to the thematic; and,

(3) from the case to the wider sample (identifying convergent and divergent themes) (Larkin et al., 2006).

To meet these principles Smith et al. (2012) recommends following the six analytic steps outlined in Table 6 below.

Table 6. IPA's Six-stage Analytic Process

IPA's six-stage analytic process (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith et al., 2012)

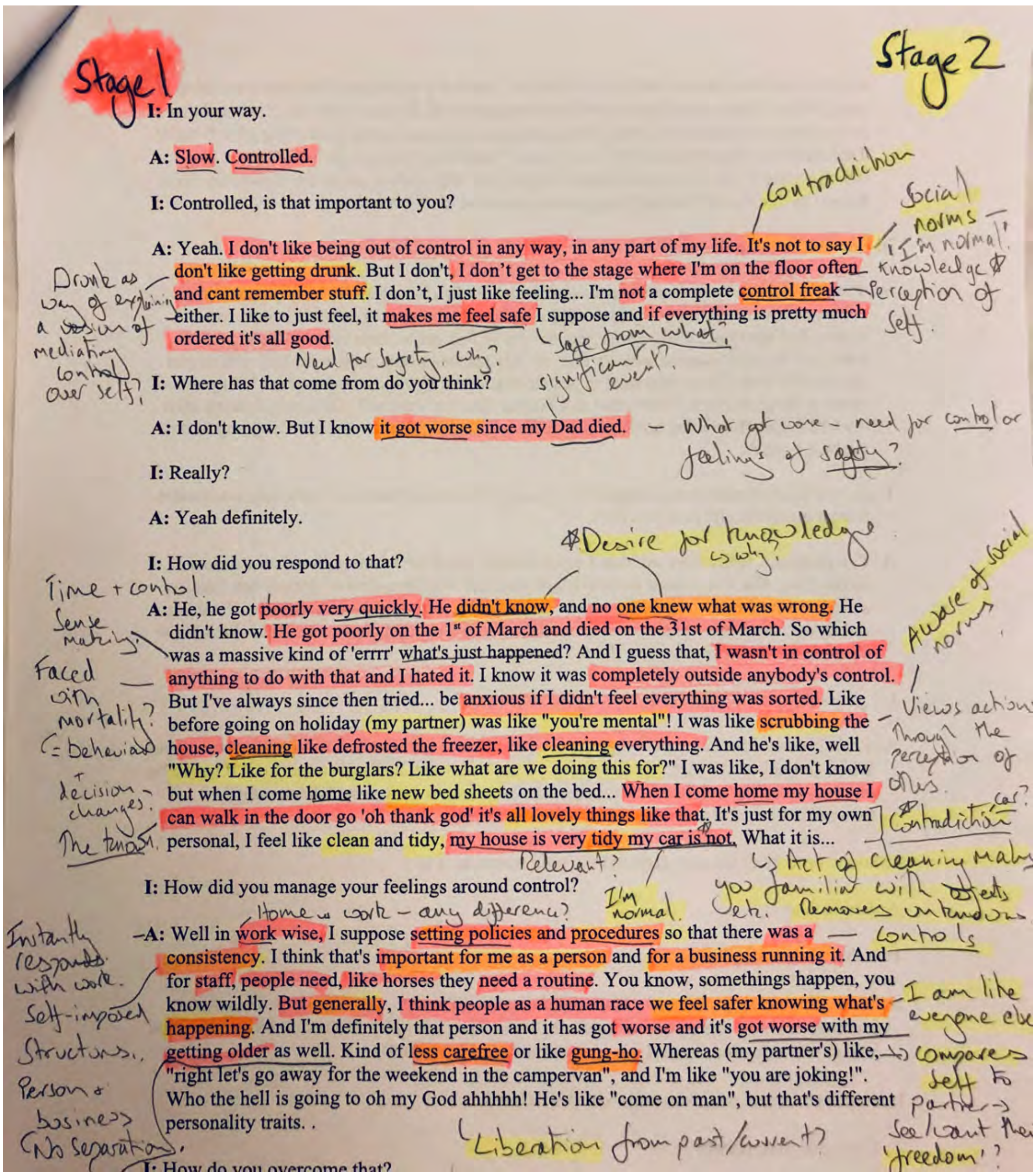
Stage	Process
1	Read and re-read transcripts to get to know the data
2	Make initial notes to systematically capture observations
3	Develop initial themes for each case
4	Search for connections across initial themes within the case
5	Move to next case
6	Identify connections and patterns across all cases (once above steps completed for each case)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a 'subjective, iterative process that involves flexible thinking, reduction, expansion and creativity' (Smith et al., 2012, p. 13). IPA is meticulously idiographic, requiring the in-depth examination of each case in its own terms before moving to the next case (Smith, 2011). This was an immersive experience, as each reading required increasing levels of sensitivity to what is being presented. At this stage IPA (Smith et al., 2012) recommends the suspension of a researcher's judgement known as 'bracketing' (see Husserl, 1999, p. 63 – 65) to take place.

In Chapter 3, (theoretical perspectives) I address the concept of bracketing (the epoché), and my rejection of it, in more detail. In summary, I do not believe that bracketing is achievable, nor do I think I was able to achieve it throughout the analytic process. This is where scholars (van Manen, 2017a, 2018; Zahavi, 2019a, 2019b, 2020) have challenged IPA and its relationship with interpretative phenomenological philosophy. Thus, I have applied the guidance of LeVasseur (2003) and more recently, Gregory (2019). For example, Gregory (2019) highlights the concept of bracketing as even less achievable for the lone researcher due to the level of involvement in all stages of the research process; this is discussed further in

Section 4.7.1. Acknowledging this cautionary guidance during this initial stage of the analysis, I was careful to ensure I used and kept a reflexive journal to note down initial thoughts and potential biases that may influence my analytic process.

The second stage involved returning to the transcript, using the right-hand margin to identify any emergent patterns (i.e., themes) within the experiential data. However, within this study, only the participant's linguistic descriptions of their models were analysed (see example of what this looked like for my own research in Figure 12 below).



Stage 1

Stage 2

I: In your way.

A: Slow. Controlled.

I: Controlled, is that important to you?

A: Yeah. I don't like being out of control in any way, in any part of my life. It's not to say I don't like getting drunk. But I don't, I don't get to the stage where I'm on the floor often and cant remember stuff. I don't, I just like feeling... I'm not a complete control freak either. I like to just feel, it makes me feel safe I suppose and if everything is pretty much ordered it's all good.

I: Where has that come from do you think?

A: I don't know. But I know it got worse since my Dad died.

I: Really?

A: Yeah definitely.

I: How did you respond to that?

A: He, he got poorly very quickly. He didn't know, and no one knew what was wrong. He didn't know. He got poorly on the 1st of March and died on the 31st of March. So which was a massive kind of 'errrr' what's just happened? And I guess that, I wasn't in control of anything to do with that and I hated it. I know it was completely outside anybody's control. But I've always since then tried... be anxious if I didn't feel everything was sorted. Like before going on holiday (my partner) was like "you're mental"! I was like scrubbing the house, cleaning like defrosted the freezer, like cleaning everything. And he's like, well "Why? Like for the burglars? Like what are we doing this for?" I was like, I don't know but when I come home like new bed sheets on the bed... When I come home my house I can walk in the door go 'oh thank god' it's all lovely things like that. It's just for my own personal, I feel like clean and tidy, my house is very tidy my car is not. What it is...

I: How did you manage your feelings around control?

A: Well in work wise, I suppose setting policies and procedures so that there was a consistency. I think that's important for me as a person and for a business running it. And for staff, people need, like horses they need a routine. You know, somethings happen, you know wildly. But generally, I think people as a human race we feel safer knowing what's happening. And I'm definitely that person and it has got worse and it's got worse with my getting older as well. Kind of less carefree or like gung-ho. Whereas (my partner's) like, "right let's go away for the weekend in the campervan", and I'm like "you are joking!". Who the hell is going to oh my God ahhhhh! He's like "come on man", but that's different personality traits. .

I: How do you overcome that?

Figure 12. Example of raw analysis: IPA stages one and two (Alex).

The third stage involved further reading of the data, the clustering of initial themes and grouping them appropriately. Each cluster was assigned a label; Smith (2004) suggests that researchers 'imagine a magnet with some of the themes pulling others in and helping to make sense of them.' (p. 71). Finally, a table was produced with each higher order theme and its related sub-themes. Table 7 is the outcome of the iterative process outlined. The integrity of the participant's account has been preserved as far as possible (Eatough & Smith, 2017) during this systematic process. Successful IPA allows for other researchers to track the analytic journey from the raw data through to the end interpretations.

Table 7. Example of Raw Analysis IPA Stages Three and Four

Example of Raw Analysis IPA Stages Three and Four: Table of Emerging and Clustered Themes Identified from Analysis of Alex's Experiential Data.

Initial Themes from Raw Analysis	Clustered Themes
• Dislike of unfamiliarity • Rejection of entrepreneur (that's not me!) • Fear of losing control • Dislike of 'othered' structures • Ordering the self in work and at home (procedures, cleanliness) • Reaffirmation of 'normality' • Search and appreciation for spatial temporality • Finding safety in order • Perceiving self through others.	**Mechanisms for Control** • Fear of losing control • Self-created structures vs. those imposed by others • Need to be in the known • Finding safety in orders/ construction of safe spaces **Desire to Liberate Self** • Need to express self/ideas • Contradiction of actual and perceived selves • Acceptance of self through humanising actions • Rejection on entrepreneurial discourse

After each of the four analytic stages was completed for a transcript, I would move to the next case (stage 5). I would often leave some time before doing so to try and ensure I could analyse the case in its own right. Although the extent to which I managed this is difficult to demonstrate, and therefore perhaps some influence should be accounted for. After all cases had

their own table (as above), the next stage was to sort the clustered themes and to identify what was convergent and divergent across every case (stage 6). Dominant convergences form superordinate themes. These act as a thematic umbrella, under which the relevant subthemes discovered in the data are used to express how participants' account fits under it. The results of this are displayed in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Final Superordinate Themes and Corresponding Subthemes

Overview of final superordinate themes and corresponding subthemes generated from conducting the six stages of IPA analysis across all ten cases

Superordinate theme	Subthemes
Great Expectations	Rejection of entrepreneurial expectations Gendered expectations Regional expectations
Conflicts of interest: me, myself and my employee(s)	Mother hen: finding meaning in hiring others What if they don't turn up? The wake-up call
Never-ending stories	The impossible staircase to 'success' The winner takes it all But it gives a purpose

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Conducting ethical qualitative research is not passive, nor is it the simple act of following a set of guidelines (Webster et al., 2013). Good ethical practice requires consciously thinking through the impact of your actions and/or research on participants, and making continual adjustments where necessary (Bell et al., 2018; Silverman, 2017). For this study, I obtained approval from the Swansea University, School of Management ethics committee to conduct the pilot and main studies (Appendix B.1 & C.1). Table 9 below outlines the key considerations and approach taken to ensure ethical practice throughout my research.

Table 9. Ethical Considerations

Summary of Ethical Considerations

Area Considered	Approach Taken	Appendix Locations
Informed Consent	• Participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) explaining the aim of the study and what will be involved if they agree to take part. • To ensure mine, and participant's safety was also considered a lone fieldworker risk assessment was also completed. • Prior to interview a study consent form was given to participants to read and sign. • Verbal consent was continually sought throughout the interview, particularly prior to any sensitive topics being discussed (Houghton et al., 2010). • After data collection had taken place, participants were fully debriefed and provided with a debrief form.	C.2 C.7 C.3 C.6
Confidentiality	• All participant's information was kept strictly confidential and stored in accordance with the 2018 General Data Protection Regulations. • A data flow table was created to account for how all personal and potentially sensitive data will be stored and shared throughout the study. • Before each interview, participants were asked to fill in a participant information form which gathered basic, contextual information about themselves and their business.	C.8 C.4
Data Anonymisation	• For this study, data includes photos taken of participant's Lego constructions and drawings, and audio recordings of interviews. • Prior to the interview, participants were asked to choose a pseudonym for both themselves and their business. These were used during the transcription process, and in any subsequent information about the study. • Anonymisation of verbal data took place during the transcription of all audio material. Any identifiable features or language were removed or replaced. • All photographs taken of LEGO® or drawings were shown to participants at the end of the interview to ensure that there were no features in the photographs that could identify them or their business.	
Equality and Diversity	• All participants were respected equally and treated similarly. • There was no discrimination on the basis of education, intellectual attainment, physical and mental ability, race ethnicity and cultural background, religion and religious beliefs, political beliefs, age, gender or sexual orientation.	

4.7 Research Quality

The criteria for judging qualitative work remains an open and evolving debate within both entrepreneurship (Cornelissen, 2017; Van Burg et al., 2020), and the management fields (Harley & Cornelissen, 2018). The concept of 'rigor' and what constitutes it, remains central to these debates (Hammersley, 2008; Rheinhardt et al., 2018). There are some scholars (Creswell & Poth, 2016) who suggest such criteria is tied to the choice of approach. Others suggest that taking a more universal approach to identify 'universal markers' of quality is more applicable (and helpful) (Tracy, 2010, p. 839; Reinhardt et al., 2018). There are some frameworks that acknowledge both agendas. For example, Tracy's (2010) 'big tent' approach carefully differentiates between common end goals of good research (universal identifiers of quality) whilst acknowledging the different methodological means (practices, skills, and crafts) through which these goals are reached. Guba and Lincoln (2005) are often cited as a key influence in the thinking behind how to assess the quality of qualitative work.

I have used three 'guides' in helping to ensure I maintain a level of quality throughout my research process. Table 10 outlines each; for more universal considerations I've used the work of Tracy (2010) and Rheinhardt et al., (2018), and to ensure my work meets its phenomenological commitments I used Creswell and Poth's (2016) helpful guide. There is also a body of literature that discusses how to evaluate quality in IPA research (Yardley, 2000, 2017; Smith et al., 2012; Smith, 2011, 2019). Nonetheless much of what constitutes a 'rigorous' IPA study are reflected in more universal discussions of quality with very similar, if not identical criteria being identified (Kacprzak, 2017).

While I used the guidance in Table 10 to shape and inform the quality of my study holistically, a significant area of focus was ensuring that I collected data that provided the level of depth needed for a study of this kind. The quality of the data collected relies on the quality and rigour of the tools used (a factor IPA scholars are only recently addressing – see Boden et al., 2019). The interview, it's benefits and drawbacks, is an area of particular interest and the impact of it as a data collection tool is something I have also considered (see Crawford et al., 2020). Therefore, great attention was paid to what and how the methods used would impact upon the participants and the possibility for the Lego interviews to generate good data.

Table 10. Research Quality Framework

Summary of approaches used to guide research quality in this study

Tracy (2010) 'Big Tent Approach' to assessing research	**Rheinhardt et al., (2018) Criterial for achieving rigour**	**Creswell and Poth (2016, p. 273) Assessing phenomenological research**
Worthy Topic *Research relevant, timely, significant and interesting.*	Credibility *Presentation of study (and data) remains true to its stated aims.*	Transferability *Clear articulation of phenomena being investigated.*
Rich Rigor *Applies sufficient and appropriate methods and theoretical constructs.*	Transparency *Providing detailed descriptions of the steps they took, from data collection procedures to final analysis.*	Transparency *Study demonstrates commitment to phenomenological philosophical tenets.*
Sincerity *Research transparent about methods and challenges.*	Volume and depth of data *Justifies quantity, frequency and diversity of data.*	Volume and depth of data *Uses procedures of data analysis grounded in phenomenology.*
Credibility *Makes use of thick descriptions and detail*	Reflexivity *Accounts for complexity, and the central role of the researcher in this.*	Credibility *Communicates overall essence of experience of the participants.*
Resonance *The research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences.*	Transferability *Understands how findings and insights gleaned from one study might be applicable to other contexts.*	Reflexivity *Embeds reflexivity throughout the study.*
Significant Contribution *Conceptually/theoretically, practically, morally and methodologically.*		
Ethical Considerations *Demonstrates an ethical approach to research.*		
Meaningful coherence *Achieves stated aims and uses methods and procedures that fit goals.*		

4.8 Reflexivity

A constant challenge for the qualitative researcher, is to contribute to knowledge whilst acknowledging our own subjectivity and its impact upon our research (Hayward & Cassell, 2018). As Nadin and Cassell (2006, p. 208) emphasise, the benefit of reflexivity relates 'to both a greater understanding of the role and impact of the researcher, and an increased "trustworthiness" of the data, and general "integrity" (Finlay, 2002) in the research process'. My intention for the final part of this chapter is to take a more reflexive stance, and to acknowledge and demonstrate an understanding of how I have (or may have) impacted this research.

Finlay (2002) compares reflexivity to a swamp, 'a murky and confusing terrain of self-analysis and self-disclosure is rife with endless narcissistic personal emoting or interminable deconstructions of deconstructions' (p. 226). In this 'swamp' the researcher can become hopelessly adrift and the voice of the participant is lost. Hence, reflexivity can result in confusion. Finding clarity requires effort on the part of the researcher to ensure that their emphasis remains firmly on the data. Finlay (2006, p. 188), suggests that reflexivity encompasses:

> The researcher's scrutiny of his or her research experience, decisions and interpretations in ways that bring the researcher into the process and allow the reader to assess how and to what extent the researcher's interest, position and assumptions influenced inquiry. A reflexive stance informs how the researcher conducts his or her research, relates to the research participants and represents them in written reports.

Researchers are encouraged to explore 'their presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process' (Mruck & Breuer, 2003, p. 3). Thus, reflective practice aims to make visible to the reader the constructed and interpreted nature of research outcomes. A construction that 'originates in the various choices and decisions researchers undertake during the process of researching' (Mruck & Breuer, 2003, p. 3). I found carrying this out was simultaneously 'an exhilarating, problematic, some- times narcissistic task' (Fine & Weis, 1998, p. 280) but one that did not come naturally to me.

In the remaining sections, I reflect on my role as a researcher and how I sought to achieve critical distance (Hayward & Cassell, 2018); dealing with the unexpected during

fieldwork; the frustrations I found with the analytic process; and, finally thinking more generally about the impact of the doctoral process and its impact on the research.

4.8.1 The Researcher's Role: Achieving Critical Distance

The constant challenge for the qualitative researcher into organisations and management is to contribute to knowledge, while acknowledging our subjectivity and its impact upon our research (Cunliffe, 2016). Through an active and ongoing critique of our subjectivity as researchers (through reflexion and debate), we can make sense of the complexity of human systems. Indeed, we can use the subjectivity of both ourselves and our research participants to understand different perspectives as data that can help inform the research.

Critical distance, according to Hayward and Cassell (2018) assumes a separation between the researcher and the researched, and that that separation has a critical purpose. The authors apply 'critical' in two ways: first, meaning something of importance and second, as involving some kind of reflection. Similar to interpretative phenomenological scholars' rejection of bracketing and the epoché (Gregory, 2019; Zahavi, 2019b), Hayward and Cassell (2018) believe the researcher and the researched can never be completely separate. Therefore, becoming aware of, and understanding how I impact the research, is a defining part of my research process. To do this, Hayward and Cassell (2018, p. 375) helpfully suggest three areas of reflexive focus:

- Guiding philosophical framework
- Context
- Relationships with the research field

Writing the initial chapters (namely 1-4) of this thesis was a useful exercise in identifying my role as a lone researcher (Gregory, 2019). The process is in part reflexive in itself, a very personal space where you come to terms with your own philosophies and perspectives, and in my case, write through a lot of frustration (which ends up in various forgotten files or notes). The reading, writing, cutting, rewriting that happens as each chapter develops is oddly detaching, but from my own experience, it acts as a reflexive anchor. I found that through much of the writing of this thesis, I felt an increasing sense of detachment from my research, especially after the analysis stages had been completed.

When it came to think about relationships with the research field (Hayward & Cassell, 2018), I found a helpful categorisation of the dynamics between the researcher and the researched in the work of Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013, p. 365). Their guiding framework, formed of four hyphen-spaces, encourages reflection towards the ways we, as researchers, conduct our inquiries (as shown in Figure 13). They describe the hyphen-spaces as 'insiderness-outsiderness', 'sameness-difference', 'engagement-distance', and 'political activism–active neutrality' (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p 370). These spaces are accompanied by guiding questions (see Figure 13 below). I found these questions to be a good starting point to begin to explore these 'spaces'; to think about myself, my role and the influence this has on my research.

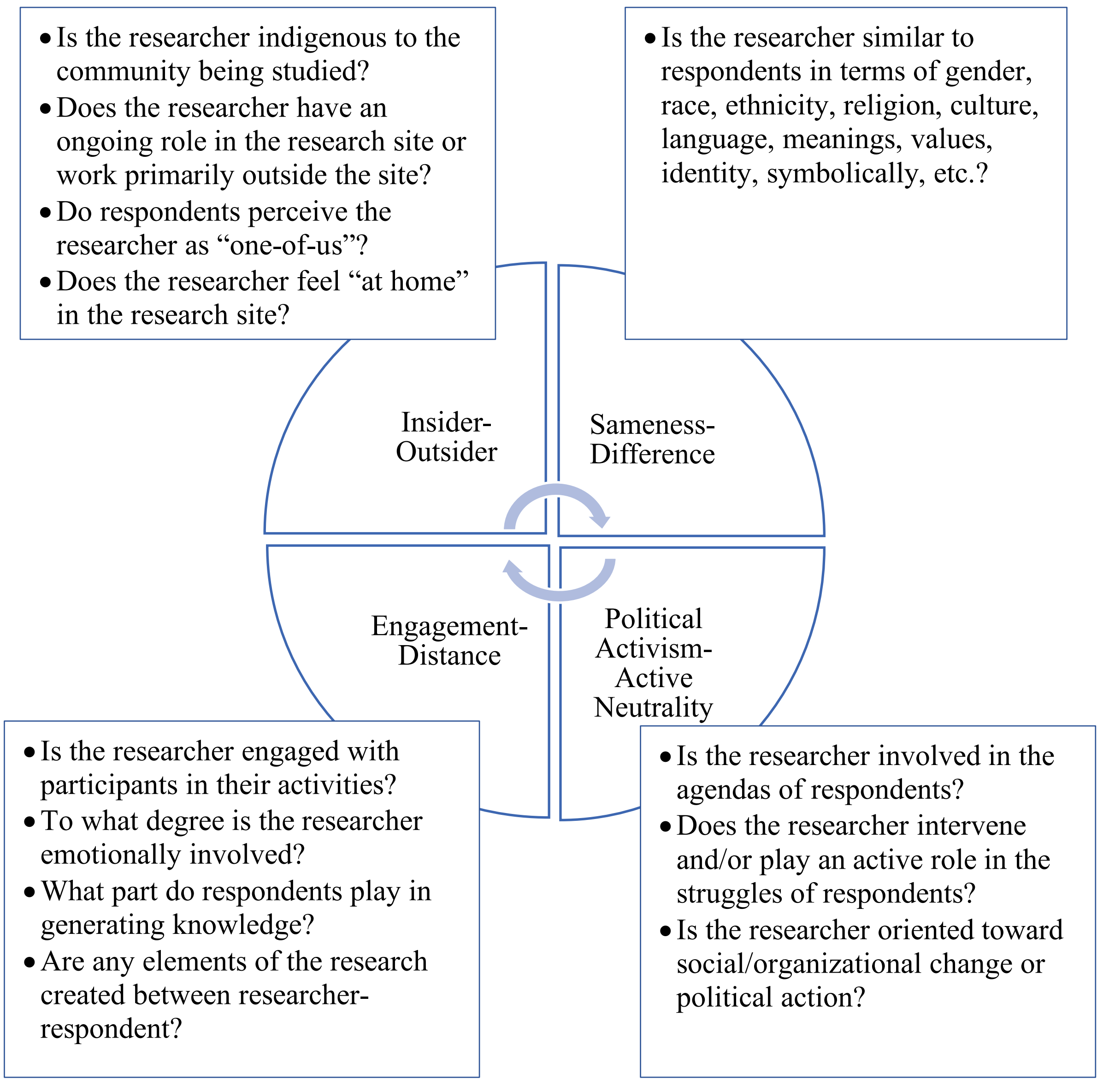


Figure 13. Reflexive framework (adapted from Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013. p. 365).

To complete this study, and this thesis, required me to spend a lot of time on my own. My role as not just a researcher, but a lone one (Dowling, 2007), is something I have also considered the impact of, particularly in the fieldwork stages of my study (see also Clark & Sousa, 2018). Much has been written about self-reflexivity and its role in challenging a researcher's authority at different stages of the research process (Bresler et al., 1996; Gregory, 2019). The 'recursive nature of fieldwork'; the way it unfolds and the texts that are generated all evidence how the researcher is situated within the findings (Bresler, 1996, p. 14). Thus, playing all the research roles at each stage of the process could make the interpretive lens less detached for the lone researcher (Eckert, 2020; Oakley, 2016).

For the lone (and in my case, novice) researcher, study design, participant recruitment, negotiating fieldwork, writing field notes, preparing coding and analysis, and, writing up my research all reflect degrees of subjectivity that are magnified by my singular perspective. I very much felt the burden of personality and positional self-reflexivity that qualitative research demands. Lego was significant in helping me visualise and work through this part of the research process (see Figure 14). While using Lego was a central to my chosen research method, it also had a meaningful role as a self-reflexive tool outside of the research space. This included building myself (at various stages through this project), rebuilding participant's models, and creating co-constructed models with my supervisory team (Sections 4.8.4 – 4.8.5).

Figure 14. My Lego Self (as lone researcher)

Combining these approaches all contributed to achieving critical distance. This is what Hayward and Cassell (2018) deem necessary; to create a space where I can begin to acknowledge the role of my own subjectivity and its impact on my research. While I think it is an on-going project, the sections that follow form part of my critique, starting below with some reflections taken from my fieldwork journals.

4.8.2 Dealing with the Unexpected: Reflections from the Field

An unexpected development was how participants, in reflecting upon their experiences, continually deconstructed and reconstructed their Lego self over the course of the interview. What I initially deemed a ‘procedural’ part of the interview, designed to provide a way of anonymising each participant became a point of significance for participants. At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to build and rename themselves as part of the ‘building rapport’ exercise (Figure 7). Many participants took time in considering an appropriate name, focused more on the aesthetic of the model. Throughout the interview, participants would return to the ‘Lego self’ they had built. Often, they would return to their initial descriptions, feeling there was a better representation of their current self (see Figure 15 below).

In addition, some, but not all, female participants chose what are perceivably masculinised names (e.g., ‘Bruce’). Others chose metaphorical names with personal meaning. A female participant, named ‘Warrior’, in answering why she chose her pseudonym stated: ‘…because that’s what I am. I think I’m a Warrior and that’s never something I thought I could be’. What appeared to be small changes or additions to creations, revealed the use of Lego as a means for self-discovery. Each of these changes were recorded within the transcriptions, placing the models created next to each other at the end for my own reference.

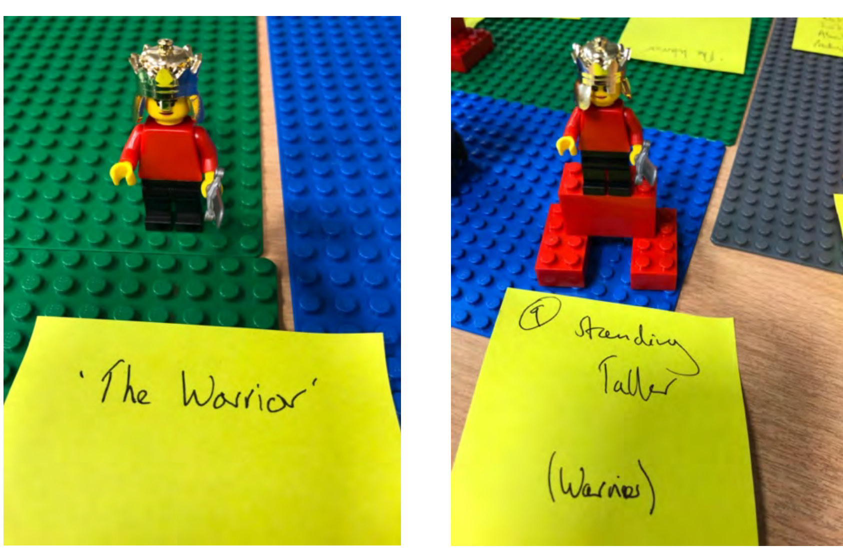


Figure 15. Warrior’s initially constructed (left) and latterly reconstructed (right) ‘standing taller’ self.

A final reflection was the level of personal detail that I encountered when entering participants worlds. Many topics, and some highly sensitive in nature, were covered. This is discussed further in Chapter 5, the findings chapter. However, from an 'in the field' perspective, this raised the importance of reflecting on the impact of being told such stories as a researcher. Negotiating the sharing of traumatic accounts, without being able to fix or repair their causes was something I admittedly struggled with.

In trying to comprehend this, Mannay (2018) offers useful insights by exploring the relational and emotional lifeworld's of qualitative interviews. In a number of exchanges with participants, bound up within the telling of their entrepreneurial journey were 'darker' experiences (such as a suicide attempt, or dealing with a sudden death). I reflected on how I responded to these in situ. For example, after discussing her Dad's sudden death, Alex laughed, and I also laughed. We both laughed. The laughter was resonant of a shared 'don't know whether to laugh or cry' response, as we were laughing but nothing was at all funny. The laughter as Mannay (2018) also reflects, normalised the situation and somehow it helped. Crying would, for me, have been a disrespectful appropriation of someone else's experience (Rose, 2010).

In the research process, reflecting on emotions can provide a more nuanced understanding of what is said, and what is silenced. Emotions offer a way to move beyond a simple question–answer analysis, which can leave out more than it allows of human subjects (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012). In interviews, focusing on what was felt enables an appreciation of the weight of participants accounts. It also opens up the shared social worlds of the interview and provides an opportunity to reflect on not just how, but why researchers interrupt and reassure.

Returning to the overwhelming feeling of helplessness felt in particular interviews, importantly this did not disappear as I moved from the situatedness of the interview space. Liveng et al., (2017, p. 166) have reported how the emotional states that the images and talk of their research activities produce in them continued beyond the fieldwork; in the form of 'dreams and feelings'. Accounts that featured trauma or even just descriptions of how tough the daily realities are, stayed with me. They stayed not simply because they were traumatic, moving or difficult to hear and bear. They stayed because I knew that this study, and their participation in it, could not provide them with the changes they were seeking. One of the tools I used to record and also manage my initial thoughts was through post-interview video journals. I not only found this a quicker and easier way to record my reactions, but also a cathartic means to begin to critically distance myself from each interview (Figure 16 below).

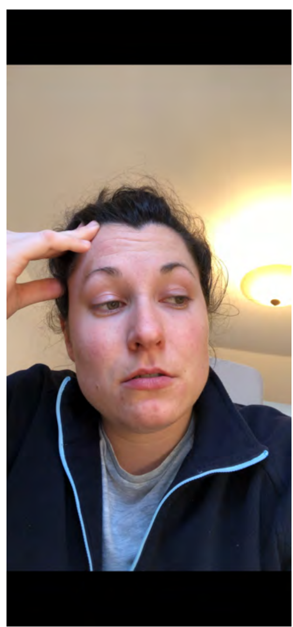


Figure 16. Screen shots from some of my post-interview video journaling.

Echoing what Crawford et al. (2020, p. 13) also found in their 'show-and-tell' long interviews; the process of doing the 'build-talk-build' for hours (approximately three hours on average) was exhausting for both myself and the participants. Often interviews came to a natural end point when participants simply could not think to build any more. On a practical level, managing this with participants often meant implementing longer 'deconstruction' periods after the interview, when the Dictaphone was turned off. I found that, often while helping to deconstruct their Lego build, participants also did the same with their interviews and the process in general, reflecting with me on what they enjoyed or felt they had learned. Although I did not capture or record these conversations, other than in my field notes, I believe this was an important part of the method and participants engagement with it.

4.8.3 Lodgers in My House: Reflections on the IPA Analytic Process

The analytic process, for me, was all encompassing and lasted around ten months in total (May 2019 – March 2020). Sometimes it was insightful, rewarding and revealing. At other times, it felt long, frustrating and draining. In short, it was not easy. This is perhaps, not just the case when using IPA, but also can be extended to any long-term engagement with qualitative data. During the initial analysis stages, I would become so aware of my participants words and worlds and so involved in the data and its potential for meaning, that I would lose the boundary between my own interpretation and theirs. It is virtually impossible, and I think generally inadvisable to take the reader through every analytic twist and turn (including the U-turns) that together make up the path to our findings (Engward & Goldspink, 2020). This, Engward and Goldspink (2020) note, can easily become the path from rigor, to rigor mortis for both the author and reader. However, I consistently try to lay out the key pieces of the analytic process in my methods sections and increasingly acknowledge their non-linear and iterative nature.

My reality was, that I had a lever-arch folder containing all ten (anonymised) transcripts (see Figure 17). This folder, throughout this time period, came almost everywhere with me. I woke up to it, fell asleep on it and even cried on it a few times in times out of frustration or interaction. The words and worlds of each participant rented space in my mind during this time. There was not, as some qualitative research guides suggest, a single activity or time to be reflexively engaged (Corlett & Mavin, 2018), nor was it confined to one part of the research process. It was a way to 'be' with the research and data, and thus, for me reflexivity was challenging, time-consuming and fraught with intellectual danger points.

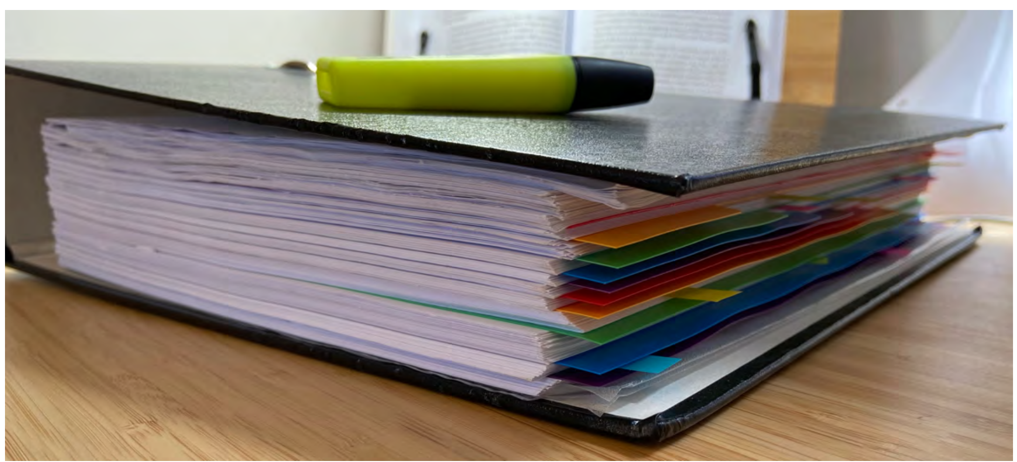


Figure 17. My ever-present data (the lodger).

At first glance, the six-steps (as per Table 6) of IPA appear deceptively straightforward and linear. Doing IPA reflexively demands that the hermeneutic phenomenological underpinnings of IPA are clearly understood (Smith, 2019). If not, there is risk that the research that applies IPA is not *actually* IPA, something I was keenly aware of throughout the analytic process. The presence of linear routes through data analysis misses the hermeneutic phenomenological point of IPA and thereby lacking in rigour and credibility. However, through a methodological lens, the six-stages emphasise a requirement for rigor and trustworthiness (Yardley, 2017). A key recommendation, across all forms of qualitative research (Hayward & Cassell, 2018), is the recommendation of not only making each of the six-stages apparent, what I termed as an 'analytic audit trail', but also noting reflexive accounts using a research diary for all stages of the research process.

However, simply noting or recording thinking at any one time, without recognising the role of temporality, reduces activities of reflexivity to a list of tick boxes to be achieved (and at times, a bit forced). Engward and Goldspink (2020) argue that reflexivity in IPA is the opposite, suggesting it to be multi-faceted, complex, long, and often (especially in my own experience) very frustrating. They go on to liken this feeling to having 'lodgers in the house' (p. 2). This notion was born out of one of the author's experiences of living with the words of her participants on a daily basis during her own research. These words were with her, being meaningful in different ways and times, usually when she wasn't engaged in 'sitting down with the transcripts' type analysis'. This captures the often hidden and non-linear nature of the research, and specifically, the analytic process that I too, experienced during my analysis phases of my data.

In using IPA, the researcher is the central analytic instrument (Smith et al., 2012). The job of the IPA researcher then, is to uncover the dual meanings given to the defined phenomena from the participants and researcher perspectives (Shaw, 2011). In this way, researchers do not view data as an object or in abstract terms, as to do so will evict the people who gave the data from the research. The participants' voice remains 'in' the research because their experiences take up residence in the researchers' interpretative work.

Smith et al., (2012) claim that successful analyses require the systemic application of ideas, and methodical rigour; but they also require imagination, playfulness, and a combination of reflective, critical and conceptual thinking (Smith, 2012, p. 40). Here, the request is for researchers to be both systematic and imaginative. While potentially contradictory, I take this to mean the application of IPA methodologically is systematic, but then creative in how you

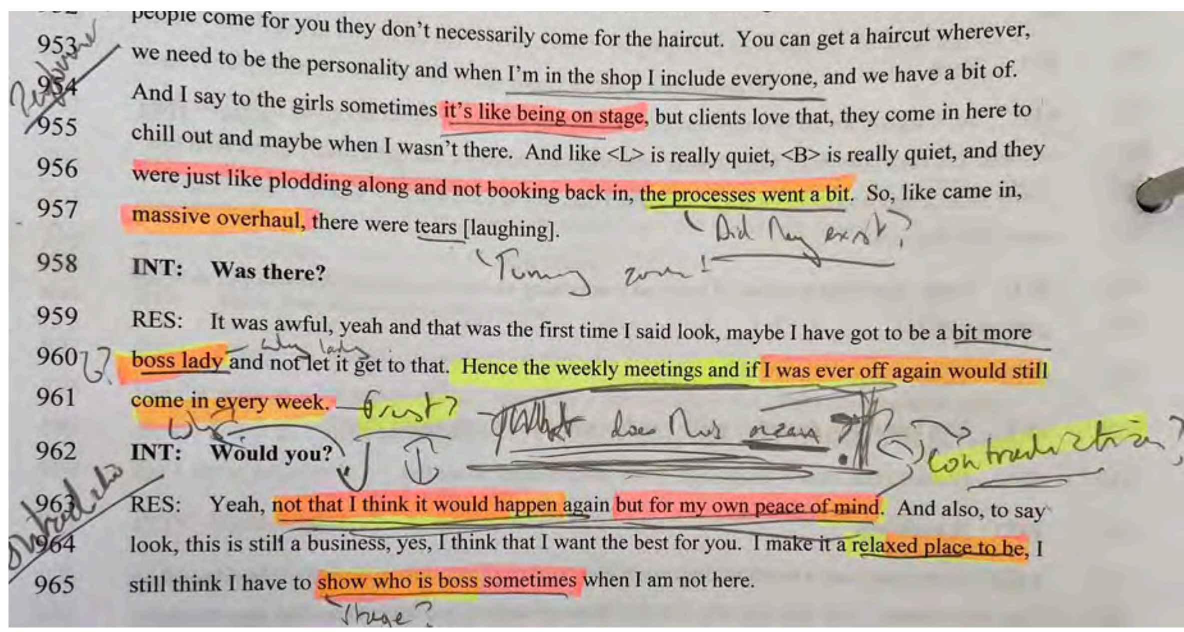
choose to interact with the data. This suggests, perhaps rightly so, that there is no singular way to gain insights from the data, or that there is no easy route through the analysis.

I found that hours of analysis were required to do justice to the data given by the participants. My analysis took time, around ten months, engaging with the data was complex and took longer than I anticipated. The following extract from the Goldspink (2019) reflects on her own IPA experiences with analysis:

> There have been times today when I have had no idea of what I'm looking at. Then suddenly, I have a moment of clarity, which soon evaporates when I try to sort what belongs to me and what belongs to the participant. The six-steps have teeth, and I am getting bitten. I'm nowhere near where I thought I would be (Engward & Goldspink, 2019, p.18).

The above journal extract demonstrates frustration that this process is not easy: where does the researcher begin and end in relation to the data? Where does the data belong and end? Whose voice is whose? What is being lost in-between deciding what is in the data and what to leave out? Why is the data always with us? As such, the research, its data lodgers and our interactions within these spheres mean we are residing with the research; the research is residing with us constantly. It is an ongoing reflexive appraisal of the comings and goings of the analysis, which Finlay (2011) describes as an attitude. At times, it is a highly frustrating process to go through, it's difficult to just suddenly start 'being reflexive' or having an 'attitude', these require work and focus.

In looking through my own data, I could identify these moments of frustration, or times when my ability to interpret were limited. Often, these were expressed in the notes I would make on the transcripts. Below, Figure 18 is an example of when exasperated or feeling stuck I would write, 'what does this mean?', I'd often exaggerate these with some scribbles to redirect my thinking to these in later readings, sometimes I'd have a breakthrough and other times I would not. I would hit many hermeneutic dead ends where I would be forced to leave certain parts of the data to avoid the risk of over-interpreting.



people come for you they don't necessarily come for the haircut. You can get a haircut wherever,
953 we need to be the personality and when I'm in the shop I include everyone, and we have a bit of.
954 And I say to the girls sometimes it's like being on stage, but clients love that, they come in here to
955 chill out and maybe when I wasn't there. And like <L> is really quiet, <B> is really quiet, and they
956 were just like plodding along and not booking back in, the processes went a bit. So, like came in,
957 massive overhaul, there were tears [laughing].
958 **INT: Was there?**
959 RES: It was awful, yeah and that was the first time I said look, maybe I have got to be a bit more
960 boss lady and not let it get to that. Hence the weekly meetings and if I was ever off again would still
961 come in every week.
962 **INT: Would you?**
963 RES: Yeah, not that I think it would happen again but for my own peace of mind. And also, to say
964 look, this is still a business, yes, I think that I want the best for you. I make it a relaxed place to be, I
965 still think I have to show who is boss sometimes when I am not here.

Figure 18. Analytic frustrations present in my data

There is not, therefore, a single activity or time to be reflexively engaged. Nor is it confined to one part of the research process, rather it is a way to 'be' with the research and data. Analytic reflexivity is challenging, time-consuming and fraught with intellectual danger points. The researcher treads a cliff edge where it is all too easy to fall into an infinite regress of excessive self-analysis at the expense of focusing on the research participants (Finlay, 2017; Finlay, 2012). As the analytic stages are worked through, the intensity of reflexivity ebbs and flows, some insights will weave their way into the findings, while others will go no further than a scribble on a transcript. Either way, reflexivity held the data as a constant in my mind, and the demands of the need for physical transcripts meant I was never far from the data. The participants worlds demanded constant attention. They became, in effect, lodgers within me.

4.8.4 Acknowledging the Doctoral Journey

Figure 19. My doctoral journey; constructed by myself and my supervisory team.

Although this has very much been an independent journey, I feel it would not be transparent reflecting on three years of research without accounting for those who guided and shaped my thinking. A key question to ask is, if I didn't have this team, would this study be the same? The answer is, in my case, a strong no, having been gently coaxed away from many theoretical dead ends or 'big ideas'. The impact of supervisory dynamics is rarely accounted as a factor that impacts the final project. It is perhaps implicitly assumed and culturally expected. Much of the extant literature on carrying out Doctoral research focuses instead on investigating completion and attrition rates (Devos et al., 2017; Press et al., 2019), or thesis writing experiences (Odena & Burgess, 2017). A notable exception is Donovan (2019) who, in describing her doctorate as a ship, uses a metaphor of an anchor and sail to examine the relationship between supervisor and supervisee throughout her doctoral voyage. In doing so, it highlighted various points at which the supervisor guides or grounds their supervisee.

To reflect on my journey as a whole, and my supervisory team's own perceptions of it, we decided to engage using Lego as a reflexive tool. We started by building what each of us thought my doctoral journey is (see Figure 19). Not only did this engage us in thinking about my own 'Doctoral voyage', but also provided a chance for the whole team to engage with Lego and how it is used in this study.

Figure 20 is the final result of our reflexive process, which was submitted to a University competition (it didn't win, in case you were wondering). Rather than provide a full reflexive account here, and in the spirit of exploring creative approaches, instead, I chose to write a poem to convey the impact of the experiences of this voyage (Figure 20). The experience of completing this research has very much been, for the most part, an independent one. However, in turning my reflexive attitude towards my supervisory team's dynamic/impact, it acknowledges it as relationally bounded within my entire doctoral journey, woven into this thesis, brick by brick.

Figure 20. A reflexive model built by myself and my supervisory team, 'brick by brick'.

4.8.5 Using Lego as an Analytic and Self-Reflexive Tool

From my reflections in this chapter, I have communicated the fraught, exhausting and often messy nature of conducting an IPA study. The use of Lego has been a central tool in providing a means to achieve critical distance from what can be an all-encompassing process (Cassell &

Poth, 2016). One example of doing this, was the rebuilding of participant's Lego models during the analytic, and write-up phases of my findings. Using the photographs of participant's Lego models as a visual guide, I would reconstruct them brick-by-brick in order to build-through my analytic frustrations (see Figure 18). In Section 4.8.3, I highlighted the challenges that come with IPA's demand for interpretative analytic depth. In the moments where I would get stuck, or get frustrated in achieving this, I would use this approach to productively build through and reconnect with participant's worlds.

During times of analytic frustration, I would return to the images of the relevant participant's Lego builds. I would select the build that related to the textual data I was working through. Using the image as a starting point, I would begin to build and try to replicate them. Sometimes, I would complete them in full and just use the process a means to escape the demands of coding the interview transcript. Other times, I would begin with building a participant's model, but as my thoughts would begin to materialise through connecting the bricks together, the models would become more abstract or be deconstructed altogether.

Figure 21 below is an example of this materialisation through reconstruction of visual data. On the left, is a model built by Max, whose data I struggled with at times. Max's model was a representation of his business now, and where he would like it to be in the future. When rebuilding this, I felt that the building process had no end point. As per Max's model (to the left in Fig. 21), to me, it always appeared to be unfinished. I could keep adding bricks, yet Max's build would still appear to need more adding to it.

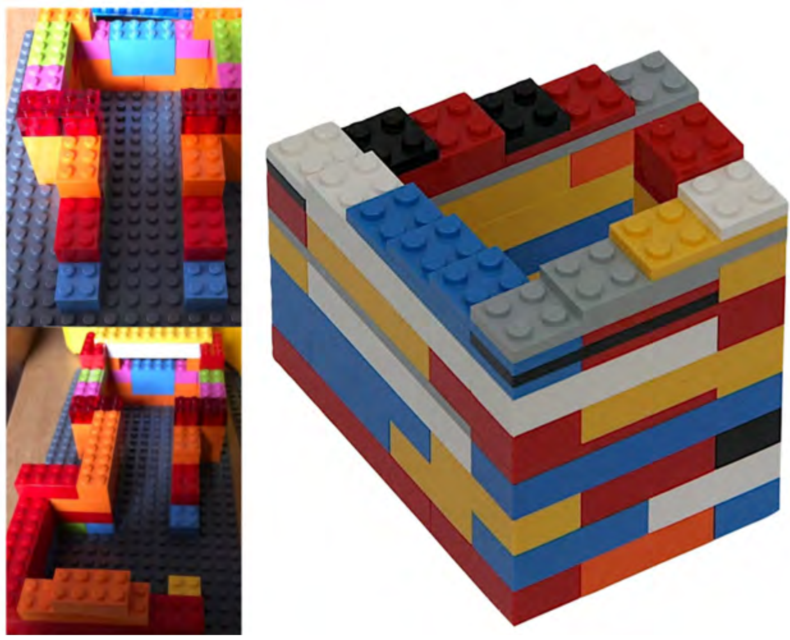


Figure 21. Example of Lego used to draw meaning from data.

The model rebuilding triggered a connection to another participant's (Phoenix) quote likening his entrepreneurial experiences to a 'never-ending staircase'. I then extended Max's model to try and represent this staircase (per Penrose & Penrose's impossible stairs (1954), shown to the right in Fig. 21). This introduced me to the idea of regarding participant's entrepreneurial experiences as a never-ending endeavour. This was the trigger needed to start connecting participant's experiences. Additionally, this particular example helped construct one of the superordinate themes in my findings (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4 for the results of this process).

More broadly, akin with the justification for using Lego as an elicitation tool (see Section 4.4.1), I also found using Lego was invaluable in enabling me to access a space away from the constraints of textual analysis (Radcliffe, 2018). The build process created adjacent spaces for me to think through participant's narratives in a material and what is now, a familiar way. As described previously, I would also use this as a starting point to reconstruct models. At times, I would find connections between the words and the model I was building and would have a breakthrough. Other times, it became a simple exercise to withdraw myself away from any feelings of interpretative rigor mortis. For example, Figure 22 was a model I built when thinking through the ethical challenges of using Lego in this study and the dangers of over-interpreting participant's accounts.

Figure 22. Using Lego as a self-reflexive tool to work through ethical challenges.

In addition to using Lego, Figure 23 captures my ‘post-it patchwork’, a collection of all the post-its I used to label participant’s Lego models during their research interviews. I created this after completing my analysis, which involved grouping the post-its into ‘themes’ along with my written data (Miles et al., 2018). This was done purely as high-level introductory exercise to get me to think about potential commonalities and differences present in participant’s accounts. The patchwork was partly in celebration of reaching this stage, and partly a rally against the structure IPA requires (see Section 4.5.7). In addition, it was also used inadvertently as a reference board, when writing-up my findings chapter. Specifically, its purpose came to be as a phenomenological commitment tool. I used it to ensure my findings remained true to participant’s experiences and descriptions, a challenging balance to achieve in interpretative work.

Within the literature, there remains scope for development of analytic aids that facilitate drawing meaning from the depths of textual data (Leavy, 2020). This is, from my own experience, often the most challenging part of interpretative work. Existing examples include textual data displays (Williamson & Long, 2005), drawing concept maps (Wilson et al., 2016), and creating graphic visualisations of analysis findings (Miles et al., 2018). However, the use of creative materials (like Lego) beyond drawing or mapping, has mainly been confined to literature discussing how to teach qualitative data analysis (e.g., Hunter et al., 2002; Scandlyn & Hautzinger, 2013; Mallette & Saldaña, 2019). Therefore, there are opportunities to further explore the value in using creative processes, especially through the use of tools like Lego, as both an analytic and self-reflexive tool.

Figure 23. A 'post-it patchwork' created from the labels of participant's Lego model.

4.9 Meet the Participants

In this section you will find participant's introducing their Lego selves, in their own words. I also provide some of my own personal reflections of each interview, taken from my fieldwork journals. This reinforces that this research is governed by a relativist ontology and epistemological subjectivism; recognising that myself and my research participants are exposed to multiple realities constructed from various experiences throughout our lives (Larkin et al, 2019).

4.9.1 Meet Alex

Pseudonym	Industry	No. Employees	Age of Venture (years)	Employer (years)	Age	Identified Gender (F/M)
Alex	Leisure	30	6	0.5	35-40	F

Well, I like the… black jeans. Not going to lie. That's kind of my uniform I suppose. So yeah. Red top because I got told very recently that red suits me and I've never worn red and then started wearing red. So that's as far as in depth that is. And, it's a crown or like a helmet. I don't know why I chose it. It's sparkly and I'm not going to lie, I'm a bit like a magpie and I like shiny things.

Personal reflections

It was a nice day and Alex insisted we sit outside for our interview. The setting was stunning and the buildings around us stood gleaming in the sunshine, new and proud. Alex was clearly nervous, so I asked her to help set-up the Lego. "I'm not very creative, you know" she kept saying. "I probably won't be a very good person for this". I reassured her and suggested we build ourselves. She relaxed and appeared to become lost in herself during the interview. Alex's story was filtered through the experience of her father dying very suddenly when she was starting her business. After we finished, I felt uncomfortable as she struggled to talk about some difficulties she had with control and dealing with other people. I felt immediately afterwards that I may have opened wounds that had not fully healed.

4.9.2 Meet Bobbie

Pseudonym	Industry	No. Employees	Age of Venture (years)	Employer (years)	Age	Identified Gender (F/M)
Bobbie	Technology	2	2	1	35-40	F

Bobbie is [age], married, pretty independent. Does her own thing but not for the adversity of others. Very generous, but probably too generous with time. And, a bit of a giggle but also very private.

Personal Reflections

Bobbie had started her technology business in the past few years. She had recently hired one employee and was recruiting for a second the week the interview took place. Bobbie's interview took place in a start-up hub in the middle of a city-centre. Her office (or 'HQ' as she referred to it) was small, with just enough room for two desks. Lists were scrawled on whiteboards around us. Business start-up advice books were neatly stacked on half-empty shelves. Bobbie was high energy and clearly comfortable in being interviewed. Her narrative was highly reflective in that her immediate answers were often followed by streams of thoughts that contradicted her initial thinking. Age and gender dominated Bobbie's concerns and descriptions of herself and her attempts to separate herself from two distinct worlds she inhabits. The interview was over 3 hours long; at the end Bobbie declared, "thanks, I really needed this", I think my interpretations will perhaps go some way in finding out what "this' was.

4.9.3 Meet Maximus (Max)

Pseudonym	Industry	No. Employees	Age of Venture (years)	Employer (years)	Age	Identified Gender (F/M)
Maximus	Manufacturing	3	4	0	25-30	M

Commander of Legions of the North. New label. Put it as Max if you want to, Maximus Desimas, I always liked that Gladiator isn't it. I am just here to help anybody who wants to be helped. I don't know, I like to be the person to go and see sort of thing. It's weird because I have always, even with, you know, people, crikey how do I say it, who have been in trouble sort of thing, I've always been the one they come to for help. That's me really...

Personal Reflections

Max's business was in the heart of the Welsh Valleys, as I got out of my car, it felt like the area had an edge to it, as if it had been forgotten by those in charge. As I walked into Max's shop, he immediately apologised "sorry", he gestured to the room around him "it's probably not what you were expecting". The shop provided a front to a rabbit warren of small corridors leading to various rooms with people busily working. Old products, machinery and empty energy drinks cans strewn everywhere. The interview took place in an empty room, which was freezing cold and contained a small desk. At the start, Max found it very difficult to find the right words. "Crikey' he kept exclaiming, when presented with a question. As the interview entered the second hour, Max was more relaxed and open. I felt a distinct sense of frustration for Max after the interview. He was intent on demonstrating how his business facilitated a need to help others, but felt hindered; "the more you have, the less you own, it's knackering" he stated just after I'd turned the Dictaphone off.

4.9.4 Meet Bruce

Pseudonym	Industry	No. Employees	Age of Venture (years)	Employer (years)	Age	Identified Gender (F/M)
Bruce	Service	6	2	1	35-40	F

Okay, so this is Bruce, Bruce has got many hats. yeah, basically we have got a little bit of everything. I am not, I don't see myself as just the boss because I have worked from the bottom and started myself as an apprentice.

Personal Reflections

Bruce's interview took place on her premises. As I was becoming more accustomed to, on arrival I was led to the back through another rabbit warren of small corridors. We settled on the floor of Bruce's wig-making room. Bruce was open and frank, although at times she seemed hesitant to talk about her employees who were working next door. Her story was punctuated by her need to pursue a career that she loved, but felt she was judged for. I shared Bruce's frustration in experiencing a lack of support because she wasn't in tech, she felt overlooked by government.

4.9.5 Meet Warrior

Pseudonym	Industry	No. Employees	Age of Venture (years)	Employer (years)	Age	Identified Gender (F/M)
Warrior	Health	4	3	1	30-35	F

So this is my little warrior… Because I feel like that's what I am now. Because how much I feel like I've grown as a person in the business, and I feel more stronger and more, like, confident about things. Yes.

Personal Reflections

Warrior's interview took place in an industrial estate on the outskirts of a Valley's town. The business was born out of an idea she had with her friend, their product is now patented and being sold in a number of stores across the UK. She had set up her business with her friend four years ago and now employed three members of staff, including her husband and friend's daughter. Her small office was in the back of another business's building. Sales figures and product prototypes covered walls and shelves. My immediate thought was, this is not what I expected. Warrior had been on Dragon's Den and was lauded by the Government as the 'next big thing', being labelled 'entrepreneur of the year'. The website for her business was slick, reflecting an image constructed by the media or online. Her story reflected challenge and hardship. It exposed a system keen to reward individuals who 'made-it', ignoring the less glamourous everyday realities of starting a business. This was a side that mainstream academia and popular media ignored, and I left this interview feeling very frustrated and angry.

4.9.6 Meet Phoenix

Pseudonym	Industry	No. Employees	Age of Venture (years)	Employer (years)	Age	Identified Gender (F/M)
Phoenix	Service	10	6	0	25-30	M

Alright then, let's go for my title, I'm King Amongst Men. Name… Hmm, I think I'll have a sword because every day is a battle. Let's have a suitcase for a shield to fight off the rubbish you have to do in business. His arm is a bit floppy but… A name? Phoenix. Why Phoenix? Because if we're going forward in… you want to know what makes people tick. When you're a phoenix you rise above the ashes and then you get hit down and then rise again. Then sometimes you feel like giving up and ruining everything.

Personal Reflections

Phoenix has a number of hairdressing businesses across South Wales and employed ten members of staff at the time of the interview. This was one of the most challenging interviews to manage. Phoenix was on edge through a lot of the time we were together. Phoenix was worried I was 'the government', asking to see my driving licence to check I was who I said I was. Although I could understand his concern, his demeanour was something I kept a close eye on in the interview. Out of all the interviews, Phoenix made me feel like a pseudo-therapist, he offloaded very personal details but all were entangled into the setup of his business. His businesses were located across the Welsh Valleys town. The interview took place in one of his shops. As a I was led to an 'office' upstairs, where an unmade bed, ironing board and desk were all located. "I let one of the boys sleep here at the moment" Phoenix declared.

4.9.7 Meet Melissa

Pseudonym	Industry	No. Employees	Age of Venture (years)	Employer (years)	Age	Identified Gender (F/M)
Melissa	Service	1	5	2	30-35	F

I've built an emo woman with quite a scary skull face, a rucksack and stilts, although you can take those on and off. Just helps you to see, she's short so she needs to be lifted up a bit higher. Backpacks are cool, I've got one as well, this is like my survival bag though.

Personal Reflections

Melissa's interview took place quite late in the evening as she closed her shop at 7pm. She was tired but happy to speak. She spent a long time getting accustomed to the Lego. Melissa had been told that day that her one and only employee, a friend, was pregnant. Immediately the interview focused on the challenges she had. She was worried she didn't have enough money to pay her employee's holiday and maternity leave. Melissa's interview opened my eyes to the difficulties a small business owner faces in the wake of hiring just one employee. Often these challenges, it seemed, were invisible. The current employment laws and structures in place meant that Melissa could not pay herself a wage for two years, in effect, her employee earnt more than she did during this time. Melissa was at a crucial deciding point in her business journey, she could hire another employee as she had enough work for one but did not want to because of the challenges she had faced thus far. Rather than grow, Melissa was ready to down-size her business.

4.9.8 Meet Bish

Pseudonym	Industry	No. Employees	Age of Venture (years)	Employer (years)	Age	Identified Gender (F/M)
Bish	Agriculture	3	4	0	25-30	M

So this is Bish. I suppose he's just – he wants to be involved in the job, that's what he's doing. He wants to go and get stuck in, so he's got all these two tools with him, yes, I think. But he can't always do that. Sometimes – most of the time in fact, he has to err, sort of stand back or do other things. Yes. Like the office stuff or, yes, I suppose, yes.

Personal Reflections

Bish was highly reflective right from the start of the interview. He had taken over a failing agricultural business four years prior. His business now had three full-time employees and he had just advertised for a fourth, although only as a contractor (to avoid the costs). Right before the interview, Bish had been 'doing his books', as he had to check he had enough money to pay his employee pensions – new legislation on this had been recently introduced. He claimed he just had enough to pay them.

4.9.9 Meet Joe

Pseudonym	Industry	No. Employees	Age of Venture (years)	Employer (years)	Age	Identified Gender (F/M)
Joe	Construction	4	7	3	40-45	M

Yeah so this is Joe, he's complicated, but everyone thinks the job he does is simple [laughs]. He feels a bit trapped sometimes… but it's got better recently. Yes. Joe prefers to work than to do paperwork and finds it all a bit dull. That's why I've got him trying to break free with that pick-axe – is that what it is? Hates phones and prefers to be on his own.

Personal Reflections

Joe had recently (a month before our interview) sold his business to a larger organisation. He pointed out the main reason was that he could no longer keep up managing the workload and employees, expressing relief to have given it up. Incidentally at the time of the interview, he was employed by the organisation that bought him out. Our interview took place in the unit he once rented, two of his employees were now colleagues. This was a tough interview from an emotional perspective. Joe has experienced some highly personal events, including an attempt to end his life. He recalled this was down to the pressures of running his business, including mounting debts. Joe was visibly angry and upset at points in the interview, he felt it was important that his struggles were communicated and heard.

4.9.10 Meet Tree Lady

Pseudonym	Industry	No. Employees	Age of Venture (years)	Employer (years)	Age	Identified Gender (F/M)
Tree Lady	Food and drink	4	5	3	30-35	F

I say I'm like a tree because you have the roots at the bottom but there are pieces everywhere. I'm also a new Mum and proud of it, although it's chaos sometimes.

Personal Reflections

Tree Lady's interview took place in her home. Her one-year-old daughter was also present and would frequently attempt to distract her Mum. Tree Lady was initially hesitant, as she didn't feel as in-touch with her business since having a baby. She had a number of employees, and her Dad has taken over duties while she was off work. As we talked, she began to open up more about how being a new mum and a business owner was challenging. Her daughter was clearly her new focus, and she paused the interview several times to address her needs. It felt at times, I was experiencing first-hand her balancing between trying to be a business owner and a new mum. She was keen to communicate the precarity of owning a business and having a baby, something a man, she felt, wouldn't have to deal with.

4.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to make my choice of methodology and research methods clear. In combination with Chapter 3, it is admittedly dense, but the requirement to be transparent and provide a theoretical justification for my choice of method highlights a key contribution of this research. The contribution being the use of a valuable methodological approach within the field of entrepreneurship.

By exploring IPA and its limitations, I set out a need to mitigate these through the use of a co-creative approach. This sought to bring together principles applied in phenomenological interviewing and Lego Serious Play. The method used in this study, the Lego Interview Method, was explained in Section 4.4. Moving beyond this, I detailed the nuts and bolts of the fieldwork phases of my research. The ten participants that took part in this study are introduced in Sections 4.3.4.1 and 4.9. I then turned to discuss broader applicable issues raised in the completion of qualitative research: ethics and research quality. Following this, my chapter takes a more reflexive tone. In the final sections, I took the opportunity to reflect on my role as a researcher and the impact I have had upon different stages of the research process.

The next chapter (Chapter 5) presents my study findings, the output of months of data collection and subsequent analysis. These are presented as three superordinate (overarching) themes comprising sets of three relevant subthemes. Themes are summarised in Table 11 in the following chapter, and subsequently discussed in detail.

Chapter 5
Findings

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Superordinate Theme One: Great Expectations

5.2.1 Subtheme One: Rejection of Entrepreneurial Expectations

5.2.2 Subtheme Two: Gendered Expectations

5.2.3 Subtheme Three: Regional Expectations

5.2.4 Theme Summary

5.3 Superordinate Theme Two: Conflicts of Interest: Me, Myself and My Employee(s)

5.3.1 Subtheme One: The Mother Hen: finding meaning in hiring others

5.3.2 Subtheme Two: What If They Don't Turn Up?

5.3.3 Subtheme Three: The Wake-Up Call

5.3.4 Theme Summary

5.4 Superordinate Theme Three: Never-Ending Stories

5.4.1 Subtheme One: The Impossible Staircase

5.4.2 Subtheme Two: The Winner Takes It All

5.4.3 Subtheme Three: But It Gives Purpose

5.4.4 Theme Summary

5.5 Chapter Summary

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5.1 Introduction

I begin by summarising the three overarching superordinate themes (see Section 4.3.7) that I believe capture the experiences the ten participants transitioning from entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer. In doing so, I explore my study research questions:

1) How do entrepreneurs experience the transition from non-employer to employer?
   a) What are the potential enablers or inhibitors of this transition?
   b) What is the impact of this transition from the entrepreneur's perspective?

Each theme comprises three connecting subthemes generated from the analysis of each transcript (see Table 11). The first, *'Great Expectations'* focuses on the notions that seemed most significant in forming a meaning-making framework impacting on how participants perceived their selves. By identifying several socially embedded expectations present across the participant's accounts, I suggest that such expectations impact on their selfhood. I explore how participants negotiate expectations of entrepreneurship, gender and civility, all of which seem to impact how participants feel they ought to be and act. I will explore in more depth how a tension reveals itself within participant's trying to understand *who they are* beyond what they are told they should be.

Moving to the second superordinate theme, *'Conflicts of Interest: Me, Myself and My Employees',* I focus on the experiences of becoming an entrepreneur-employer. Subthemes trace the contours of this transition. Findings demonstrate how hiring a first employee introduces a level of relationality into participants' worlds that was not initially felt when starting their ventures. I interpret the employer transition as a relational step, exposing participants to a need for formality and structure in their relationships and ventures. Participants expressed a desire to disentangle their work and personal lives. This was particularly felt by those who had chosen to hire friends or family members. As the day-to-day realities of business ownership are realised, a conflict with expectations presented in the first superordinate theme is exposed. This theme captures the beginning of a realisation that, given their newfound employer status, achieving initial expectations may not be possible. Consequently, the following and final superordinate theme explores the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition as an introduction to a liminal state, where day-to-day realities sit in opposition with what they thought they were supposed to be or become.

The final superordinate theme, '*Never-Ending Stories',* investigates ways in which participants' accounts were often fragmented and contradictory. Despite all participants initially rejecting identifying themselves as entrepreneurs, their accounts continually juxtapose their entrepreneurial expectations to their own experiences of being an entrepreneur-employer. Consequently, attempting to live out the expectations explored in the first superordinate theme conflict with the realities presented in the second superordinate theme. In this, participants appeared caught in a state of liminal flux. Participants' narratives reflect a continuous loop of ascending and descending emotions; a collection of never-ending stories revealing fleeting glimpses of freedom and control, before being overwhelmed by existing constraints.

Similarly, ideals of entrepreneurial success, which many participants discussed as reasons they started their ventures, were not being experienced. Initially perceived freedoms become overwhelmed by feelings of constraint. Material markers of entrepreneurial success seem to sit just beyond the reach of participants, given these newly felt conditions. Thus, in taking on a first employee, I suggest, introduces participants to a more liminal, perhaps less entrepreneurial existence, a 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1974); participants feel they are neither entrepreneur, employer nor business owner.

Table 11. Superordinate Themes and Corresponding Subthemes

Overview of final superordinate themes and corresponding subthemes

Superordinate theme	Subthemes
Great expectations	Rejection of entrepreneurial expectations Gendered expectations Regional expectations
Conflicts of interest: me, myself and my employee(s)	Mother hen: finding meaning in hiring others What if they don't turn up? The wake-up call
Never-ending stories	The impossible staircase The winner takes it all But it gives a purpose

5.2 Superordinate Theme One: Great Expectations

I will now explore how participants attempted to make sense of their selves by reflecting on their experiences of setting up and running their enterprises. I look in detail at how and why participants regarded themselves in particular ways. Accounts were multifaceted, with participants' responses influenced by similarly felt expectations revolving around the entrepreneur, gender and place. The findings within this superordinate theme tease apart and assess the impact of these expectations upon participants' sense of self.

Notions of selfhood were expressed as participants' accounts reflected a continual construction and reconstruction of their selves. I explore these ideas, specifically, focusing on constructs that converged across the narratives of each participant. The subthemes - *rejection of entrepreneurial expectations, gendered expectations, and regional expectations* - capture the building blocks of participants attempting to make sense of themselves. I explore how converging notions of the entrepreneur, gender and civility form a nuanced and complex web of socially weighted expectations. Civility denotes a sense of standing or membership in a community, and this status comes with certain rights and responsibility (Jeffrey et al., 2018). It is understood as a set of norms that strengthen social bonds embedded through repeated embodied practice (Boyd, 2006). I found the notions of the entrepreneur, gender and civility were pertinent in understanding the referential sense-making of a participant's sense of self.

Broadly speaking, social expectation is the general mood of society about what people should do: the spirit of the times. The concept of 'social expectation' relates to Bourdieu's (1979) (see also Bourdieu & Rice, 1980) conception of the 'habitus' or normative expectations that a citizen takes for granted as the way to live one's life. Therefore, expectations are highly context-dependent yet take into consideration the effects of universal norms enacted in more localised settings. Social expectations associated with being an entrepreneur, being a specific gender and being 'civil' play a central role in forming a framework of meaning-making for the participants.

The subthemes in this section explore how participants made sense of themselves in the 'becoming' of something, either a rejection of what they are told they ought to be or a need to seek to be it. Making sense of each of their selves appeared to take place in relation to embedded social expectations that participants negotiated between. The notion of temporality is pertinent, distinguishing the self as something that is not fixed, but ever-changing. What this suggests is that notions of selfhood within these findings revolve around participants seeking to change from a 'current self' to an aspirational or an 'ought self' (Higgins, 1987;

Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). In some instances, the decision to start a business is used to dis-identify from a work-imposed identity to be what they might regard as their 'authentic' self (Costas & Fleming, 2009). As I will explore, participants rock back and forth between the present and the past in their narratives because, in doing so they preserve a sense of self against constructed expectations. These expectations are present in how each participant self-affirms and rationalises their entrepreneurial decisions. To some extent, their businesses become a vehicle to reaffirming who they are and what matters to them. Pervasive mainstream entrepreneurial narratives are present in the accounts of all participants. The subsequent subthemes *Gender Expectations* and *Regional Expectations* follow to form an intra-acting meaning-making framework. The expectations within each subtheme acted to guide participants' reflection of themselves, and who they are in relation to their entrepreneurial experiences. Additionally, expectations appeared to impact participant's perceived sense of self and influence upon who they felt they ought to be.

First, I explore how participants interpret the meaning of the term 'entrepreneur' through the first subtheme, *Rejection of Entrepreneurial Expectations*. Second, the nuanced and intersecting role of gender is explored in the second subtheme: *Gendered Expectations*. Finally, in the third subtheme *Regional Expectations*, examines how the cultural norms of a particular place (in this instance, The Welsh Valleys) particularly impacted on participants who were born and now run businesses within the same region.

5.2.1 Rejection of Entrepreneurial Expectations

In the following subtheme, captures how participants relate to being labelled as an 'entrepreneur', and how this shapes who they think they are. While all participants rejected the label, almost instinctively, it became increasingly clear that initial rejections were directed towards popularised images and narratives of the entrepreneur.

Melissa and Bish likened being called an 'entrepreneur' to a 'shark', in that they often felt misunderstood and mislabelled when referred to as entrepreneurs. This metaphor applied to a number of other participants' reactions and subsequent loading of the term 'entrepreneur'. The image of sharks as fearsome predators through cultural representations in films such as 'Jaws' or sensationalist media reports of shark attacks contribute to framing sharks negatively in the public image (Friedrich, 2014). These attitudes remain despite the fact that three of the largest shark species are plant eaters and have no teeth at all (Friedrich, 2014). Relatedly, the

more general understanding of a shark's behaviour is often used as a metaphor to describe the entrepreneur. Television shows such as the UK's 'Dragon's Den' (BBC Television, 2020) or the US's 'Shark Tank' (abc Television, 2020), emphasise that primal, animalistic behaviours are key to identifying as an entrepreneur.

In a similar vein, Melissa described why she believes people assume she is and when, in her reality she feels far from it:

> …I think people have this thing, like they think, 'oh you've got your own business, you must be this, this and this', and I'm not at all what people say. 'You must be really driven or must be really ambitious', or whatever. But, I'm not, I'm just the same as everyone else. I never really planned it, I never ever wanted to be a business owner when I was little, ever. I think self-employed people are misunderstood because people think they're a certain type of person, but they're not always that type of person. Like sharks. (Melissa)

For Melissa, how she perceives an entrepreneur is everything she isn't. She goes on and explains, '… people think they're different to other fish, but actually [sharks] they're not, they're just the same as everybody else' (p. 5). Melissa stresses a need to be the same '*as everybody else'*. Her subtle switch from using fish to 'everybody' suggests her analogy relates to how she has been treated by others. She illuminates how 'people' put her on a platform on which she does not belong. This provides insight into where her discomfort with the term 'entrepreneur' stems from; how others perceive her, rather than how she perceives herself.

Further, her use of 'you must be' and 'type' are deterministic and inflexible; there is no room for her to negotiate or display her actual self in the wake of other's perceptions of what she should be. Melissa goes on to stress just how different she is, using an example of her lack of forethought in starting her business, '*never* really planned it' rising to 'I *never ever* wanted to be a business owner'. This infers her image of the entrepreneur is as a deliberate and calculating being, similar perhaps to how we perceive a shark hunting opportunity. For Melissa, her decision to start a business was born out of necessity, linked to threats of '*being stuck in an office'*. In addition, Melissa goes on to highlight, perhaps deliberately, her rejection of the entrepreneur label through use of *'business owner'*. This suggests that, to Melissa, such terminology is not loaded with the same expectations that come with the use of entrepreneur. Business owner is plain, understandable and not burdened with constant misinterpretations. For Melissa, this distinction appears to matter.

Although Bish did not overtly reject the word entrepreneur, he did not readily associate himself with being one. However, his use of the shark to emphasise misunderstanding echoes Melissa's interpretations. On first reading, Bish suggests that he displays some similar behaviours that are commonly associated with the shark:

> I have been called a 'Cheeky Shark' but not an entrepreneur. No. I wait in the tide for the right time, and then I strike, and I never miss… (Bish)

However, he goes on to clarify and distinguish his behaviour as non-conformist to the 'shark' stereotype:

> I say cheeky shark is because I never harm anyone, like sharks mostly they are thought of wrong, like maneaters and threatening. I'm the opposite. So that's what I try – to cheer myself up a bit I think, it's not the wrong way to be, to let the business, let the customers come to me – I don't advertise, I don't have a website. My mentor thinks I should but I'm… Yeah a cheeky shark, I don't do what people think if that makes sense? (Bish)

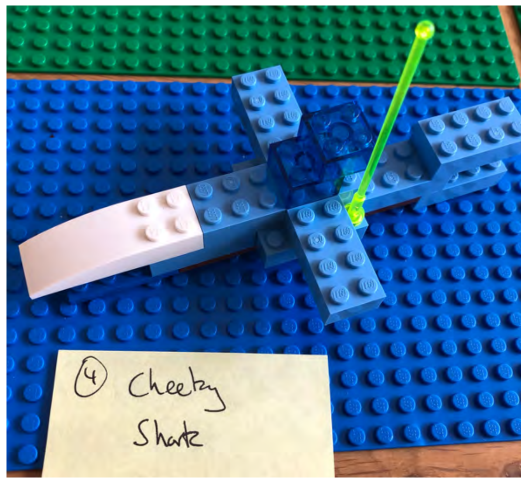

Figure 24. Melissa's Shark (L) vs Bish's Cheeky Shark (R).

Bish is quick to highlight 'I never harm anyone'; the implication here is that entrepreneurs, according to Bish, do, as does the misunderstood shark. Rather than reject the term 'entrepreneur', Bish's rejection appears to stem from not conforming to what others think he should do or be. For Bish, his cheeky shark serves as a reminder that his endeavours are '*not*

the wrong way to be'. This perhaps highlights an internal conflict, as if Bish believes he is not wrong, there is a suggestion from 'somewhere' that there is an alternative 'right' way. An approach that he should follow that ensures a more concrete form of what an entrepreneur is *supposed* to do and be.

Bish and Melissa's 'sharks' evoke a paradoxical nature of the term 'entrepreneur'. According to Bish and Melissa's interpretation entrepreneurs are often pedestalled as different, a minority. Yet, Melissa's rejection highlights her intent on illuminating her sameness. Bish, on the other hand, rejects conforming to the stereotypical actions he associates with the 'entrepreneur'. There are some assumptions on what these stereotypes might be through the language chosen by Melissa and Bish. Melissa uses typical traits 'ambitious', 'driven', while Bish more subtly suggests his less aggressive approach 'I don't advertise', is less aggressive, more mischievous than predatory.

What both Bish and Melissa touch upon was present in the narratives of all ten individuals. Commonalities in the descriptions of what constitutes an 'entrepreneur' presented themselves with surprising similarity. Perhaps this would not be so surprising if you were to consider 'entrepreneur' more as an ideology, reinforced by a comforting chorus popularised by public figures, images and behaviours. This is reflected in the examples below. Descriptions contained very similar, sometimes repetitive descriptions of entrepreneurs. Without prompting, participants used well-known public figures who are labelled as 'entrepreneurs' in the media as a starting point for their explanations:

> Yeah, and I just think like Alan Sugar (Bruce).

> Alan Sugar, yeah, just come straight to my head, yeah. But that's who I would see as an entrepreneur, I wouldn't see myself as an entrepreneur. I am just an everyday person - just got to get on with it and get it done. (Max)
> I mean, your entrepreneurs, in my eyes, are Alan Sugar, the guy from… Richard Branson. You know, they're up there, they tend to make you feel like you can get there too. (Warrior)

> James Dyson or… you know Alan Sugar. Or people like him, but I shouldn't – I know it's not just what it means, but I think of people that have come up with new things or stuff people haven't done before. (Bish)

> Yeah Alan Sugar is one that comes into my head as soon as you say 'entrepreneur' I've got his book over there [points to it] but I haven't read it. (Phoenix)

The potential impact these public representations have on these individuals is referred to here by Warrior; *'they tend to make you feel like you can get there too'*. There is a suggestion here that '*they'*, in Warrior, Bruce, Phoenix, Bish and Max's case, Alan Sugar, seem to form their entrepreneurial frame of reference, a baseline to measure their own selves against. None of the participants had met Alan Sugar, yet the power of the cultural representation of what an 'entrepreneur' is, is significant in that they all used him as their go-to example, almost immediately. It suggests their understandings of the 'entrepreneur' are multidimensional, in the sense that none of their own experiences fed into this representation. It also points to the power of the images presented to us, suggesting that for these participants, the prevailing view of the 'entrepreneur' is male, rich, suited and powerful.

Furthermore, Alan Sugar is synonymous with the UK BBC television show, *The Apprentice* (BBC, 2020). It is a competition that positions itself as lifechanging, a chance for the entrepreneur to transform an 'ordinary' person's life – blurring the boundaries between lifestyle and work. In this format, a 'popular' entrepreneur (Alan Sugar), chooses his own 'entrepreneur', as if only those in this position have the power to identify and label another one like them. Such references serve to highlight the susceptibility of the term entrepreneur to cultural discourses. It illuminates it as an idealistic, curated state. Perhaps this is what Warrior was referring to, that the likes of Alan Sugar can provide a vehicle to '*get there too'*. The insinuation is that by taking part in a game show, it increases the likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur, acting as a bridge between fiction and reality. On the other hand, it further separates ordinary people from the entrepreneur. Max highlights this separation; '*I wouldn't see myself as an entrepreneur. I am just an everyday person'* (Max). This claimed ordinary, everydayness and the use of 'see myself' are significant in offering a glimpse into how Max compares his own experiences to 'the entrepreneur's'. It highlights the impact of visual imagery in defining who and what constitutes being an entrepreneur and that becoming one is beyond the ordinary, everyday practices of Max.

The convergences in participant's descriptions of who or what an entrepreneur is were not surprising. The similarities in these descriptions were akin to a comforting ideological chorus, becoming a familiar rhythm present in all ten participants stories. To further illustrate

this chorus, in the extract below Bobbie identifies her own description as part of this ongoing chorus, what she terms the *'metronome entrepreneur'*:

> No. I don't think I'm a typical entrepreneur and I have no idea why that's my gut reaction, but it's absolutely… That's my first reaction, a stereotype is a tech start-up person. If I actually think about it, I then benchmark that against people that I know. Mostly men interestingly, so I do have a kind of, mostly men…. So, anywhere between 35 and 40, I may be doing some of them a favour actually (laughs). Some might be a bit older than that. Reasonably fit, physically fit. (Bobbie)

> So, maybe that's linked back to the metronome entrepreneur. It's constant, but people will stop using it when they are sick of hearing it. (Bobbie)

The idea of an influential repetitive narrative serves as a powerful metaphor to make sense of why participants jumped to very similar descriptions. The metronome is unchanging and rhymical. Designed to keep a person or a group of people to a set rhythm, the sound it produces is consistent and difficult to change. At times, hearing participant's descriptions felt like this, repetitive and unchanging, as if they had all rehearsed similar answers. Bobbie's use of 'typical' evokes a belief that an 'entrepreneur' shares common and recognisable features, a view which is strengthened by other's similar descriptions. Some accounts more than others provided further insight into why the rejection of the term 'entrepreneur' was so commonplace. Take Alex, for example. Her immediate reaction was to claim 'anyone' could be an entrepreneur, but her initial interpretations contradicted this when the focus turned to think of herself as an entrepreneur. She started with:

> I would say an entrepreneur is someone who just tries to set a path out for themselves, whether it's through a passion to ultimately to be...to you know, to, to fund their lives through that… I think with an entrepreneur; anybody could be it. Yes, it's probably more to do with self-belief or confidence. (Alex)

This was then followed later with:

> I've never really thought of myself as an entrepreneur because... I don't... I don't... although what we've built is kind of pioneering. It's not rocket science -it's not, we haven't created something exclusive. It's, there's other similar places around the world and in the UK. So, we've tried to be the best obviously. But, we're not... It hasn't just invented a cure for cancer for example that's like ahhhh amazing. (Alex)

What this perhaps indicates and reinforces is the sense of an entrepreneurial ideological chorus, and that it is deemed unobtainable. It suggests an entrepreneur is something extraordinary and unique, something otherworldly that only the very best - and thus very few - can be. Alex's language highlights that they have '*tried* to be the best' – however to her, her best is not extraordinary enough to be classed as entrepreneurial, for Alex her best does not seem good enough. The contradiction here is evident in Alex's initial description linking to something human and innate, 'self-belief' and 'confidence': an entrepreneur is just *someone* who chooses to do *something* they want to do. Here, exerting agency is emphasised as key to perceiving oneself as an entrepreneur. However, the added layer of complexity comes when Alex adds a relational layer. She tries to make sense of what that *something* is in relation to what others do and the outcomes they have, and that is where perhaps a gap in her identifying herself as an entrepreneur begins to occur. Tree Lady shares parallel views to Alex:

> Entrepreneur to me means someone who has a vision of something that might work business-wise, and they go forward and make that vision a reality and, yeah your initial vision might not be what your end goal is, but it doesn't always have to be set in stone. (Tree Lady)

The difference here is that for Tree Lady, on the surface being an entrepreneur is accessible, not defined by outcomes but is linked more to the fulfilment of an idea, whatever that may be. Tree Lady appears to switch between the use of the third person and second person. She changes from '*they'* to '*your'* midway through her explanation. Although on the surface this switch may appear to be minor, there is some significance to this. The initial description – *'they go forward and make that vision a reality'* - is far from Tree Lady's own reality. This perhaps gives a glimpse into the perceived narrowness of the term entrepreneur. Here Tree Lady perhaps illuminates how personal events (i.e., becoming a mother) impacted on her business and her feelings towards it, her priorities or in her words, *'end goal'* changed as a result of this.

However, this does this make her less ‘entrepreneur’ and more ‘business owner’? Her following response suggested this may have been the case:

> I was just a Managing Director… I suppose as an MD of a small business you do everything when you start off, you know, not only did we make the <product> but I delivered it, did the finances, bookkeeping, all the sales, everything, so you do it all. It’s not really what you think an entrepreneur does is it. It’s not what everyone says it is anyway. I think it’s dangerous, what people think and the reality, like it’s messy. (Tree Lady)

Tree Lady starts with ‘*I was just a Managing Director’*. This echoes Max’s earlier statement of *‘I’m just an everyday person’,* a declaration of his ordinariness – a deliberate separation of himself from the ‘entrepreneur’. The use of *‘I am just’* indicates an attempt to normalise themselves, indicating a sense of status between what they are and what they feel an entrepreneur is supposed to be. It also returns us to Melissa’s need to reinforce her preference for the safer, less loaded term ‘business owner’, but it also highlights Tree Lady viewing the entrepreneur as a comparable entity. There is a suggestion it was unobtainable in her position as an MD, and that an entrepreneur is more than just a business owner.

Again, we are reminded of both the misunderstood shark with *‘I think it’s dangerous, what people think and the reality’* and, Bobbie’s *‘metronome entrepreneur’* with ‘*It’s not what everyone says it is anyway*’. The distinction between entrepreneur and business owner that Bobbie describes, I think provides some level of understanding as to why Tree Lady feels she was ‘*just’* a managing director:

> It feels like a label that people say, stick on themselves to make themselves sound important. You know, and it’s just like, actually, I’m setting up a business, that doesn’t make me an entrepreneur, you know. That makes me someone who’s setting up a business. (Bobbie)

Up to this point, a pattern is beginning to emerge. What participants are providing in their descriptions of the entrepreneur, is one which does not appear to reflect their own realities. What they are not providing is a link between themselves and *being* an entrepreneur. The term appears to be ubiquitous and universal in its interpretation, perhaps highlighting the significant impact popular cultural representations can have. Within these interviews, such representations

transcended demographic differences. The subsequent accounts that followed, for some participants, including Bobbie, Max, Warrior, Joe and Bruce were that these representations were emotionally evocative. Their rationalisation of the term is revealed in how it made each of them feel when being called it. The extracts below evidence Warrior and Bruce's knee-jerk reactions of embarrassment.

> To me, it makes it sound like you have got the best business, the best person and have absolutely millions in the bank. That's the interpretation for me. Become an entrepreneur, and I think it gives a false persona. And it's a little bit more superior than any other business… I feel a bit embarrassed being called one. There's a lot of competitiveness, I think, and I don't think that's fair, because it puts immense pressure on businesses. (Warrior)

Again, for Warrior, trying to make sense of her relation to the label 'entrepreneur' only causes her to distance herself from it more. Her language use is particularly pertinent and loaded with meaning, '*become an entrepreneur, and I think it gives a false persona'.* This suggests an ethereality to the entrepreneur as something that cannot exist as a normal being. It is, to Warrior, these deceptive 'superior' expectations that result in what she's determined as unfair. It has become an 'immense pressure' in trying to achieve and live out these expectations. Warrior's embarrassment perhaps stems from a growing awareness that these expectations are beyond her own reach.

For Bruce, her embarrassment is more readily felt and the result of the negative experiences she had with her old boss, who identified himself as an entrepreneur. Thus, her comparison appears to reveal how she does not associate herself as like her boss - a self-identified entrepreneur - and his behaviour:

> If you were calling me that I would be a bit embarrassed. I don't know, I just think [pause]. Maybe it's because when I worked with my ex-boss, he was so like how not to be a business person, he was so egotistical, he was so like. He used to like yeah [to] brandish that term around and say oh, I'm an entrepreneur darling. (Bruce)

Instead, she differentiates his behaviour from a 'businessperson' as if this is a better way to be. As with Melissa, Bobbie and Tree Lady, they fail to provide any detail as to what a business-person is or might be. It is perhaps because this term has no apparent association to the negative images/ideals that they associate with 'entrepreneur'. Perhaps the term a businessperson provides a more relatable alternative, a route to distancing themselves from the value-laden expectations that appear to be associated with the label entrepreneur.

For Joe, the subject of the entrepreneur was a delicate one, entrepreneurial expectations haunted his account, hanging heavy in the air between us at times. Joe's response below exudes an air of frustration, perhaps demonstrating the impact of the unfairness Warrior was referring to:

> I hate it. I feel like it has a stigma as being this word that's used for people usually big-headed and cocky. They can get anywhere in life. So, for me, it's very misused. You know, sometimes I think it makes people think I'm something that I'm not. My parents still think I'm loaded, for example [laughs]. I'm not by the way. (Joe)

Joe's insinuation here is twofold. First, he precursors his response with '*I hate it'*, the term evoked an immediate visceral reaction for him. The use of the word '*stigma'* also suggests it is perhaps a dirty word, a description that comes with a sense of shame. The hatred perhaps stems from the false ideals and expectations that come with that; *'they can get anywhere in life'*. This wording, namely the use of '*they'*, is linked more to who an entrepreneur is, rather than what they do, it also creates an immediate separation between them and Joe. Again, we are faced with very similar experiences of how participants feel when these supposed entrepreneurial truths do not match up with their own sense of self.

Grounding Joe's responses to his context are pertinent in understanding his attitude towards the term entrepreneur. His business had ceased trading a month before our interview, and he felt forced to join the organisation that bought him out. He had gone from being an entrepreneur-employer to an employee, a reverse transition. He was still working in the same office and on the same premises, he just no longer owned any of it. When he set up his business, he had been labelled a success story by Governments and the industry he worked in. He had been put on a pedestal by others, hence perhaps why he followed up with:

> I think it sets people up to fall you know. Like from my experience what you're told it is to what it actually is, it's bullshit. Sorry. But it is. Think that's probably why I built myself like that you know. Even though I'm not 'there' anymore. I gave up because I didn't earn any of that. Like this is reality… inside the net …[pauses]… and outside is what you're supposed to be. (Joe)

Figure 25. Joe's model of himself

Joe's construction of himself neatly demonstrates, both visually and textually, the juxtaposition between Joe's self and ought '*supposed'* entrepreneurial self - *'I think it sets people up to fall you know'*. For Joe, debt played a huge part in his account. Thus, his reference to not earning here is both raw and revealing. Economic gains for Joe played a huge part in how he perceived the entrepreneur and his rejection of it. Not only did Joe lose out financially, but the added entrepreneurial expectations appear to have heightened his fall. Despite appearing to see his reality as distinct from these expectations (Figure 23), the fact that the entrepreneur is readily presented in the way Joe describes may heighten his feelings of being fed a now-familiar metronome of expectation.

I finish this subtheme by exploring Phoenix's understanding of what it means to be an entrepreneur. Although complex and nuanced, Phoenix's account neatly encapsulates why all nine participants distanced themselves from the label so readily. Phoenix was the only participant to indicate an initial acceptance of the term entrepreneur. However, on further reading, similarities began to reveal themselves. In the extract below, Phoenix's reaction is one that links directly to the images conjured up by other participants:

> I like the word entrepreneur, but I do not use it ever because I am the ultimate entrepreneur in the sense that everything I've touched again, I've done well out of it (Phoenix).

'Everything I've touched …., I've done well out of it' appears to be generic and non-committal, almost grandiose, but rich in illustrating the illusion of the entrepreneur as hero-like. It fulfils the stereotype other participants appeared to distance themselves from. His perception echoes that of the other nine participants in that the entrepreneur has extraordinary abilities to make something out of nothing. *'Everything I've touched'* evokes the Greek Myth of King Midas and the 'golden touch' - everything he touched would turn to gold (Hadjittofi, 2018). Aristotle uses this story as a warning, coining the term the 'vain prayer'; an embodiment of the darker side to greed and wealth (Hadjittofi, 2018). Although on the surface, such a statement from Phoenix, appears to be positive, as he further reveals there is perhaps more to this. It is only in the light of his later revelations that this rather grandiose response begins to make sense.

In contrast to the other nine participants, rather than rejecting the term, he sought to justify himself to me as the '*ultimate'* entrepreneur, immediately platforming himself. It felt that in light of the other participant's responses, this was a seemingly rehearsed response, metronomic once again. Since I positioned my research as 'about entrepreneurs', he was simply saying what he thought I wanted to hear to fulfil a stereotype. However, as the interview progressed and we began to delve deeper into Phoenix's experiences, it becomes clear his initial reaction might be born from a need to keep up appearances, a need to fulfil expectations and demonstrate his extraordinariness. However, as the extract below indicates, the curse of his golden touch began to emerge:

> So, they see me and <my wife> up on a pedestal, it makes me laugh when they say, 'local celebrities'… makes entrepreneurs a joke to me. Two pillars, people see us on a pedestal. People see us on a pedestal and see us through what people see through our front doors. The way people see us, and we're always on display. We've got a lot of following on Facebook and stuff like that. People see our happy little lives living on… People's perceptions and masquerade, it's knackering… You know Macbeth, right? Macbeth, it looks like the innocent flower… but it is the serpent underneath it. (Phoenix)

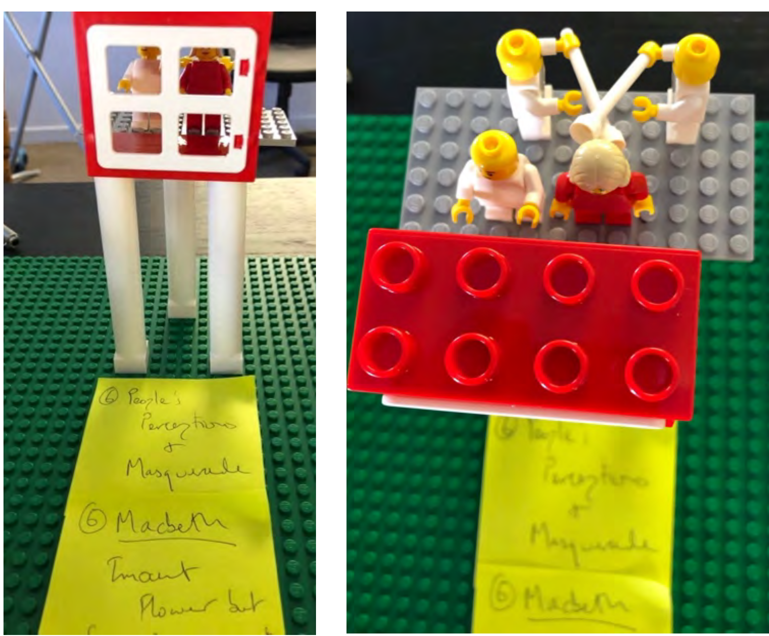

Figure 26. The Masquerade

The repetition of the word *pedestal* highlights just how far Phoenix feels he is viewed by individuals around him. Again, this is reinforced by the repetition of the notion of '*being seen'* perhaps alluding to the aesthetic, and more often than not, materialistic images associated with being an entrepreneur. The emphasis on aesthetics suggests this is significant to Phoenix and it is why his initial identification as an entrepreneur is then contradicted with *'being a joke to me'*.

The impact of needing to 'look the part' leads to a better understanding of Joe's description of how such entrepreneurial definitions are '*setting up people to fall'*. For Phoenix, that fall is high and very real, there is very little substance to the image he initially painted. The image he presents to the world, his '*masquerade'* in no way reflects his reality and implies he is simply performing a role that he wishes everyone else to see. Phoenix indicates that he understands the entrepreneur as not a genuine entity. However, his description of keeping up the pretence of being an entrepreneur, suggests a need to not be who he genuinely feels he is to maintain appearances. A contradiction begins to disclose itself here; it raises the question as to why Phoenix feels the need to maintain appearances? What does he gain from this? In trying to become an entrepreneur, he is perhaps only creating a larger distance between his known actual self and the self he wishes those around him to see. The darker, perhaps more toxic result of constantly managing between this so-called performance and his reality is captured through his use of Macbeth.

In sum, this subtheme introduces the possibility that the 'entrepreneur' is an illusionary role, crafted within popular narratives. It highlights the impact of influential entrepreneurial discourses, as all ten participants allude to similar notions in their narratives and as a result, distance themselves from them.

Although there was much convergence in how all participants interpreted the 'entrepreneur', divergences appeared themselves in how they interpreted gender. In the following subtheme, I turn to explore this divergence. Gender, particularly for female participants, appeared to add an additional layer of expectations, forming another reference point to how they make sense of their selves. As the following subtheme will explore, the impact of gendering was obvious, particularly for some female participants. Female participants spoke of personal 'transformation', often linking this to an enhanced 'self-belief' and distancing themselves as identifying as a woman. On the other hand, male participants made no overt reflections on personal transformation or growth. Instead, narratives focused more on a fulfilling of masculinised norms, and in some cases overtly demonstrating their maleness. I capture the influence of gendered expectations in the following subtheme as influential in the meaning-making frameworks of how participants tried to understand who they are, or who they ought to be.

5.2.2 Gendered Expectations

As explored earlier in Part Two (critical approaches to entrepreneurship) of my literature review, gender can be viewed as a relatively stable social construction; based on cultural norms that guide and constrain role players and can be considered as types of informal institutions (Ahl & Marlow, 2018). In rejecting identifying as entrepreneurs, there was little difference in participants' descriptions and their subsequent rejections. However, divergences were present through the way male and females would talk about themselves and their own experiences. Participants often use gendered language and stereotypes to make sense of particular experiences. Greene et al., (2013), define gender stereotypes as 'heuristic devices constructed from situated cues that prescribe the behaviours, values, and actions that males and females perform … if they are to be recognised as credible social actors' (p. 689). Credibility, and status, intersected with a need to either distance or emulate normative doings of gender.

This provided insight into the potential pervasiveness of masculinised and feminised norms present in participants contexts and how these impacted upon them. What was common

for both males and females, was that gendered norms provided additional levels of expectations on top of just being labelled an 'entrepreneur'. As such, I chose to highlight this and how it offers insight into how stereotypes are transmitted and transferred into social roles. Participants appeared to experience incongruity between their gender role and entrepreneurial stereotypes explored in the previous subtheme.

For Warrior(F), Alex(F), Bruce(F), Phoenix(M), Joe(M) and Max(M), the doing of gender appeared as a culturally hegemonic expectation in aspects of their experiences. I found this highlighted the hidden nature of expectations associated with gender. Many of the actions and behaviours associated with what it means to be a 'man', or a 'woman' are potentially deeply embedded. No direct questions about gender were asked, only if it came up in conversation did I probe participants' thinking to gain more insights. Indeed, the impact of gender norms only became apparent to me after the second or third stages of analysis, suggesting they are also firmly embedded within my own experiences.

On the other hand, the initial task of asking participants to choose pseudonyms and build their Lego selves provided an initial glimpse into the pervasiveness of gendering the entrepreneurial stereotype. For example, Bruce and Warrior took time in choosing their names. It felt, to some extent, they were using this as an opportunity to distance themselves as women, suggesting a disassociation between their gender and their entrepreneurial endeavours. In asking why she chose the name, Warrior explains:

> Because I feel like that's what I am *now.* Because how much I feel like I've grown as a person in the business, and I feel more stronger and more, like, confident about things. Yes. (Warrior)

There are some points of significance raised in this short, but poignant explanation from Warrior. The emphasis of what I am '*now'*, evokes a temporality to Warrior's sense of self and that she sees this growth as embedded within her venture. It also illuminates a temporal dimension to her personal growth, a past and present self and thus indicating a self that could perhaps be improved. In addition, her use of 'person' is genderless. However, the two descriptors she chooses to explain this change are that of a growing sense of 'strength', which she then clarifies as 'confidence' – distancing from associations of 'strength' as physically felt and seemingly masculinised, towards a more emotionally enacted sense of change.

Reflecting this emerging sense of strength that Warrior alludes to, Bruce decided to

adapt her Lego self to portray how she has become ‘stronger’ as a result of her entrepreneurial experiences (Figure 25):

> [Pause] Maybe instead of me holding the scissors I should hold like a giant tyre [laughing]. Because I am strong…. Like the world’s strongest woman. Yeah, I think that’s just I’m carrying it all aren’t I. (Bruce)

Figure 27. Bruce: the world’s strongest woman

For Bruce, her description of strength is embodied and readily felt. Yet, there is a sense that what she is carrying is beyond tangibility, more than anyone else can see or feel. This embodiment of strength is less about aesthetic strength or ‘looking’ strong, but more about feeling strong. In contrast, and perhaps highlighting a difference, Max talks about strength as fully embodied and enacted. Masculinities were implied through describing his need to be physically strong in order to fulfil his role as a father:

> I like the feeling; do you know what I mean? I would rather be strong like the kids love it whatever, the kids, it’s nice to be like that as well isn’t it? Because they love it, they just think of dad is so big and strong and I chuck them around. It’s just I like to be that person if you know what I mean? (Max).

Moving beyond their Lego selves, when reflecting their personal growth, Melissa, Bruce, Alex, Tree Lady and Bobbie used similar language. These women describe a growing sense of confidence, self-belief, or 'strength' as a way of making sense of how they have changed personally. It suggests an out-there-ness to these feelings; that they can be found if the right path is followed. That somehow in becoming a woman entrepreneur enables the participants to access traits they could never do otherwise. This is perhaps a symptom of gendering universally touted reasons why there is a lack of woman-entrepreneurs – because they 'lack confidence' and/or 'self-belief' and are required to be 'stronger' than other women (Business Wales, 2020). Not only do these views determine a priori assumptions about being a woman, but also insinuates that such traits are necessary for becoming an entrepreneur in the broadest sense. For example, Alex talks of her growth of confidence between *now* and *then* when discussing how she feels she has changed since starting her venture: '*Yes, it's probably more to do with self-belief or confidence. I do feel more confident now than then'* (p. 6). In trying to distil what this meant, and to try and understand what this change felt or looked like, I probed on this further during the interview:

> I: What's confidence to you?
>
> A: Confidence is... to me... would be willing to take a risk, a calculated risk. I'm not completely gung-ho [laughs] and it would be a calculated risk. Probably be less emotional about stuff. (Alex)

Alex immediately returns back towards familiar narratives raised in the previous subtheme. It suggests how she makes sense of being a woman and an entrepreneur. The initial reference to 'risk-taking', links to common traits that are associated with being an entrepreneur, one that is brave, opportunity seeking and willing to take a chance against all the odds (Nadin et al., 2020). In the same vein, Alex rejects that she is risk-taking by clarifying that this is not something she is comfortable within its literal sense. Rather, for Alex, confidence links to controlling herself and that being emotional is seen as detracting from being effective. Tree Lady and Warrior's response to a similar question provides additional insight:

> I think it's all about self-confidence really, you know, you feel vulnerable at the start because you're new to the industry, but then you get it sooner or later. (Tree Lady)

> I think it comes down to like your self-belief. When you've stayed home for so long and not in a workplace, to even put yourself back in anywhere is a challenge. (Warrior)

Tree Lady's reference to 'vulnerability' is revealing, reinforcing how starting a venture exposed Tree Lady to parts of herself she felt were not good enough. Feelings of exposure are also present in Warrior's response. Prior to starting her business, she describes herself as '*just a stay at home mum'* (Warrior). The use of 'just' again raises her belief that the perception of this is in some way less to what she does now. What then is present in Alex, Warrior, Bruce, Tree Lady, Melissa and Bobbie's worlds that influence them?

The effects of 'gendering' are also visible in the narratives of these women, with exaggerated differences leaving women feeling a need to prove their 'sameness' to, or in some cases being better than, men. For instance, Alex's earlier interpretation of confidence is related more to the control of emotions, which is perhaps linked to her feeling the need to prove herself as the same or indeed better than a man. She explains further:

> Because you have to prove yourself that little bit more as you might be seen, you know. You've got, you can't just be the same as Dave. You got to be better than Dave, to even be considered that you might be as okay as Dave. (Alex)

'You might be seen' is both informative and disconcerting. Alex expresses a need to prove herself by demonstrating her competence as the same or better than Dave. If she is herself, she will get found out for what she really is; perhaps she feels being herself is simply not enough to be accepted. The implication here is that because Dave is a man, and Alex, a woman, there is a need to demonstrate a sameness to Dave rather than emphasising her differences.

Further, Warrior addresses how women are seemingly all regarded in the same way, and how this gendering impacts them:

> I think women are pigeon-holed. *I'm* not. Haven't allowed it. I was at the start when I first started out doing the journey. What I don't like is people thinking that women need extra support, like we need special help or something, not just by men either. I've been invited to do so many talks to women on these support courses; you know what I mean, don't you? I think

> it just encourages women to think they need extra help like men don't? But I think that's what it is. (Warrior)

What Warrior captures here is that gender differences become salient by the availability of support mechanisms specifically aimed at women. Rather than acting as a platform of equity, instead they insinuate that women lack the required skills needed to be a successful entrepreneur. In Warrior's case, by being told you lack something because you are a woman, and therefore need 'extra-help' only increases feelings of being less able than a man. For Warrior, this association seemingly plays into her attempts to resist being seen as a woman, further emphasised by her refusal to be 'pigeon-holed'. This might provide an insight on her decision to label herself as 'Warrior' for this project. As Warrior rallies against her own vulnerabilities, she also challenges a wider and more ubiquitous stereotype – the woman-entrepreneur.

In our discussion, Bobbie also referenced stereotypes. She highlighted feelings of insecurity in relation to describing herself to others as a 'tech CEO':

> B: I think… 'how the hell am I going to create that [the right culture] when I'm not a typical CEO of a tech start-up?'.
>
> I: What's a typical CEO to you?
>
> B: Of a tech start-up… Jeans, t-shirt, reasonably young. So, probably you know, the mid-30s. You know, I'm the mid-40s. Mid 30s prepared to go out for beers and all the rest of it… physically fit, male… Probably hasn't got a five-year-old daughter at home... (Bobbie)

Here, Bobbie references assumptions relating to gender, age, aesthetics and motherhood, that inform her frame of reference about who can be an entrepreneur, specifically in tech. Popular images of the 'tech CEO' become a relational reference for Bobbie in how she makes sense of herself as she believes others may perceive her. The materiality of success is evoked in the description of the jeans and t-shirt, perhaps also highlighting how formalised the once informal has become. A new uniform of success, but only tailored for those 'reasonably young', 'physically fit' and male enough to wear it. Such uniform appears unfamiliar, forming a barrier in her ability to regard herself as exactly what she is, a tech CEO.

Phoenix and Bruce used gender stereotypes in relation to their own contexts and backgrounds, in the hope of performing their roles as business owners with a greater level of credibility. Both had chosen to build a business within the hairdressing industry. Each focused on the stereotypes they believed to be associated with it, prompting them to discuss gender and in some cases, sexuality. The impact of the stereotypical male hairdresser reared itself throughout Phoenix's interview. The result led to Phoenix demonstrating levels of feminiphobia (Johnson & Morrison, 2007), a tendency to temper examples of non-normative masculinity through an emphasis on participation in more typically masculine pursuits. For example, he openly discusses how he dealt with other males in his local pub who 'pushed' this:

> They always think, 'Oh, fucking faggots' and stuff like that and then he got a bit bolshie with me after the game on Saturday and I was like, 'Oi, what are you being like that for now?' And he tried pushing me, and I just went… guillotined him…(Phoenix)

Violence is assumed to be one of the most uncivilised, uncontrollable and primal features of masculinity (Giazitzoglu & Down, 2017). Here Phoenix appears primal, not only is he enacting his masculinity but also appears to use this to assert his heterosexuality, suggesting a deliberate recognition of a stereotype. This suggests a need to perform correct maleness, which he feels his work is not associated with. Phoenix's discomfort with being perceived as less masculine refers to what he regards as a socially preferred and dominant style of masculinity that he is familiar and comfortable with. He provides insight that such views are socially embedded in his context: *...Putting up with the shit and negativity and the step-father going, 'Oh, fucking hell, what are you wearing? Fucking hell, you look like a fucking poofter.* After discussing the fight he recently got into, Phoenix went on to explain what, and more specifically, who persuaded him to continue to train as a hairdresser:

> I couldn't do that [hair dressing], it's not my persona, do you know what I mean? All this cockiness and chest out. He was like, 'No, look at you, you're always immaculate, your clothes are different, you dress well.' I did, I used to go out shopping in a shirt and stuff like that, and he said, 'Try it.' I said, 'No, mate, it's for poofs.' He said, 'Well, I was going to do it' ex-military man. I was like, 'Really?' And he changed my perception of it. (Phoenix)

In this extract, Phoenix bounces between aesthetic stereotypes of what it means to be a 'man' in his world. Phoenix positions himself as typically masculine, 'cockiness and chest out'. He describes being identified as different due to the clothes he wears, not by the way he behaves. This suggests a separation between who he *is* (cocky, chest out) and what he *does* (dresses well). For Phoenix, to perform his maleness is to feel masculine. The importance of 'performing' maleness is strengthened by his reference to the impact and influence a 'military man' had on him. The soldier is almost always perceived as male, an embodiment of what it means to be a man. For Phoenix, the implication is that for him to accept a career in what he deems to be a feminised industry would take the ultimate man to persuade him, a 'military man'.

Notably, the stereotypes that Phoenix and Bruce explicitly reject and indeed, resent were alluded to by Bobbie:

> You know, there are lots of micro-businesses, but they tend to be beauticians or hairdressers or whatever it is, you know. So, it's really stereotypical, which is a bad message. I've never bothered to dig around behind it. And yes, I can also think of two or three great, brilliant female entrepreneurs who I've had the pleasure to spend time with who I think are really inspirational. (Bobbie)

Bobbie illustrates her differences as she distances herself from the hairdresser micro-business 'stereotype'. Although again, little detail is given as to why this is a 'bad message', or indeed, why being beauticians or hairdressers cannot be influential entrepreneurs in their own right. In this subtle inclusion, Bobbie points to a lack of legitimacy. Hearing this, Bobbie's earlier allusion to the jeans and t-shirt wearing tech CEO begins to make sense; it is perhaps this she wishes to emulate but feels unable to compete. Bobbie appears to use the hairdresser stereotype to legitimise her own venture. When considering this in light of the interpretations of Phoenix and Bruce, it demonstrates the impact of gendering as a means to validate or indeed, undermine what is considered entrepreneurial or not.

Finally, I discuss Joe's experiences. So far, gendered expectations have guided participants reflections. They present as a set of ideals to resist, motivate or conform to. Joe begins to illuminate this in describing himself:

> I'm not your typical bloke, you know. Like I do a physical job, and I keep fit. But I don't have many friends. It's not that I'm not social, like, my wife says I'm shy,

> and I think I am to be honest with you. But because I have my own business, people expect me, like… to be 'bigger', if you know what I mean? (Joe)

Like Max, Joe juxtaposes himself against narratives of normative masculinity, which generate feelings of disconnection for Joe. Not only are his expectations linked to being a 'business owner' but they are embedded into masculinised norms of physicality and what Joe terms as 'bigger'. This 'bigger' can be interpreted as beyond what Joe presents to the world physically, which for him does not match what is expected. Intriguingly, despite alluding to lack of confidence by describing himself as 'shy', narratives of a lack of self-belief did not appear in Joe's narrative. What becomes clear is that such a disconnect between 'looking' male and 'feeling' male, in light of owning a business took an emotional toll on Joe:

> Yeah, so I was in a bad place. Pretty dark to be honest with you. Found it hard to get out of bed and stuff, you know. I just couldn't deal with everything. I was young, just married, [wife's name] and just starting out and I thought it would just be easy, you know? I was up to my blinking eyeballs in debt from buying the van and the house and stuff. I honestly thought I'd be minted in a year [laughs]. Just went downhill from there really, all a bit of a blur… But yeah… It's important to tell you this. (Joe)

We begin to get a real sense here of the weight of expectation Joe felt in the initial starting of his venture '*I just couldn't deal with everything*'. Entrepreneurial expectations from the previous subtheme weave themselves into Joe's explanation. There are distinct roles – perhaps a glimpse into what Joe means by '*everything*', husband, business owner, entrepreneur. In not fulfilling the norms associated with such roles, the impact is directly felt by Joe. Resulting in questioning who he is if he is not any of them. Joe also directs this reflection towards me, *'it's important to tell you this*', signalling the significance this period of time had on him. In building this with Lego (Figure 26), and reflecting further, Joe provides insight as to why this is.

> So like this is me, young but feeling old, hands up over my ears like this. I'm trying to shut out all the noise and this stuff, these are the expectations around me. [Pauses] You know what they say about quicksand, right? [Pauses] Like you… if you struggle, you sink more quickly, whereas if you do slow movements [waves arms slowly], you're more likely to not drown. I was struggling and going down

> quick… You just… Don't expect that from a man-in-a-van, do you? [Pauses]. I… there's an expectation that you just keep going, especially around here. (Joe)

Figure 28. Joe in Quicksand

While building his model, Joe reflected on expectations in a way that made them visible – not just through the use of the Lego. His use of the metaphor of quicksand is macabre, a realisation that such expectations not only formed a meaning-making framework for Joe but an existential one. It also highlights feelings of a lack of control for Joe, emphasised further when taking on a number of employees (explored in the second superordinate theme). It was a breaking point for him and led me to wonder how such expectations were so readily felt to Joe? In this description, Joe uses a definitive masculine image to stress his difference: the man-in-the-van. This is perhaps in to reference to the stereotypical 'white van man'. This "*White Van Man'* coined by the journalist Jonathon Leake (Leake, 1997) was used symbolise and define aggressive, self-employed traders and tradesmen (Smith, 2013). The architype of a 'proper British man' (Smith, 2013) that brings together narratives of masculinity and enterprise. However, to this, he also adds '*especially around here'*, which suggests the potential for a further influential force that amplifies certain gendered and entrepreneurial expectations over others. Joe grew up and continues to live in the Welsh Valleys, specific reference to the expectations associated with the area were also shared with other participants from similar backgrounds to Joe: Bruce, Phoenix and Max. The following and final subtheme, I investigate the notion of civility in more depth in more depth.

5.2.3 Regional Expectations

Common themes of a communal moral obligation, reputation and respectability emerged across the narratives of participants who had grown up, and now own a business in the same region of Wales, The Valleys. These particular participants' experiences related to the concept of civility (Jeffrey et al., 2018). It suggests that the geographically and thus culturally bounded nature of the Welsh Valleys had a significant effect on participants sense of self. This effect was not found in the narratives of participants who had not grown up in the Valleys. I found it shaped how participants drew meaning from their entrepreneurial endeavours. Participants felt their actions were a fulfilment of purpose, a striving for status within these communities. Rather than leaving their communities, many of them saw a need to improve their environments.

Alex, Warrior, Max, Phoenix, Bruce and Joe, who are all from the Valleys, spoke about a motivation to prove they could be different from other people from the same area. In being different, the participants talked of a 'need', rather than wish, to give back, and/or be a role model to others; suggesting that the norm was not to do this. Participants seemed to be attempting to balance or at times, mediate between two competing memberships: one shaped by where they were from; and the other born from a narrative that suggests owning a business is the fulfilment of a moral obligation, as a means to an end. Such an interaction works in a way that leaves participants relating to a Valleys culture that they wish to distance themselves from, yet felt they, as individuals, could also change in some regard. As such, notions of moral selfhood surfaced in rationalising the act of starting their ventures. Their ventures appeared to provide a vehicle towards finding meaningful work and were regarded as a means to reject socio-cultural norms captured by Bruce below.

> But I didn't want to be that, and again, I suppose I didn't want to be like a Valley statistic. Just like you are born there, live there, die there, don't really do anything apart from there's no opportunity, nobody really gives a damn. You go on benefits; your friends tell you how to have babies and wangle the system, and I was like I don't want to be. I knew I wouldn't be like that, but I didn't want to be like that either. (Bruce)

Spatiotemporal notions of being stuck within an embedded quagmire of cultural norms is something Bruce wishes to resist. Bruce implies here that the odds are stacked against you

if you are born in the Valleys region, but more importantly, there are seemingly accepted practices within the area that she wishes to rally against; *'nobody gives a damn'*. Here, the impact of socio-cultural expectations associated with a place become salient. Two dimensions are being asserted. Firstly, for Bruce, not being 'a Valley statistic' speaks to how she feels that those who are from her area are perceived as all the same. Further, the use of 'statistic' is particularly telling. It is clinical and inhumane, highlighting a political tendency to use geography as a loose form of identity. Secondly, desires for civility become salient in Bruce's desire to be something more than this, to demonstrate care for a world beyond the Valleys to be different '*I didn't want to be like that*'. It takes her entrepreneurial endeavours beyond an economic means to an end. It points towards an ontological awareness – an assertion of what is perhaps seen as a better-regarded way to live and be. Such a realisation of a need to be a certain way suggests how entrepreneurial activities restore a sense of purpose, and in Bruce's case, an assertion of a moral/civilised self.

Feeling significant through productive means, perhaps entails being recognised or feeling special for contributing something as a way of resisting the norms around you, as Joe explains:

> Like everyone wants to feel like they're important, don't they? And I feel like everyone wants to see themselves as an important person. Like I want people, it would be nice if people looked up to me as they would someone else. I'm treated different now I don't have this [my business]. (Joe)

Joe explains that to him, to feel important is to be recognised as important by others. It begins to suggest a transcendence between a private and public self – a notion propagated by civility (Boyd, 2006). By being different, and standing out, but for the 'right' reasons, you are thus recognised, and that has a direct impact on your selfhood.

Turning to Warrior, the following extract provides a glimpse of the cultural norms being resisted by Alex and Bruce. Within this Warrior demonstrates why such norms led her to a feeling of being unfulfilled:

> And like, you know, I never brought any money into the house for years. Because I had the babies, but that's considered okay around here, isn't it? And now it's like, I feel it's my turn to feel worthy, you know.

> I got into university… So I was already sort of scratching that little itch because I was feeling quite fulfilled because I actually got my brain working again and I was thinking, and I actually felt really smart, *really* smart, and I was like, I did this, and I passed it… and I was so proud of myself because I was like I can't believe I've actually done this, you know? And I conquered Motorways! Little me from the Valleys – I never used to drive outside this town. (Warrior)

Cultural norms communicated as expectations are riddled within Warrior's extract. *'I had the babies, but that's considered okay around here isn't it*', is suggestive of a gendered norm that is culturally accepted practice within Warrior's contexts: women have babies and men go to work. It's mechanistic, a reference again to the rhetoric of being a Valleys statistic. For Warrior, the impact of fulfilling regional expectations results in feelings of not being '*worthy*'. This points to feeling unfulfilled, not good enough. Warrior's resistance to these feelings came with her acceptance for a university place. Her repeated declaration of *'actually felt really smart, really smart*', is telling, '*actually*' is defiant in its use, a revelation that she is more than what she felt she was.

Notions of 'worth' are also referred to by Alex when talking about trying to find people to work for her. Though frustrated with contextually embedded cultural practices, Alex seemingly finds worth, and purpose, in aiding individuals from her community:

> And it's the area, sadly—the pool of people. The pay isn't great, so it doesn't attract. But also, sadly in the Valleys you can probably earn more money if you're not in work. So although they're physically there they've got no drive, they've got no ambition... I find it really frustrating, but you do feel a need to help them yeah. (Alex)

Like Bruce, Alex uses the reference '*them*'. This is perhaps a way to distance herself from what she feels is not the 'right' way to be. The use of '*need to help*' is where her own moral obligation becomes apparent. Rather than want, the need is suggestive of a directive force. This perhaps begins to reveal an unseen values system that she does not wish to accept, but instead change. For Bruce and Alex, seeing themselves in relation to the Valleys only serves to highlight how different they are to those around them; a longing for a different status.

Joe provides further insight into where Alex's frustration might come from. In the extract below, Joe signals a need for more agentic and individualist thinking as a mean to improve 'the people' in his area:

> I really don't like it when people blame other things for not going their way. The people around here they moan about the streets being rough. Well, it's you making the streets rough. Yeah. Don't blame them. Like I know the government can do like more funding for like activities, but you're not exactly helping anything. I don't like it when people blame other people. It's your life; it's purely down to yourself. I'll use an example; there's a band I like called The King Blues, and the lead singer used to be homeless. He used to sell the big issue. If you get from being homeless to being a successful musician like that, then there's no reason why you should make these excuses for stuff not going your way. (Joe)

For Joe, a better society is one where those take responsibility for themselves and rely less on other people *'it's purely down to yourself'.* Joe attempts to comprehend this thinking by reaching to a rags-to-riches tale, suggestive of the neoliberal ideals of individualism and personal responsibility. This captures the paradoxical nature of civility as a concept because it lies precisely at the interstices of public and private life, social norms and moral laws. As with his favourite singer, it seems Joe regards success as something an individual is purely responsible for. It highlights that Joe feels that demonstrating the 'right' kind of behaviour is functional in minimising how your environment determines your potential.

Paradoxically, however, this indicates that civility may serve quite the opposite function as a facilitator of individuality and environmental indeterminism. In the cases of Joe, Alex and Bruce, civility, in contrast to the more intense and intimate sociability of community, entails a kind of wilful distancing from the obligations forced upon them by the all-encompassing nature of Valleys life. To some extent, they reject these as a form of incivility regarding it as a barrier to their own sense of progress. Insofar as civility represents a way of retaining some element of privacy or self-containment in such an environment, it suggests that autonomy and individuality are possible only when separated from the embedded socio-cultural norms held within a local community.

The notion of civility was also in Max's account. When asking Max about the future of his venture, he replied instantly as *'King of Europe*', followed quickly by '*Being the best, that's what I would say*'. I probed further asking 'what do you mean'? His response reflects a switch

to reacting to issues that were far more localised. A desire for growth appears to be trumped by a desire to help those within Max's immediate context:

> Because you won't believe how many, it's hard, like in the summer holidays, young people come in and they have got nothing, like the school up here, they have just brought in this new uniform, it's ridiculous in price.
>
> Yeah it's horrible, you see people coming in, and you know basically they haven't got a pot to piss in, do you know what I mean… and it's hard, that's what I find hard. And it's like, I will chuck them in a free pair of socks or something just to try… It's seeing people who are blinking, yeah it's hard, I don't know, it is hard seeing that. But I can't save everyone can I? (Max)

After describing who Max feels are in need he follows with 'do you know what I mean' – as if there is an unsaid understanding between us about the level of poverty that exists in Max's area. The impact of this desire, or expectation, to provide begins to surface towards the end of this extract. Though Max is unable to articulate how it makes him feel, there is an awareness that giving a pair of socks will never be enough, emphasised by a repetition of '*it's hard'*. This perhaps is Max attempting to express the realities of owning a business within an economically deprived area. Entangled within this, is his own membership of the local community, a place where he grew up and now lives. Such embeddedness may be a reason for Max not quite being able to make sense of why he feels what he does, or a need act on it. He later tries to capture this in discussing how he uses people entering his shop as a platform to change others:

> But it's nice to try and convert, you see like the people who come in with attitudes, and it's like, I don't know, I want to make the world a better place sort of thing, it's strange in a way, but it's like, oh right we can convert you, that's what I find, I don't know. (Max)

Max's use of the term 'convert' relates back to an earlier point on the paradox that presents civility as a form of conformity yet requires a focus on individualism to achieve it. Additionally, Max perhaps perceives his shop as a public space to change attitudes in order to 'make the world a better place'. What Max perceives as better perhaps can be found in a continual reference to a need to help others, and this may be what he feels others around him

should also demonstrate. Of course, such thinking and use of ‘conversion’ draw parallels to religious proselytising in that there is some belief that following a different path will result in a better world or way of life. Thus, there is a need to consciously influence others to achieve a more approved way of living. Phoenix alludes to this need to change others, but rather than use more direct approaches he describes guiding others to ‘greatness’.

> But then it’s me trying to effectively change people. Now, I understand you can’t change people… I’m trying to look… I call it guidelines to greatness. (Phoenix)

Again, like Phoenix, the language is ideological in nature. However, a key question remains in asking who are they trying to change and why? Answers to the former, lay strewn throughout each of their interviews with constant reference to the impact of living in the Valleys and those that live within them. More complex to understand, perhaps, is the answer to why? To want to change requires motivation, an awareness of a different and maybe, better, way to be. In the rejecting of one set of social expectations, new ones appear to be forming.

In a later part of his interview, Phoenix captures some deeper reasoning behind the experiences described by Joe, Max, Alex, Bruce and Warrior and also a motivation for a need to change themselves and others around them. A search for respectability and reputation as enacted goals were emergent in what Phoenix labels as the need for ‘*legacy’*.

> What gets me off my arse is that one day my son will look at it and say, ‘Do you know, my dad was a legend, like, look what he did for this place, the legacy like.’ Not like people around here. I think of my funeral all the time, what would people say? Just another hurdle in the wall to get over isn’t it. (Phoenix)

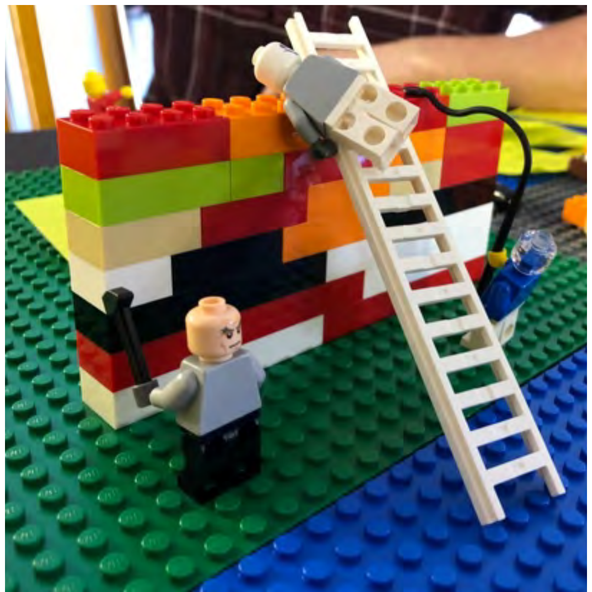

Figure 29. Phoenix's 'Wall'

Such a reference to legacy burdens Phoenix by facing the limits to his own mortality. The question is, why does this matter to Phoenix? His conversation switches from thinking about his son's own perception of him as a '*legend*' to thinking more widely of *'what would people say'?* The impact is perhaps that it leaves Max and Phoenix thinking beyond what each of their businesses does, and more so about the social implications, their actions have within their Valleys communities. It is akin to planting a seed, knowing you will not live to see the blossom, a forced detachment from the results of your endeavours. Regarding their entrepreneurial ventures as building a legacy adds endlessness to their endeavours, that is beyond the limits of materiality and temporality; suggestive of a higher purpose to their actions, a search for greater meaning.

Further, Phoenix reflects that his success can be achieved and mirrored by others through some form of self-actualisation.

> Look, I think we're one of the best countries in the world, I am British through and through but with the staff, it's trying to educate them, there is no education in schools. I had a teacher asking me to come to do a talk in a local school. He said; 'You're such a young boy, yet, you lead a young team, how do you do it?' I'm like, 'Well, I tell them how it is; I tell them what they can be.' (Phoenix)

Phoenix demonstrates that he regards his purpose as educating others as a fix to the lack of education available. Here the notion of civility is perhaps one that revolves around setting an example for others – 'you can be like me'. Phoenix spends time expressing how different he is to those around him, but he deems it acceptable if others follow in his path. Additionally, there is a sense here that Phoenix, Max and Joe in their talk of trying to change others, are attempting to create a new normal for their localities. A more acceptable normal that refers to a set of values they deem more important for building a better environment around them.

This sub-theme appears to be a culmination of the previous two subthemes being enacted within a specific context, the Welsh Valleys. The intimate ways in which the dialectics between identifying as both business owner and community member are entangled, and central to these entanglements is the desire for being something different to '*them*'.

5.2.4 Theme Summary

'Great Expectations' focused on how participants attempt to make sense of themselves, exploring what became commonly noticeable in their narratives. The discussion of their entrepreneurial selves was often contradictory and heavily reliant upon the use of stereotypes. It exposes how such broadly used constructs are subjectively experienced. The difficulties of identifying as an entrepreneur is made even more complex when intersecting with notions of gender and civility. I suggest that participants' perceptions of entrepreneurs may owe more to narrative conventions, than to their lived experiences, hence the distancing from identifying as one. The added weight of gendered and contextual expectations demonstrates the relevance of wider discourses and structures on the impact of feelings of selfhood. For women, rejecting gender appeared to play a greater role in their motivation to be different. Whereas male participants appeared to want to fulfil expectations, rather than distance themselves from them – perhaps seeking a need to perform their masculinity. Civility added a highly situated dimension to the sense-making of participants from or operating within, the Welsh Valleys.

The expectations set out in each of the three subthemes explore constructs that continually contradict and diffract one another. The result is that often participants expressed a temporality to their selfhood, noting a transition of some form or another. Certain transitions appear to be more obvious than others, as identified in the third subtheme. Of the ten interviews, there was no clear sense of any 'entrepreneurial identity'. Instead, participants demonstrate a constant negotiation between different parts of themselves and their worlds.

All ten participants communicated their experiences in a way that demonstrated an inability to separate their selves from their business. Thus, greater attention has been paid to each participant's 'biography', as part of their sense-making with regard to starting and growing (via employees) their businesses. This was often discussed as a state of flux between multiple reflexively constructed 'selves', that to some extent, alludes to Giddens's (1991) conceptualisation of identity:

> Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography. Identity here still presumes continuity across time and space: but self- identity is such continuity as interpreted reflexively by the agent. (pp. 53 - 54)

In this instance, biography is not an objective, detached record of life. Rather it is the life as constructed by the person in the present (in this instance during their interviews). Identity construction in organisation studies literature has been conceived as a mutually co-constructive (and constant) interaction between individuals and social structures (Ybema et al., 2009). The co-construction is enacted in the interplay between an individual's 'self-identity' (their own notions of who they are) and their 'social identity' (the idea of that person in external discourses, institutions and culture) (Watson, 2009). What this superordinate theme demonstrates is that more often than not, 'social-identity' appears to play a larger role in how participants construct and reconstruct themselves through performing, accepting or rejecting constructs, discourses and socio-cultural influences. This thinking seemed to guide how participants not only reflected upon themselves but also provided insight into their decisions to start, run or end their ventures.

In the next section I focus on themes investigating the non-employer to employer transition. Moving away from participants' understanding the self, the following superordinate theme *'Conflicts of interest'* focuses on the employer transition in-depth, and how participants make sense of it. Within this, I explore what is it *really* like going through this transition for participants. Firstly, I highlight how relational challenges dominated reflections; divergences became clear in discussing who was hired and if they were already within participants social networks or not. Subsequently, '*what if they don't turn up?'* illuminates how conflicts became evident in participants expressing a need for employees to demonstrate the same level of commitment - or perhaps meaning - participants felt towards their ventures. *'The wake-up call'*

reveals how such imbalances of interest manifest in participants needing to formalise and set structures in place. This provides a glimpse into a crucial turning point at the beginning of an organisation's formation.

5.3 Superordinate Theme Two: Conflicts of Interest: Me, Myself and My Employee(s)

When conversations shifted to discuss participants' transitions from non-employer to employer, several potential inhibitors and enablers became significant. For each participant, the lines between their working and private lives are blurred and often appear entangled; their businesses are them. When it came to reflect on their experiences of hiring their initial employees, such entanglements presented themselves in nuanced and complex ways, in effect a series of relational conflicts.

This superordinate theme is structured to echo how participants described dealing with their day-to-day realities of hiring and managing member(s) of staff as a relational shift. Initially, these relationalities were bounded by an informal connectedness based on interests that were regarded as mutually beneficial: in helping them, they are helping me. Participants all expressed a need for their employees, whether friends, family or strangers, to share the same level of interest in their ventures as they did. As Bish states, '*it's quite simple really, you just want them to love it as much you do'* (p. 41). However, a common shift in recognition occurs at a point where participants begin to realise employees' interests do not match their own. The reliance placed on employees appears to be detrimental to participants' abilities to manage them. As interests between employer and employee diverge, they often culminate at a point in the venture where employees were felt to be needed the most. At this point participants appear to try and mediate feelings of dependence by attempting to formalise relationships. A need for more transactional relationships was discussed by participants as they addressed feelings of imbalance.

I start by investigating how the employment of others is interpreted as a meaning-making exercise. *The Mother Hen: finding meaning through hiring others,* explores how participants reflected on their relationship as symbiotic. Maternal and paternalistic language was commonly used in discussing how participants negotiated their relationships. The second subtheme; *'What if they don't turn up?',* reveals a divergence in the accounts of those who employed people they knew, '*insiders'*, rather than people they did not, what Warrior terms as '*outsiders'* (p. 32). Initial benefits of relational familiarity that come with hiring a friend or family member appeared to result in feelings of frustration. Ultimately for some, it came at a personal cost. For Melissa and Joe, their experiences of hiring their friends were particularly challenging. Both cite their experiences of this transition as having a significant impact on their venture and selves.

This subtheme also explores a noted shift in discussions about their employer-employee relationships. For most participants, initial discussions of a perfect employer-employee symbiosis became lost in discussing the transition in more depth. In discussing their experiences, relational boundaries became more difficult to define and chaotic in their application, often captured through the discussion of a need for shared trust. Participants spoke at length of an inversed relationship where their growing dependency on the employee was evident.

Finally, *'the wake-up call'* examines more closely where feelings of imbalance reach a climax. This shift was a significant commonality across all narratives. Often this occurred after a negative event resulting in a need for order amongst the chaos. Participants spoke of a need for more formality, a need for something transactional as opposed to relational. It appeared, to some extent that this was the beginning of a need to organise in order to manage the demands of participants worlds, both outside and inside their ventures.

5.3.1 The Mother Hen: Finding Meaning in Hiring Others

This subtheme was common in that participants felt that becoming an employer was a means of helping others. The relationship was beyond transactional, contractual or financial. In some respects, echoes of civility were alluded to, but this was less about helping change society and more about helping others to help one's self.

In describing why she decided to hire one of her first employees, Alex reflects that this was less about fulfilling the needs of her venture:

> You know Mother hen will still be lurking around and stuff. But I feel that I've given everybody a good opportunity to carry on now. People who... like little Josh like… You know he's not that 15-year-old kid who'd just walked… Well, his Mum, well, he got kicked out. He's not that person anymore. And we've got a business where if people want to work hard, then they'll be welcome forever. That's quite a nice legacy to have. (Alex)

The 'Mother Hen' label could be interpreted as a form of maternalism and how Alex views her role as an employer. There is an assertion that 'mother knows best' and that her experiences are akin to the demonstration of motherly strengths, that her business is regarded as an

alternative family. 'He's *not that person anymore'* is definitive. Alex asserts a sureness about her role in transforming individuals like Josh, regarding this as part of her enterprise's legacy. Once again, notions of civility appear but are not as context-specific as in Subtheme 5.2.3. However, the employer-employee relationship became more of a focus for meaning-making:

> It's hard having employees because you kind of get involved with, naturally… You know their families, you know, you know where they live, you know that they're hard up for money and... Things like that you kind of get a bit too attached and it can be a bit too emotional [laughs]. (Alex)
> So that's me overseeing - making sure they're all safe... But it's got to be an enjoyable environment, otherwise... well sadly as I know mental health issues exacerbate and yeah things get worse. (Alex, Figure 28)

Figure 30. Keeping everyone safe

The reference to 'having employees', implies a form of ownership that comes some level of unspoken responsibility. Alex alludes to this responsibility as relating to the knowledge that juxtaposes her own situation with those she hires. The 'having' is then exchanged for being 'attached'. This change in language is sensitive to how knowledge can change a relationship from being transactional to relational. It relates to something distinctly human in our ability to empathise. Although a strength, Alex exposes how this pushes the boundaries of what she is comfortable with; it is '*too'* much, '*too emotional'*.

When reflecting on her Lego build (Figure 28), Alex begins to weave in her own experiences of poor mental health. Perhaps positioning her own understandings of health as a catalyst for how she regards herself as an employer, and therefore how she perceives her employees. It offers a different implication to '*making sure they're all safe'* insofar as it provides a glimpse into a relationship that reaches beyond a simple labour exchange. 'Safety' here alludes to being responsible for someone's wellbeing in the loosest sense, or the factors that contribute to someone feeling happy. Alex perhaps is aware of her limits but seeks meaning in providing ways that seek to fulfil herself and her employees.

Similarly, both Bruce and Warrior discuss 'helping' others; providing opportunities for those who otherwise might not have them. Again, a two-way relationship is implied by giving someone a chance. Warrior's awareness of this is through what she describes as offering a '*lifeline'*:

> I suppose you're giving somebody a bit of a lifeline really, aren't you? Because you're responsible for them getting paid, which means you're responsible for potentially them paying their rent and getting their food (Warrior).

Responsibility is often regarded as an unseen burden that speaks to some form of greater influence or power. It's not clear what the impact of this is for Warrior, or where this influence comes from. These better illuminate Alex's interpretation of keeping her employees' safe'. There are notions of maternalistic behaviours, a demonstration of care that goes beyond the venture's needs.

Phoenix also alludes to the concept of responsibility in a similar vein to Warrior. For Phoenix, the meaning of being an employer was linked to the role of an educator.

> Therefore, employing people, I understand it's all about education. I've got this thing called Guidelines: The Great Message. So, then, basically, I'm setting them up to succeed. I never set anyone up to fail…
>
> Like one guy, the other guy who is sleeping in this office, I said, 'Only you are responsible for your actions' he said, 'Why is it?' He's been really shot down lately. He's thirty-two years of age, and I can't understand, but the

> rescuer in me is keeping him here, but yet, I don't want to lose the investment I've spent in him as well. (Phoenix)

There are some grand assertions within Phoenix's account. He regards his role as something greater, a '*rescuer'*. Such an understanding results in feeling a level of responsibility that is far beyond what is needed to run an enterprise. By providing an employee with lodging above his shop Phoenix indicates his ability to provide for others is beyond providing a payslip. However, Phoenix expresses frustration at his employee for not being *'responsible'* in the way Phoenix would wish him to be. This declaration contradicts Phoenix's desire to '*keep'* his employee because of the level of '*investment'* he has put into him. The investment could be interpreted as personal, temporal and/or economic. I think Phoenix draws from all three. It suggests a nervousness of what happens if too much responsibility is given to an employee.

Further, for Phoenix, having too much responsibility isn't really what determines a successful employee. Instead, taking responsibility determines why *he* (Phoenix) is successful. I think that for Phoenix, success is firmly bounded and determined by his own venture's needs, not his employee's. His lifeline only extends so far, and perhaps Phoenix prefers his employees to be attached to it.

Warrior also highlights this inherent contradiction when describing how her employee feels about working for her.

> Yes, she loves it, I think, for herself, and she doesn't need to answer to anybody. Which is nice, is the amount of times she's pulled me to one side and said 'thank you so much for taking a chance on me.' (Warrior)

'She doesn't need to answer to anybody' caught my attention because it brings a level of complexity to an employment relationship that is motivated by moral purpose rather than a resource.

In discussions on hiring her first employee, Bruce begins to provide some explanation and again alludes to the investment conundrum. Below, Bruce discusses how her initial employee was hired as a result of similar motivations to Alex and Warrior:

> Like I took a girl on who I met through college, and she was rough as could be. Nobody would give her a chance... And my friends used to say are sure

> about taking her on, like she might nick from the till? And I was like no, I feel like she could be good, and I spent about a year and a half training her, and she was good you know... (Bruce)

Bruce attempting to resist and overcome the stereotypes presented in the previous themes come back to the fore. It is not how Bruce views her, but how those within her network perceive her, that seems to be the driving factor for Bruce taking her on. *'They are the sort of people'* is generalising, and given Bruce's previous difficulty with being stereotyped, give some indication as to why she felt she needed to prove her friends wrong. An immediate declaration follows; '*I spent about a year and a half training her'.* This was a personal investment for Bruce. Initially it was not led by the demands of her business, but possibly by her own need to transform someone; and a desire to break the contextual mould that means everyone is regarded as the same. However, the intended change did not quite work out the way Bruce desired:

> But they are the sort of people... like she has nicked on the job. And I said to <husband> 'oh my God, why did I help this girl?' he was like 'look, you can't, you tried, you can't help everybody' (Bruce).

Bruce does two things here. First, when talking about a past experience, she suddenly switches to the present tense, *'they are the sort of people...'.* There is a sudden detachment in her narrative from a past self that felt a need to help, a realisation that her personal desires do not always complement the needs of her venture. This for Bruce, it seems, exposed the limits of altruism when bounded by the demands of running a sustainable enterprise.

Giving someone a chance, rather than taking someone on because they could do a job, seemed to also be a key motivator for Warrior and Max. Such effectual decision making reminds me once again of a search for a symbiotic relationship. It is as if that through hiring individuals that the entrepreneurs deem to be in need of 'help', they are seeking meaning in some form or another, a belief that a connection is formed by taking such action. To add further evidence to this, below Warrior describes how she took a 'chance' on one of her first employees:

> She's not got a conventional past… but she's got the type of past that people probably wouldn't usually take a risk. But she's the most amazing woman,

> I think. To come back from what she went through years ago, and I say to her all the time 'well why wouldn't we have given you a chance?' (Warrior).

Further, Max adds to this in justifying why he decided to hire his cousin:

> I have got to take somebody on and then, Harry, who is like my cousin like, he didn't have a job or nothing, and I thought it's a nice little opportunity to take him under my wing and help him with life as well and whatever. (Max)

The notion of the 'Mother Hen' resurfaces quite obviously in *'take him under my wing'*. Rather than framing this as an opportunity to find someone with the right skills, Max again appears to suggest his need to hire was more an opportunity to assist someone he knew needed help. Common rationalities of business were not discussed or even be deemed important. Participants, during this period of time, regarded their role as an employer as a form of *in loco parentis*. This leads to questioning why participants felt they could and did regard their ventures in such a way – as a social means as opposed to economics ends? Where others had failed, participants felt they were in a position to step in.

When it came to discussing their experiences, Tree Lady and Bobbie focused on the idea that their employees should become part of the fabric of their ventures to have a sense of ownership in it. Notably, unlike the other participants, both had hired their initial employees from outside their known social networks and as such, discussed how they perceived being an employer differently. Rather than focus on giving opportunities to those they deemed in need of help, making sense of this revolved around the discussion of employees generating a level affectual connection to the business.

> …the people employed I wanted them to be proud of what they were doing and feel like they belonged to the business and it's like a little bit theirs, and, you know, to build a platform for it whereas they are not just coming in 9 to 5 and getting a pay-check and going home, it doesn't mean anything for them. And they literally live and breathe the business now; they absolutely love it. (Tree Lady)

Tree Lady's language consistently points to increasing levels of connectivity: '*belonged*', *'little bit theirs'* and '*live and breathe the business'*. There is something inherently structural about

this decision, ‘build a platform’, which perhaps serves to illuminate the importance of getting it right.

> That first hire that you make as a business; it sets the tone. And, I talked at the beginning about how I’m worried about creating a tone in this business that is the right tone. And, I don’t want to build a business of people who are working their butts off for themselves and for themselves only, I want to build a business where people all share a part in the success. (Bobbie)

What I believe that Tree Lady and Bobbie articulate, is a potential reason why employment is framed as so much more than ‘being paid for *work’*, rather than to work *for* the *business*.

In the final extract below, Bobbie, I think neatly captures an explanation as to why Alex, Max, Phoenix, Warrior and Bruce hired those who they felt could be given more than just a payslip. Or why Bobbie and Tree Lady felt they wanted employees to be woven into the fabric of their business; for work to mean as much to the employees as it did to them.

> I’m a really firm believer that if you trust people… that’s probably one of my weaknesses, but if you trust people and ask them to get on with the job, then they will do it. If they’re in the right environment, they will do it because they want to do it for them. They want to do it for a sense of pride, and they want to do it for you. (Bobbie)

In summary, the initial conversation around how participants discussed themselves and their employees revolved around a search for meaning. Finding purpose beyond a payslip repositions the employer-employee dynamic as entirely social. It is suggestive of the basic foundations of social exchange, in that one person does another a favour, with a general expectation of some future return (Blau, 1986).

5.3.2 What if They Don't Turn Up?

I now turn to focus on increasing relational tensions expressed in the accounts of participants when reflecting on their initial employer experiences in more detail. Tensions were readily felt and reflected in the accounts of all participants but diverged between those who had hired friends or family and those that had not. The interest of maintaining personal relationships outside the bounds of their ventures became a source of challenge and irritation for Melissa, Warrior, Joe and Max. For participants that had hired outside their known social networks (Bruce, Bobbie, Bish, Alex, Tree Lady and Phoenix) a common challenge in trying to make sense of the employer-employee relationship was interpreted as the dawning of an uncomfortable reality. Growing relational imbalances of power between employee and employer seemed significant in how such feelings surfaced. For all participants, the taking on of an employee was marked by the way it was discussed predominantly as a challenge to, rather than an enabler of, moving their ventures forward. I interpreted this challenge as negotiating between various conflicts of competing interests. These manifested, for some, in trying to maintain existing relationships whilst trying to apply more formalised ones when running their ventures day to day. Such relationalities were messy and complex, with no clear boundaries. Others alluded to a growing dependence on their employees, leading to vulnerabilities being discussed in the form of a lack of control that was not present previously.

I begin with those who hired from within their known social networks. Melissa initially hired a close friend in need of work. Her account charted the impact this decision had on her, and their friendship, which was ultimately to suffer. What gradually became clear as her experiences unfolded, was Melissa's desire to implement temporal and spatial boundaries between her work and personal life.

> I don't really want to spend time with her outside of work. So, that's beginning to clash at the moment, I think. If she did leave, it would be better for our friendship. Yes, it's hard being with the same one person for 30 hours a week. I find that personally, really difficult. (Melissa)

This relational entanglement has a negative impact on Melissa's interpretation of the employer-employee dynamic. At the time of the interview, Melissa described her relationship as strained and there was a sense it had become overwhelming. A need for separation and distance was also shared by Warrior when describing how she feels about working with her husband:

> What's hard is that I hate talking to him about work too much, or feel like I am his boss, especially because he obviously is my husband, and I don't ever want to feel like I'm talking down to him. But there's things that maybe he wants to step up to, and wants to do more of, or he has an opinion of, and to me it's like, no it's none of your business, you are not part of that, that's your job role, please just do that, don't filter into anything else, and that's the little bit that I get quite agitated about [rolls eyes]. It's just a constant conflict of interest. (Warrior)

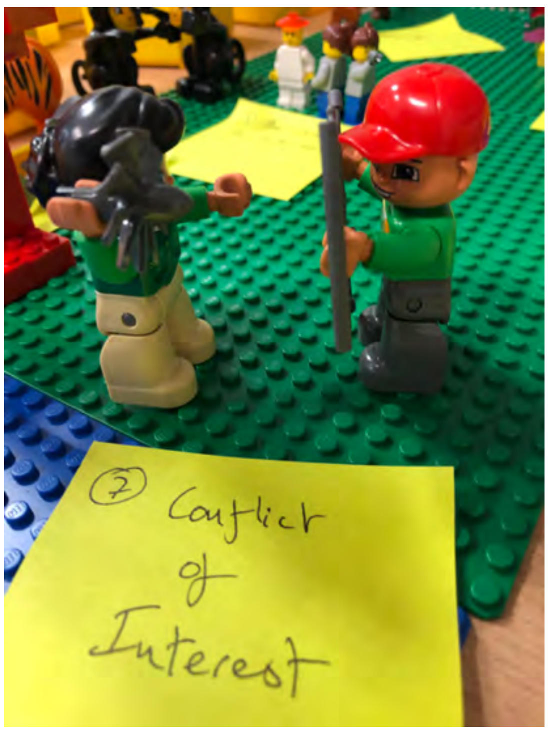

Figure 31. Warrior's conflict of interest

As with Melissa, these entanglements become readily felt, materialising into feelings of 'agitation'. Warrior's desire to want to separate her work and personal relationship signals something more complex. There is a sense that Warrior regards her venture as a catalyst towards her change of status from 'just a mum' to 'being the boss'. Perhaps she feels the need to maintain a balance in her and her husband's relationship that undermines her ability to connect with this newfound sense of ownership. She cannot replicate the same boundaries as an employer, but her account indicates the beginning of a desire to need them. It further

suggests how Warrior perceived these 'conflicts of interest' as affectual tensions that emanate in trying to intersect family and work.

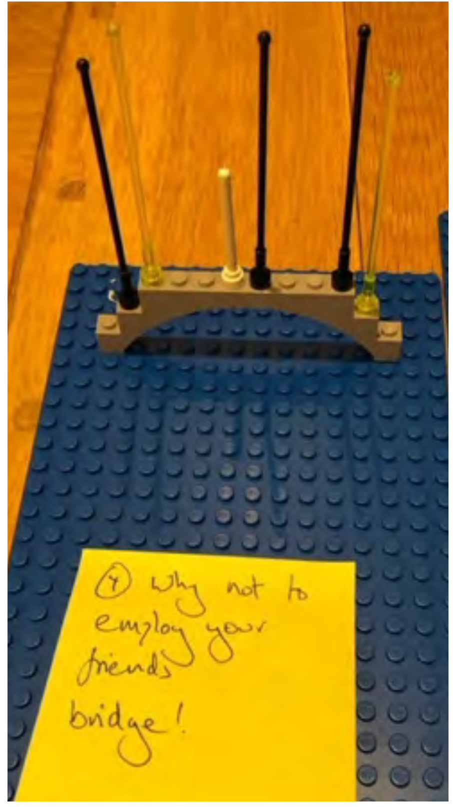

Figure 32. Melissa'*s 'why not to employ your friend bridge'*

Reflecting on what she has learnt, Melissa goes on to provide some more clarity to the frustrations she feels and why she will never employ a friend again.

> No, because I don't think she earns enough for me to really say, 'you're not doing a good enough job' because I know she really struggles. So, I think she's got her own stresses, and maybe she brings her stresses into work. I just get really annoyed and just carry on, because I don't know what else to do. I'm too soft basically, on her. (Melissa)

Issues of accountability are raised in this extract, pointing towards the source of another conflict. Addressing the quality of her friend's work clashes with Melissa's extant knowledge; *'I know she really struggles'*. Reflecting further, Melissa feels (as per her Lego model in Figure

30) that being unable to address performance issues were the result of an imbalance of power. This manifested itself in a need to put her friendship interests before the needs of her venture. In saying 'I don't think she earns enough' to be able to hold her friend to account, the suggestion here is that she feels her friend is doing her a favour, rather than the other way around.

Similarly, Max describes how he felt he was being taken advantage of by his cousin-employee, but also takes a step beyond Melissa in directly addressing it.

> Yeah and that's what, it's weird because my cousin downstairs… I had to lay the law, just to let them know that it is my business and that's how I like to run my business and we all got on. It's just he was doing what he wanted, then I got to the stage where I thought nothing is getting done here and I got to the stage where I thought I have got to put my foot down here. I didn't want to because I am not that sort of person, but then I have got to do it when you realise it's jeopardising the business as well, work is getting shoddy and loads of people on my case as well, as I was thinking, argh I can't deal with this. (Max)

This extract addresses what Melissa and Warrior are trying to make sense of: managing the interests of pre-existing relationships alongside the interests of their ventures. However, Max makes clear that '*he is not that sort of person'*, keen to state the discomfort he felt in *'lay [down] the law'* with his cousin. The reluctance felt again demonstrates intersecting interests between the needs of their ventures and their own relationships with employees that are in opposition to one another. In maintaining the interests of one, you limit the other from being fully optimised. Joe demonstrates how, in doing this, he regards putting the interests of his friend above his venture as central in his decision to close his business.

> So like you're very protective over it. It's like the thing you built. It's the thing you put all your hard work into… So I started out with by just having [employee name]. Which was great, I.. we became sort of mates. Easy like. But he couldn't always take it when I told him if he wasn't doing something right, you know. There were issues …not turning up – that sort of thing.

> …I took on a few more guys and he hated it. Caused me all sorts of grief like you know, said don't be a plonker like [laughs], but I couldn't just get rid of him because…I guess… Don't know how to describe… His world was my world sort of thing. I guess I thought I relied on him and what he knew, like a double act. But the proper… real world don't operate like that. Like I should have just sacked the prick really [laughs]. (Joe)

Joe's experience stood out starkly as a demonstration of the conflicts described by Melissa, Warrior and Max rearing themselves in such a way that caused Joe to end his business. I found glimpses of similar experiences within Melissa's account.

Towards the end of her interview, she stated that she was looking at how she could continue her venture without her employee – it had become too constricting for her. This recognition of an existing imbalance, and how they negotiate it, is what I interpret as a critical point in Max, Melissa, Joe, and Warrior's entrepreneurial journeys, a form of entrepreneurial reckoning. For Joe, an inability to find a way to separate these worlds '*his world was my world'*, became too much to negotiate and separate.

While issues of relational imbalances between the participants and their employees were common across all participants' experiences, differences emerged in the narratives of those who did not employ friends or family members. The latter group's experiences of employment revolved around the importance of trust. This was bought to my attention by Alex describing the day she opened her venture to the public for the first time: *'Yeah and you know when we first opened, I thought, what if they [employees] don't turn up? You are reliant on them to some extent'.* In this brief moment, Alex illuminates why friends and family may seem preferable to hiring employees with no existing relationship. For Alex's business to run, even begin, the requirement is now on others, and not just Alex, to work. Alex has complete control over Alex but recognises that there is nothing in place to have the same level of control over her employees. Tree Lady also refers to this realisation of dependence in her own account:

> I get scared that they just won't turn up one day. It does make you feel vulnerable but then what employer doesn't feel vulnerable about kind of your staff walkout or, I think anybody who owns a business is in a vulnerable place if you are quite small. (Tree Lady)

Alex and Tree Lady's statements are powerful in what they reveal, and telling in what they don't. The perceived vulnerability demonstrates a shift in the locus of control from the self to a reliance on others and puts an emphasis on the role of trust. Tree Lady referring to the idea that size matters is, I believe, significant. Being a small business, there are no wider organisational resources or structures to intervene if an employee does not turn up. Trusting an organisation entails different types of vulnerabilities, dependencies and risks than trusting a person.

To try and create a level of trust with his employees, Bish describes a constant balance if trying to keep his '*lads'* happy: '*So I try to keep it as fair as I can but keep enough money in the business. But you got to please the lads and keep them happy'*. Herein lies a conundrum for Bish; sustaining his venture is driven by the need for cash flow, cash flow only comes with more business, more business can only be achieved with employees, but employees ('lads') need to be kept happy to work, to be kept happy they need to be paid. Conflict emerges between sustaining his venture (and himself) and his employees:

> And I let it show sometimes that it's hard you know. So anyway, no, with the system as it is now, it works really well – coming back to that trust. So, if I know I can trust all the people working for me and they know they can trust me. (Bish)

It seems to me that Bish reveals frustration in trying to sustain his 'system'. The reference seems to imply that for Bish, trust is mechanistic, a simple fulfilling of the basic exchange of labour for a reward. However, this contradicts itself in the language Bish uses, terms like '*lads'*, '*happiness'* suggest that Bish is trying to achieve far more. It raises the difficulty of trying to meet the priorities of his business in tandem with the priorities of his employees. On the other hand, perhaps seeing his 'lads' happy is how Bish draws meaning from his entrepreneurial endeavours, a point he describes in the extract below:

> That's how I feel, I think I've found my place as a – as a more like not a boss, I'm not really a boss, I'm more – it's like I work for them. It's like when Dan tells me he needs a new pair of wellies – oh, not another pair of wellies! I go down to Screwfix and buy him a pair of wellies. But that's my job, you know, and I do – yeah, I work for them, I do. (Bish)

'I work for them' crystallises the relational imbalance that has frustrated other participants. Rather than see this as a point of frustration which he pointed out earlier, Bish appears to make sense of how he feels by suggesting this was his role all along – it's just the way it's supposed to be. Any beliefs of running his venture for himself are lost to his newfound role as employee caretaker, something that seems to have given Bish a sense of place, perhaps even belonging.

If no existing relationships are in place to form the foundations of trust, it seems participants like Bish invest personally in creating a needs-based relationship to address the imbalance of power. So rather like participants who felt they were helping a friend or family member out, Bish creates this through regarding himself as a provider for his staff, and therefore they need him as much as he needs them. Perhaps, this needs-based relationship is a form of quasi-control, a means to address the '*what if they don't turn up'* vulnerability. It suggests initial efforts are focused on creating this symbiotic-dynamic. This investment, however, as Bruce discusses, may not eradicate the vulnerabilities that come with growing a venture and the realities of formal employment.

> Because I also don't want to train someone up, to then leave me for another salon. And you can never make sure that happens [laughing] can't make you sign a contract for the rest of your life. But you have to, I don't know have a bit of trust and faith in people really - touch wood. (Bruce)

Once you have taken the leap and grown a venture beyond just the entrepreneur, the recognition that you can no longer 'do this alone' becomes a reality check. This notion links to Alex and Tree Lady's comments on the lack of full control they have over employee's actions. For Bruce, the reality of a growing dependence on her employees' manifests in the lack of control she has on whether an employee chooses to leave or not.

Notably, both Bruce and Bobbie experience the impact of making poor hiring decisions. Their narratives directly refer to a greater level of dependence on their employees in the day-to-day running of their enterprises. Bobbie states, *'I know that I can't do this alone, I know that…'*. Rather than expressed as frustration or vulnerability, this recognition was more readily discussed as something that exists. Their past decisions act as reference points for understanding that boundaries need to be made visible, and deliberately put in place.

> I think just making sure that I am boss, colleague, friend line is there, which I do find hard because I love the girls and you know I take them out

> and we do stuff. But… it has to be there because I know as soon as that gets murky... (Bruce)

Bobbie's past experiences highlighted the importance of finding someone that fits in, exceeded a need to hire an individual with the right skill set.

> I made a really crap hire at my last corporate job, and that kind of tarred me a little bit actually. (Bobbie)

> I needed someone who buys into what we're trying to do and buys in culturally to what we mean as a start-up, and that's more important than whether or not they can do the job right now, because I could always fire them. (Bobbie)

The end of this statement *'I could always fire them',* sits in opposition to the rising level of dependence other participants feel towards their employees. In reference to her past' *crap hire'*, limitations of the employment relationship are recognised and indeed, where the control lies within this relationship. Bobbie is aware there are means and structures that provide protection as a way of addressing feelings of imbalance. It suggests both Bruce and Bobbie's negative experiences of employing others enable an understanding that other participants are yet to reach.

In summary, achieving what Bruce terms as 'the line'- is suggestive of achieving a relational balance between the informality of being someone's friend, to the formality of being someone's boss. For many participants, the reality of employment, and indeed attempting to grow their ventures became salient in the discussion of the employer transition. The following and final subtheme of this section *'the wake-up call'* captures a shift in the narratives of participants. The frustrations and relational negotiations seemed to reach a climax. Like Bruce and Bobbie, it was in recognising the reality of employment that structures began to be used to implement forms of control, acting as a form of relief from the reliance on trust alone.

5.3.3 The Wake-up Call

The final subtheme in this section captures a relational shift in how participants begin to view themselves, their employees and their ventures as a result of recognising that perceived relational imbalances cannot be sustained.

A common theme was a moment, caused by feelings of chaos induced by a lack of control, which resulted in an ordering of some form, a readjustment of purpose and regaining of control. Participants experienced a 'wake-up call' - a reality check - where these points of chaos were used to demonstrate a shift from relying on interpersonal dynamics, like trust to the implementation of organisational structures. For Joe, the reality of employing staff which he reflects as an inability to instil the same level of meaning towards his venture that he has, resulted in him turning his back on running a venture altogether.

> Yeah well, it's just reality isn't it, think it's going to be one thing in your head – then [gestures to Lego] it's not that. I guess it's hard isn't it. Like you rely on these guys, expect them to work hard and love what they do as much as you do [gestures to Lego]. (Joe)

Figure 33. Joe's realisation

Joe harks back to the entrepreneurial expectations discussed in 5.2.1. Entrepreneurship, for Joe, is presented in popular narratives as one thing, whereas his experiences were far from what he had expected. The employment of staff was a reality check for Joe, a realisation that what

all these discourses construct an entrepreneur-employer as (if at all) is not what he experienced. This was in effect, not what Joe signed up for, nor something he felt he could negotiate his way through.

Focusing on the point of time where demand for her business increased, Warrior reflected on how this was a catalyst for more structure, more control.

> I'm not going to lie to you, last week was the first time I did the employer's contract. Literally. We're in the middle of setting that up, pensions… Scary stuff. These are the things that I think we, like, as we're growing, I am realising we can't just wing. There is a need for structure. There is need for measurements of how the business is performing. It's a wake-up call. (Warrior) (Figure 32 below)

> Like, then if there were any faults, it was like, who, what was the fault from? Who did the fault? You know, there was no control all over it, whereas now. I think that's what we need to make it, even stronger than, regardless of who is here, it's always going to run. (Warrior)

Figure 34. Chaos (L) and 'The wake-up call' (R)

This marked a shift in how Warrior discussed how she related to her venture, the extract above is littered with logics of business – measurements of performance, quality control, accountability systems and consistency. There is also an indication of Warrior recognising her limitations that constantly monitoring and managing the day-to-day activities restricts her ability to grow the venture beyond its current size. It perhaps indicates Warrior recognising how such structures can relieve her from the intensity she previously felt in moments of chaos. More notable is Warrior's apprehension in formalising tasks and employment relationships; *'scary stuff'*. It is as if that, up to this point, despite existing for almost three years, validation of her endeavours only comes with the introduction of formal structures demanded by the UK government – i.e., employment contracts and pensions (UK Government website 2020: 'Get ready to employ someone').

Similarly, Melissa also captures a temporal shift in identifying how she was before she employed someone to after. The process of ordering from chaos became significant in moving through this period of time.

> So, this is my study. It's not even a study, it's a storage room. There's the before employer. Just a bit of a chaotic mess. And, now I'm an employer, I have to do payroll every week, I have to sort out the holidays, get everything in order for my Accountant. (Melissa)

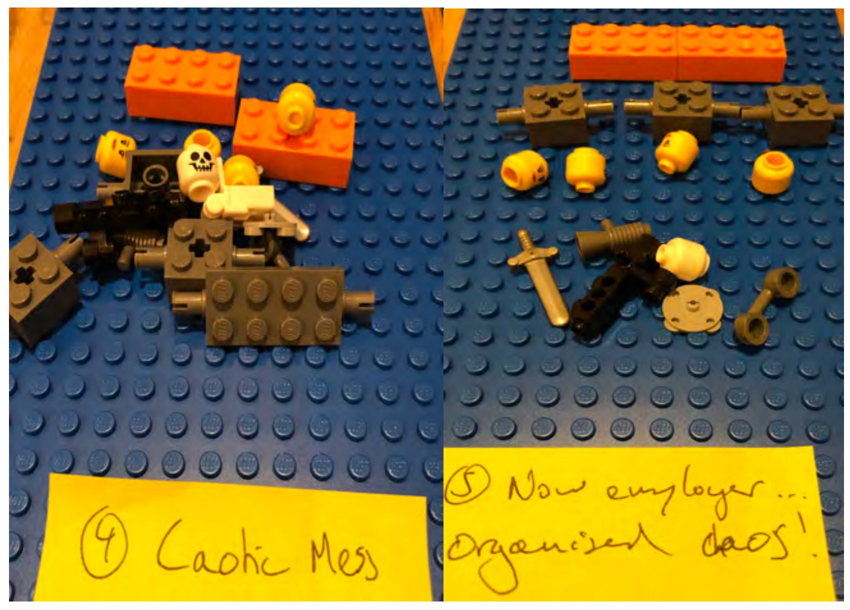

Figure 35. Melissa's chaos (L) and organised employer (R) selves

> So, the 'after', everything's a bit more organised. Yes, I think I am organised because I have to be because she needs payslips and things. And so, I know. And, it has taught me a tiny minuscule amount about business [laughs]. (Melissa)

Melissa reflects on a clear 'before' and 'after' within her transition. In doing so, a clear change in how she began to talk about her day-to-day management of her venture became apparent. Similar to Warrior, the discussion of familiar systems, and indeed, legally required structures were a catalyst in ordering Melissa's world, beyond her day-to-day venture management.

Max's recognition that he needed more structure draws on Warrior's experiences in that it came at a crucial point of growth for his venture. Facing a sudden increase in demand, a lack of organisation began to take its toll on Max and his employee:

> I just explained to him if we want to have a job, we have got to make money to survive as well. I guess… I just was just more structured about his day too. …then eventually then he was running the machines and was like oh let me relieve a little bit of pressure off of you. There would be times you have got all these different jobs coming in and it just, I was just running, running, running. My head fried. I realised we had to change the whole system. (Max)

Figure 36. Max *'just running'*

Implementing structural and systematic changes was not born out of wanting to be a more recognised 'business' with formal structures and procedures, but more so out of necessity. Bruce also described a similar situation when deciding to leave the running of her business to her employees for the first time:

> When I was off with the baby, I just left them to the shop. Checked in every now and then but thought no, they love the shop, they are going to do it. And then there was a period there where things were really low… just was a bit of shitstorm. I felt disappointed, and I was really gutted. And I just came in and said 'look girls I'm gutted' and like 'what's happened?' So, like came in, a massive overhaul, there were tears [laughing].

> It was awful, yeah and that was the first time I said look, maybe I have got to be a bit more boss lady and not let it get to that. Hence the weekly meetings. And also, to say look, this is still a business, yes, I think that I want the best for you. I make it a relaxed place to be, but that I want things to run a certain way: like clockwork (Bruce).

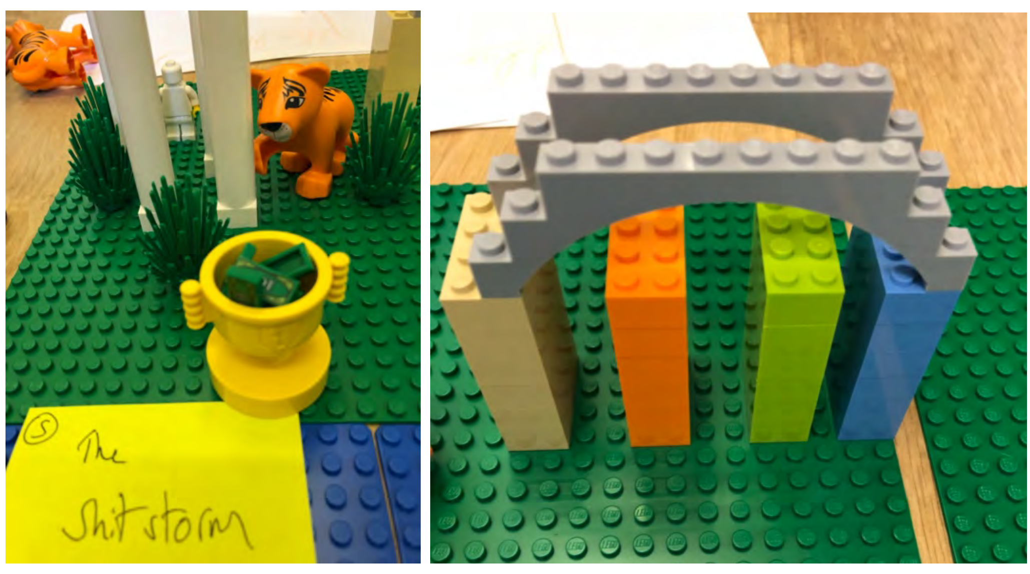

Figure 37. The 'shit storm' (L) and 'like clockwork' (R)

In leaving her business to run without her for the first time, Bruce is faced with reality (the *shitstorm*). Her belief that they '*loved the shop'* was, like Bruce, enough to run a successful business. This experience appeared to serve as Bruce's reality check; a reminder that her staff are not in the same position as her. The impact of this was for Bruce to introduce a level of formality not previously seen before. A noticeable relational shift begins to take place – a need to assert herself in being the '*boss lady'*. To do this, Bruce describes implementing formality and structure to address imbalances and bring about order to how she believes her venture should be run. By declaring '*this is still a business',* the use of the present tense perhaps suggests that this is not just a reminder to her staff, but also to Bruce. As much as she may view her endeavours as a means of helping her employees, her reality cannot escape the logics of capitalism.

The necessary implementation of structures (as with Bruce) is also referred to by Alex, who employed the most staff among those I interviewed (52). In discussing how she is able to cope with the number of staff she has; Alex refers to the logics of business (policies and procedures):

> But we have, I set up policies and procedures, so it has to be in place. We've now; we're at year five, which is year five, we've now got 52 staff. [Laughs]. So you can't run it like there was 12 of us or four of us. It's just; it has to be consistent. And so those things have to be in place for disciplinary, like absence management things like that. There has to be just the same for everybody whether they work in the cafe or they're a director, you know, whatever. (Alex)

What is exposed more directly here, and inferred by Bruce, is that the ordering that takes place gives insight into the emergence of an organisation. Structures are necessary just to get through the day-to-day. Alex makes particular mention that it is not just her employees, but also those running the business (the directors) that require monitoring. In being 'the same for everybody', this moves beyond addressing the imbalance of dependency on employees to take it a step further to describe a need for a relational balance that applies to all. This may indicate, that in having a larger number of employees, Alex deems introducing a level of perceived fairness as a significant factor in maintaining a sense of control over her day-to-day.

Keeping with the notion control, a reality for Phoenix was a need to balance his need for staff over his desire to control them. When discussing the initial reasons for employing

staff, Phoenix declares *'I cannot replicate me'*. In declaring this, which is demonstrated in the extract below, it seemed Phoenix interpreted his transition to employer as a tool to extend himself.

> So, employing people, I understood that… okay, I employed people, but I used to do it all myself. Then I read books where, okay, the employees are your front men, and you've got to lead from behind. But sadly, that's all well and good, but then if you've monkeys leading the way forward and I'm just telling them what to do all the time. (Phoenix)

Several points are raised by Phoenix. The first is that employing '*people'* was not the same as replicating Phoenix. The second was that this realisation was Phoenix's wake-up call. As a result, Phoenix turned to popular literature for help, only to find this did not reflect his reality. Rather than responsible and autonomous beings, just as Phoenix sees himself, his employees were '*monkeys'*. In this Phoenix indicates a disjunction between what he imagined being an employer would be like and his reality. The reality is that replicating himself in any form is not something easily achieved.

Finally, I turn to discuss Tree Lady, for whom employing staff was interpreted as a 'breakthrough' moment. A chance to rediscover parts of her previous life that became overwhelmed by trying to run her business alone:

Figure 38. Tree Lady's 'The Breakthrough'

> It was a bit of a relief, because you get to a stage where you start, although you are enjoying it you start to feel the pressure of it, I literally had hobbies before I started running the business which I had given up all of them. And I knew that you know, I could sit down with somebody else and get more work done between us, and it gave me a bit of my life back really and made me think more positively about the business because I was definitely getting into a bit of a rut of, I hate this. (Tree Lady)

This ability to bound her business was something that I regarded as a positive impact of the transition. Rather, this wake-up call was more like an awakening: the realisation that for Tree Lady, her life, and indeed, her self, did not have to be rooted in, or dictated by, her business. This '*breakthrough'* is interpreted as a form of affective release for Tree Lady. It provides some evidence towards how successful negotiation of this transition, and the difficulties raised by it, results in venture growth being realised. It raises the issue of how being able to run a successful, growing enterprise requires the sacrifice of the life/work boundary, or if that boundary can exist at all.

To summarise, this subtheme examined what I interpreted as common across each of my participant's experiences of moving through and beyond the transition of an entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer. A significant commonality was that out of various forms of chaos (*wake-up call*s) came the creation (through various means) of boundaries. However, for Joe, the boundary was revealed as his decision to end his business and being an employer. For others, a separation between the self, employees and their ventures, became increasingly more distinct, with conflicts of interest becoming less relevant as the realities of running a business take hold. The experiences discussed in this subtheme suggest that with growth, more, rather than fewer structures are necessary; and these directly follow the footsteps of structures common to larger organisations. It also perhaps takes away the 'entrepreneurial' nature of a venture, it no longer is something that is distinct from more structured forms of organisation. This introduces a tension between entrepreneurial ideals and my entrepreneur's realities. This tension will be explored in more depth in the final superordinate theme: *never-ending stories*.

5.3.4 Theme Summary

This superordinate theme, *conflicts of interest: me, myself and my employees,* traces the contours of the employer transition. Participants experiences converged in identifying this period of time as particularly challenging. This became increasingly salient in discussing the day-to-day realities of managing their employees. In presenting the transition as a linear succession of increasing understanding and awareness, I do, to some extent, provide a false sense that participants ordered their own sense-making in such a way. This progression led to a shift in how participants described their experiences of becoming an employer.

I focus on this as a relational shift that echoes an ever-increasing need for separating the self, work and employees. The first subtheme is presented as the starting point of this journey. In *the Mother Hen: finding meaning through hiring others,* I explored how participants reflected on their employment relationship as symbiotic meaning-making exercise. The second subtheme; *'What if they don't turn up?',* notes the beginning of a change as frustrations begin to emerge, and separating it from the ideological rhetoric of the first subtheme. Further, I explored the divergence in the accounts of those who employed people they knew, rather than people they did not. This subtheme also explored a noted shift in discussions about their employer-employee relationships. For most participants, initial discussions of a perfect employer-employee symbiosis became lost to increasing feelings of over-dependency and a lack of control. Relational imbalances, in which the dependency on the employee was readily experienced and something that became a source of vulnerability and/or frustration.

Finally, *'the wake-up call'* examined more closely where feelings of imbalance form a catalyst for ordering. The introduction of structures and more formal work/life boundaries was significant in commonality across all narratives. Participants spoke of a need to separate their selves from their employees, a desire to implement transactional structures into their everyday. This perhaps captures the beginnings of more recognisable organisational features. Rather than implement them with further growth in mind, this ordering appears to be born from a need to manage the demands of participants internal and external worlds.

Next, I present the final superordinate theme, *never-ending stories.* This seeks to elucidate what I believe is the impact of the previous two subthemes conflicting one another. What happens when your reality does not match up to expectations set-out by society around you? Glimpses of frustration between their realities and what they thought being an employer should begin to surface in a *conflict of interest,* and similarly, as with the first superordinate theme, participants clearly rejected themselves as commonly constructed entrepreneurs.

5.4 Superordinate Theme Three: Never-Ending Stories

The final superordinate theme unravels contradictions present in all participants' narratives. I find that despite their rejections of being entrepreneurs (as seen in superordinate theme one, subtheme one) participants are continually trying to live-out and achieve entrepreneurial ideals: emancipating the self, more control, gaining more wealth, transforming the self. A growing gap emerges between participants' experiences, and what they (and others) expected them to be. Participants frequently express feelings of frustration, particularly when talking about the realities of being an employer, contrasting these to entrepreneurial expectations. There is a sense of a growing awareness that achieving entrepreneurial status is never-ending, it is a constant seeking of something.

The first subtheme '*the impossible staircase'* explores why participants are never quite able to articulate an end point to their entrepreneurial journey. I focus on freedom, control and increasing awareness of constraints present across the narratives of all participants. To make sense of this, I use the concept of the 'impossible staircase' (Penrose & Penrose, 1954) to help visualise the state of liminal flux participants appear to be suspended in. On this staircase you can experience progress and fleeting moments of freedom; you have control to choose to go up, or down or stop entirely; but you can never ever reach the top.

Moving to the second subtheme '*the winner takes it all'*; I explore participants' increasing feelings of frustration as they pit the realities of their transition against notions of entrepreneurial success. It further suggests that, within my participants' contexts, to become an entrepreneur is a never-ending endeavour. Feelings of freedom are fleeting; the promised material wealth of success is limited; but what is perhaps achieved is an appearance of success.

Finally, in '*but it gives purpose'* I explore what some of the participants felt they gained from their entrepreneurial experiences. While the overwhelming impression I interpreted from descriptions was that the transition was a significant challenge, some participants reflected on what they felt they had gained from their experiences. This was commonly described as a feeling of personal transformation, or how starting a venture provided a sense of direction and purpose.

5.4.1 The Impossible Staircase

Within this state of liminal flux, participants' narratives reflect a continuous loop of ascending and descending emotions; a collection of never-ending stories often revealing fleeting glimpses of freedom and control before being overwhelmed by existing constraints. Freedom, control and success are outcomes appear strongly related with 'becoming' an entrepreneur. As Phoenix explained, *'It's like I'm chasing it all the time. I'm chasing… there is no pot at the end of the rainbow'.* I was reminded of the work of Penrose and Penrose (1958), who's depiction of a two-dimensional staircase was termed the 'impossible stairs' (Figure 37). The stairs make four 90-degree turns as they ascend or descend forming a continuous loop, such that a person could climb them forever and never gain anything. This neatly encapsulates participants' feelings of never quite being able to articulate an end point to their entrepreneurial journey.

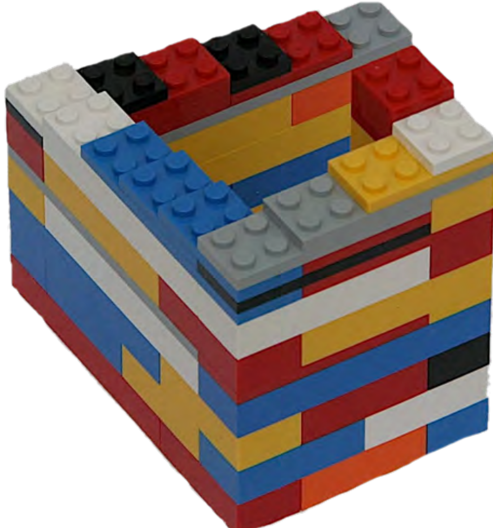

Figure 39. Model of Penrose and Penrose's (1958) 'impossible staircase'

Indeed, this confuses the commonly known purpose for a set of stairs. Thus, the 'impossible staircase' defeats any notion of overall progress and is itself never-ending. Phoenix's experience of 'constantly chasing' was reflected and shared in others' stories. Consequently, a gap between entrepreneurial discourse '*the pot at the end of the rainbow',* and participants entrepreneurial realities emerged, revealing 'a never-ending story' of chasing perceived entrepreneurial rewards: freedom and control.

I found glimpses of participants claiming feelings of freedom and liberation within the narratives of Bobbie, Bish, Melissa, Phoenix, Bruce, Alex and Max. On the staircase you are

free to execute certain decisions; whether to get on, which way to turn, or whether to get off. It is in these 'decisions' fleeting moments of liberation emerged. For my participants, these were transitional 'touchpoints' where the autonomous-self became salient.

For Bobbie, Bish and Melissa the decision to start their own business provided a lens for their interpretation of freedom. In Bobbie's explanation below, she describes her actions as an autonomous rejection of her past 'corporate life':

> Freedom. So, there's a real thing about freedom for me. Yes, and this is probably a reaction to kind of, past, rather than a driver for now… I'm probably working harder than I've ever worked before, I'm certainly getting up earlier than I was when I was in corporate life. But, it's my decision. (Bobbie)

Bobbie's recognition of 'freedom', reflecting that it was not a 'driver for now', evoked a temporality of 'feeling free'. This suggests that there is a constant throughout Bobbie's narrative; continual references to a 'corporate world', 'corporate slog' highlight how Bobbie may separate what she feels are two distinct selfhoods. The listing of what she can do now, compared to her past life, perhaps provides a tangible measure of the meaning of freedom for Bobbie.

Such a distinct separation between past and present was not initially existent in Bish or Melissa's accounts. Instead, their impressions of being 'free' were situated within specific moments in their pasts:

> I used to, on the way to school I remember this quite clearly, I used to see bin-men, anyone like that, postman, anyone and I remember thinking they were sort of free, whereas I was stuck in school. (Bish)

For Bish, his initial take on freedom was linked to where his work was, not what or with who. The commonality amongst these three participants was their focus on this transition as a deliberate act for *themselves*.

Like Bobbie, Alex distinguished between her past and present through presenting different forms of work 'worlds'. Both sought freedom in their decision to move from being employed to being self-employed and were careful to distinguish between past and present selves. For Alex the feeling of being able to be 'different' was illuminated through her continual comparison of her business to the 'corporate structure' of other businesses.

> This is my business [on the left]. It's a bit more mismatched and colourful… But, the corporate structure [on the right] just it’s basic it's got everything on there that we've got but less fun and you could probably replicate like a McDonald's pod. You know it could be anywhere, you could be anywhere and do it. Mine is definitely quirky. (Alex)

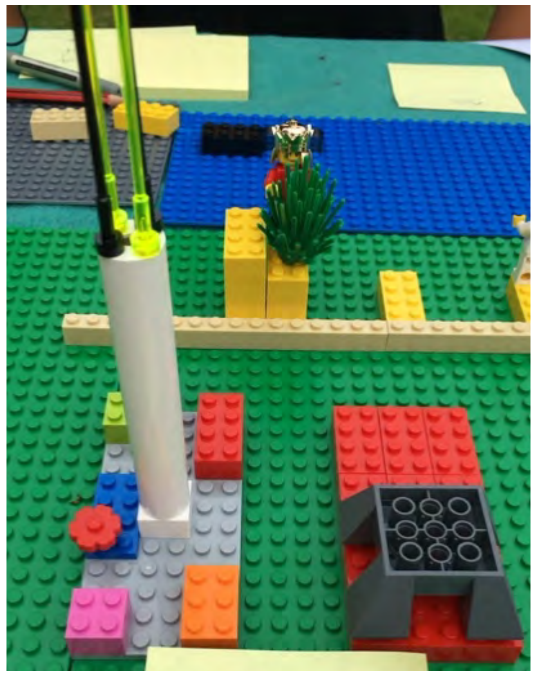

Figure 40. Corporate vs. Quirky (Alex)

Alex’s use of ‘quirky’, ‘colourful’, ‘mis-matched’ to describe her business may represent how she wishes her business to be perceived. It alludes to entrepreneurial discourses that construct entrepreneurial ventures as ‘rebellious’ and ‘innovative’, perhaps representing her ‘pot of gold’. A juxtaposition between perception and reality emerged when exploring how her business became a means of control when her father died very suddenly.

> I don't like being out of control in any way, in any part of my life… I'm not a complete control freak either. I like to just feel, it makes me feel safe I suppose and if everything is pretty much ordered it's all good…Well in work wise, decisions like I suppose setting policies and procedures so that there is consistency helped… But generally, I think people as a human race we feel safer knowing what's happening. (Alex)

Alex's narrative twists and turns through contradictions, declaring not liking being out of 'control in any way' was quickly followed with stating that she's not a 'complete control freak'. There is a sense that Alex is continually navigating between expectations and her reality. When probed further, despite building a model to represent difference and disorder, the reality was a need to restore order to satiate her need for feeling 'in control'. Within her business, she implies that this was through her 'decision' to implement policy and procedures, many of which imitate the very 'corporate structures' she wished to differentiate herself from. In this instance, such decisions provided momentary periods of control for Alex.

Zooming in further, conflicts within these decisions appeared when participants began to talk through the day-to-day aspects of their entrepreneurial journey. Participants' stories began to reflect a constant tension in the reality of keeping their business going in their contexts. For Bish and Max, who rely on a regular customer base for venture survival, the reality between their ideal entrepreneurial world and the one they have to inhabit began to surface.

> …it's not always people that cause the tension… It can be the things I want– so like, I want the business to do well, but I don't want to do jobs that are bad for the environment. Sometimes we get offered jobs that in my opinion, you know, shouldn't be happening… But the conflict then is, right, what have we got – have we got enough work for me to say no, or not? So sometimes it's, 'all right we'll do it anyway'… It's tricky. But I am happy (Bish).

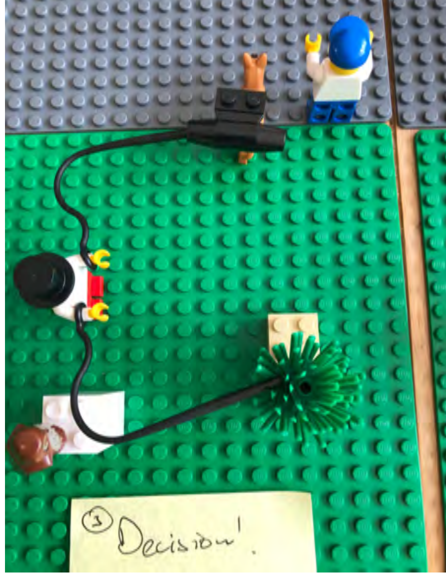

Figure 41. Bish: Tricky decisions!

The tension described expresses a struggle between what he considers morally right, and what is necessary for his business to survive. Yet, despite the inability to be fully autonomous and satisfy his ethical beliefs, a declaration of happiness is made, suggesting that the level of self-autonomy provided by his business is enough to provoke feelings of joy. The conflict Bish experiences highlights wider contextual constraints which are nominally universal; for a business to survive it requires money, which requires it to provide a regular delivery of a service or goods. For Max, this fundamental aspect of survival took its toll in the initial years of starting his business:

> To be honest it was just about keeping everything afloat, just surviving like. Yeah at Christmas time, crikey, I decided… I stopped for a Christmas break and I just went boof, getting flu and everything, it's like my body just shut down and I just crashed… I wanted to burn the place after that. But you know it taught me my limits. (Max)

Max's experience of an embodied constraint demonstrates the limits his own body put upon him in his pursuit of his need to survive. It humanises the entrepreneurial endeavour as one that is not only constrained by universal structures, but also by our own human limits.

How do feelings of freedom surface through an apparent continuum of constraint? I suggest that it is in the making of often fleeting decisions during which participants' realities are suspended. At these times some appear to be caught up in a moment that can produce a kind of euphoria – even a sense of adequacy or fullness – that temporarily eclipses the anxiety endemic to a critical awareness of their world's tragic complexity. For Bobbie, Bish and Melissa, those fleeting moments were significant in that they executed choice and deliberate acts of change in their lives. For Max and Alex, their decisions connected notions of embodiment and selfhood, a reminder that our own selves can act as a significant constraint. Conversely both Max and Alex found ways to mitigate the constraint through exercising acts of self-control.

5.4.2 The Winner Takes It All

Participants' experiences revealed relationality as intimately bound to a growing awareness of oppressive forces developing within their worlds. This awareness became salient when discussing their experiences of hiring and managing their employees, which given the discussion in the previous superordinate theme, is not unsurprising. Within this subtheme, I investigate how growing feelings of frustration are tied to an increasing awareness of constraints.

Within their experiences, feelings of entrapment, tension, frustration and confusion surfaced. Melissa, as explored in previous superordinate themes, found the experience of dealing with her employee highly constraining. Melissa navigates between feelings of frustration caused by structures outside her control and being trapped by her decision to hire her friend.

> Like, having an employee and like, paying their holiday pay and things is really difficult, because you have to pay them the full amount while the business is taking essentially half… You know I can't take holiday… So, it's really difficult. It's hard to take any time off… There's no help.…I was trapped basically, and locked in with my own success I think... And, eventually it got to the point where I was becoming quite ill like, physically (Melissa).

Figure 42. Melissa: Trapped – '*a victim of my own success'*

The influential constraints that guide Melissa’s actions began to emerge in her description of managing her employee. Beyond the relational difficulties of managing her friend, Melissa highlights a constant state of tension between her business’s needs and her own. This tension illuminates the impact of legislative structures beyond Melissa’s control. Growth of her customer base meant she employed a staff member, which many discourses would disclose as a measure of success. The impact of that ‘success’ and having an employee is both personal and financial; the staircase begins to form and oppress.

Max alludes to this success ‘trap’ in his own narrative. Having experienced a surge in orders he hired a family friend to be able to meet the needs of his business. Highlighting a tension between maintaining levels of production and training (Baumeler & Lamamra, 2019), Max regarded this as having an impact on him and his enterprise:

> It was hard, because you are trying to deal, like run the business as well, train somebody and then obviously mistakes were getting made… it started costing money as well and everything and I was like, oh I can’t afford to do this… (Max)

In common with Max’s extract, Tree Lady also expressed similar concerns:

> Yeah, the first couple of months were difficult because you know you have to explain everything and go over everything and try and do your own job and teach somebody else, so it was difficult. The downside? Growing. The financial worry was huge for me…. It’s just constant and you just sort of exist and that’s it. (Tree Lady)

Figure 43. Tree Lady – 'Existing'

The benefits of taking on staff, for Tree Lady, which here she describes as 'growth' were not readily felt. On the contrary, for Tree Lady, it only added to a sense of worry and concern and captures the sense of entrapment alluded to by Max and Melissa. Tree Lady's notions suggest an existential reckoning that leads to a challenging of both who she is and her relationship with her enterprise. I believe this captures a significant point for Tree Lady, a recognition of the realities of the transition she has experienced and a point at which the ability to recognise herself as an entrepreneur begins to fade: *'you sort of exist and that's it'*.

For Alex, her need for control framed her experiences with employees in her business:

> …we needed to employ more people but I was a little bit hesitant… And oh god I didn't want to have all the stress of payroll, and you know all the unknowns. I remember opening day, just sat there thinking… 'oh god will they turn up for work?' You know, if they don't then I'm screwed. You're completely dependent on them. (Alex)

Alex's reference to the 'unknowns' echoes a desire to feel in-control, conflicting the needs of her business. It elucidates a relational instability between herself and her employees, compounded perhaps by her need for consistency. The 'dependency' she felt was significant in my understanding of this relational dynamic. Consequently, I noted such feelings may have resulted in a shift in the locus of control (Lefcourt, 2014), at this transitional point in Alex's entrepreneurial journey. The impact of growing relational imbalances overlaps and fleshes out

ideas presented in the subtheme '*What if they don't show up'* (5.3.2). This further illuminates the potential everyday impact of becoming an employer.

Wider constraints outside my participants' control were also apparent in Phoenix's narrative. The battle between Phoenix's vision for what he desired his business to be 'a legacy', he noted at one point, was a matter of frustration for him. '…If I was to go VAT registered here, I'd be shut with six months. And that's the government doing that to me. It's a constant battle'.

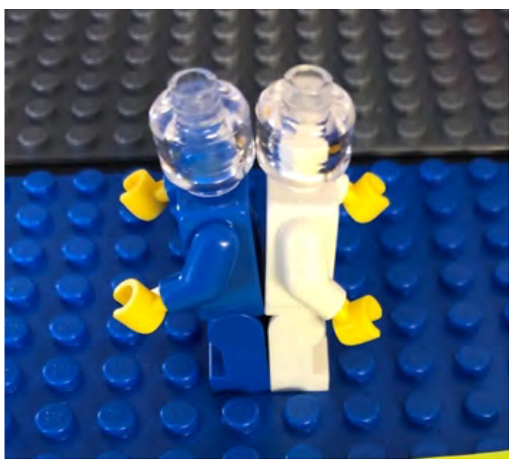

Figure 44. Phoenix's 'Battle'

Such were the constraints for Phoenix that he referenced this battle throughout his account. His use of language evokes feelings of unfairness and oppression 'that's the government doing that to *me*'. This suggests feelings of being singled out by an institution, that is beyond his control and impacts his ability to achieve his entrepreneurial goals. Perhaps because of this, the metaphor of the impossible stairs was one that he frequently returned to. Phoenix's analogy provided me with the basis for the wider conceptualisation of participants' experiences of emancipation. His frustration was seemingly grounded in a disjunction between his expectations of entrepreneurial success, which for him, were rapidly becoming unobtainable when confronted with the realities of running his business.

> Okay, do you know what… do you remember the film Labyrinth? Know the bit where she is going up the stairs and falling back down and she never gets to the top? I don't understand how people do make money, I really don't. (Phoenix)

The 'top' for Phoenix could relate to his interpretations of success. Throughout our discussion he explained that he had read a number of 'entrepreneurs' autobiographies' that highlighted various 'heroes'. Thus, his ideas of success are likely influenced by such entrepreneurial discourses, which often idealises success as a '*pot of gold at the end of the rainbow'* (see Anderson & Warren, 2011; Johnsen & Sørensen, 2017). Consequently, his frustration and questioning of these ideals discloses an awakening to constraints apparent within his lifeworld.

Max also alludes to this inability to reach the 'top', and that becoming an employer was a point where this was acutely felt:

> …like everybody's wages are covered but then what's left over, crikey, what you have got to pay for a business it's unreal, absolutely unreal. So… there is not a lot of money left over. I am always thinking oh it will get here one day, and then it's always like every year it's oh crikey. (Max)

Max's emphasis with '*unreal, absolutely unreal'* illuminates a gap between what Max thought running his venture would be – perhaps influenced by discourses of entrepreneurial success (i.e., wealth) – and the reality of it. The back and forth that comes with this is then presented by Max, '*maybe I will get there one day…*' and then '*oh crikey'*, his own reality hits. This echoes Tree Lady's existential reckoning that came with growing her venture. For Max there is a sense of disbelief, almost disappointment that his entrepreneurial dreams are bounded by him growing his enterprise. His enterprise is supposed to help him realise his ideal, rather than prevent it.

Rather than disbelief, Warrior readily discussed her own frustrations of not realising what she regarded as basic rewards for her endeavours.

> But something you can put in your paper, and this is like my nemesis at the moment, company directors and mortgages, yes, that's hard work. I can't get one. I'm a single Mum and I'm reliant on my own income. And do you know the reason? And I think it's the most ridiculous reason in the world. There was too much of a jump in turnover from year two to three. (Warrior)

This extract is a useful lens to make sense of the growing number of contradictions that frustrate participants. Warrior here, is achieving success with her venture but when trying to reap the reward from this she is prevented. In this instance, there is a suggestion that regulatory frameworks actively constrain her ability to live out her success beyond the bounds of her enterprise. To emphasise her point she contrasts this to her own employee:

> I think it's awful. If I had wage slips, like my employee, I would have got a mortgage six months ago. So they're pushing and saying it's great da da da, but the reality is you probably won't be able to have your own house even if you're actually doing well, and if you have a family that's a big deal. (Warrior)

During the analytic process, I wondered what, or who Warrior was referring to by '*they're pushing'*. It suggests some nameless force: encouraging, manipulating, tantalising people with the promises of entrepreneurial success. Then, when you think you have achieved success there are regulatory frameworks that prevent you from tangibly realising it.

Phoenix also illuminates the unjust nature of a system that so readily encourages but also oppresses entrepreneurial ideals. There is very much a sense of 'what is the point then' coming from both Warrior and Phoenix's predicaments. Phoenix also references himself as 'self-employed' rather than entrepreneur. This is perhaps because regulatory frameworks in the UK do not use the term 'entrepreneur' – which is relevant because, as Warrior illuminates, only policies to encourage individuals *into* enterprise ownership use entrepreneurial rhetoric (Mallett & Wapshott, 2020). Once however, you start a business, participants - as Phoenix describes below - are introduced to language that represents the logics of capitalism and are thus, perceived as constraints.

> I've been trying to re-mortgage my property for the last four years. Because, I'm self-employed… I can't. And it's just like… it helps to just sit on your arse and be on the dole, like. (Phoenix)

For Bobbie initial feelings of liberation were born out of leaving another world she rejected. What struck me with her story, was through the interview, her reflections provoked her to connect between her past feeling of liberation and present realities.

> Gosh sometimes… you know, I left the corporate world to do what I wanted [laughs]. I thought I'd left that world… [pauses]. But really, it's just the same except this time, it's all on me... Pensions, pay, stress, people, you know. Bloody hell! Not great that is it. (Bobbie)

Figure 45. Bobbie feels '*stuck in an ugly corporate world'* (again!)

Bobbie's reflexive account demonstrates her change in perspective. A realisation that two worlds she thought were distinct, are instead full of similarities. It suggests that a key difference in how Bobbie makes sense of her entrepreneurial endeavours is through the responsibility she feels towards her employees. Whereas at the beginning, the level of autonomy she sought was framed very much as a positive change, the impact of having staff evidences a significant shift in her perspective.

Finally, I return to Phoenix, who, towards the end of his interview began to reflect more broadly on his entrepreneurial endeavours:

> …And the thing is I know that everything can come crashing down at the blink of an eye, that's why I'm building it the other way up. And I do appreciate that I could be gone tomorrow. (Phoenix)

Figure 46. Phoenix: *'Life is a mess'*

I believe Phoenix captures an intangible essence that connects participants' understandings of their worlds; that there is 'something' holding the entirety of their experiences together. This is not just with regard to their ventures, but points towards an influence that weaves itself into all parts of their lives. Phoenix recognises the fragility of entrepreneurial success as not finite, but merely a temporal reflection of his life today, but that tomorrow, it could all fall down.

These lived experiences reveal a constancy of constraint with momentary flashes of freedom, which provide some albeit brief feelings of entrepreneurial success. I interpret the transition to employer as significant in participants becoming increasingly conscious of ever-present constraints. As these constraints reveal themselves within their worlds, a battle ensues between various perceived entrepreneurial ideals, especially notions of success, and their realities. Most significantly, I believe this begins to expose the difference between labelling my participants as an 'employer' and an 'entrepreneur-employer'. The challenges that come with being labelled an 'entrepreneur' is why I think a narrative battle exists between

entrepreneurial discourses and participants' felt realities of being an employer. This appears to be a never-ending negotiation throughout participants accounts.

I now turn to the subsequent and final subtheme of this chapter. Despite finding that becoming an entrepreneur-employer was universally articulated as a significant challenge for my participants, within this subtheme, I evidence some potential benefits. Participants' reflections on what they feel they have gained from their experiences of transitioning from entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer.

5.4.3 But It Gives a Purpose

To conclude the findings section, this final subtheme explores how some, but not all, participants made reference to what their experiences enabled them to do or feel. Alex, Bish, Bruce, Warrior and Joe highlight how their entrepreneurial endeavours led to a form of personal transformation, or in some cases feelings of fulfilment. What was of interest to me, was that the benefits described in this subtheme echoed expectations I visited in the first superordinate theme. Taking responsibility, feeling autonomous, leaving a legacy of doing something good, and changing of the self were linked to increasing feelings of 'happiness'.

Alex made sense of her overall experience by the sense of personal transformation she felt:

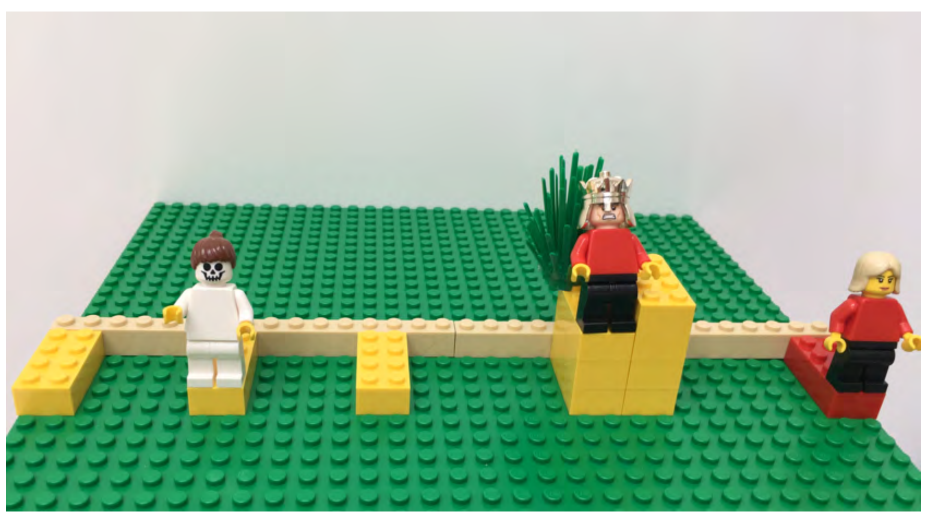

Figure 47. Alex's timeline

> You can see I am same person, fundamentally. But much more comfortable in my own skin I've relaxed I know that. And yeah... I feel... like I've achieved something good and a legacy. That sounds a bit, it's a bit pedantic though I know. (Alex)

Alex suggests that her experiences culminate in a sense of achievement, of creating a something that extends beyond her: a '*legacy'*. Within this, she regards herself as transitioning (Figure 45) into someone she is more comfortable being. However, the reference of 'in my own skin' perhaps suggests an aesthetic acceptance, as if somehow her journey has afforded a means to see herself differently.

For Bruce and Bish, the newfound sense of autonomy was commonly identified as a positive enabler of the transition. This was impacted by the lack of support that they both felt they received, despite asking for it:

> I never had any help from the government, never had any, I emailed everyone, I went to the Welsh Assembly. I got my own AM contacts, nothing, I had a letter off [local MP] saying lovely letter like I framed it and put it in the shop. 'Good luck with your new venture', I had nothing. But I do feel I am stronger now, yeah. (Bruce)

> I am really chuffed with that I just got on with it and built it up to this now with no help whatsoever, like not even off government funding, not a thing. Nothing at all, not even a penny and it was like, you have got nothing, you have got to make something. But it's a nice feeling to have. (Bish)

The inherent contradiction here is that both participants actively sought support in their endeavours, but it made them feel more entrepreneurial as a result of not being able to access it. This point also draws similarities to Subtheme 5.2.2 '*Gendered Expectations'*. Within this, Warrior described why she did not access any women specific entrepreneurial support programmes. Her resistance being that these programmes imply that women need more help than men. Similarly, it seems that for Bruce and Bish, the lack of support only served to heighten their sense of ownership and autonomy over their ventures.

In Warrior's reflection, her change was very much focused from within. For Warrior, her description of potential outcomes reflected entrepreneurial ideals of success '*making millions'*, '*big house'*. However, Warrior suggests these material outcomes are not what makes her feel *real.*

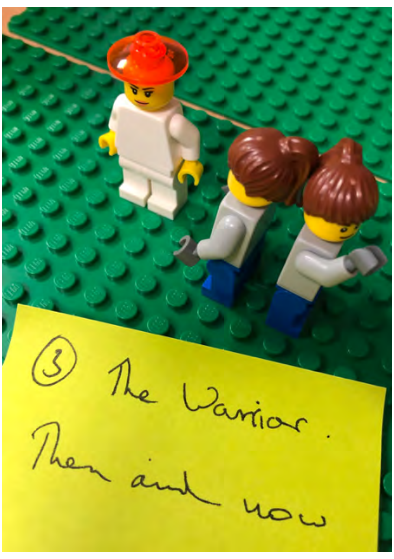

Figure 48. Warrior then, and now

> I always said to people, if I ever change, because you don't know where the business is going to take you, you don't know if you're going to end up making millions and buy a nice big house… I just want the one I'm living in now. Because I want to stay real to who I've been. I don't want to change, I like who I am, I'm happy in my own skin now.

What became clear after further analysis of this extract, was that perhaps Warrior was not only trying to convince me, but herself, that her business is separate from her. However, the following sentence, '*I don't want to change… I'm happy in my own skin now'*, is suggestive of a time where Warrior was not happy, and that to some extent her business has facilitated moving Warrior from 'then' to 'now'. Warrior goes on to clarify what being regarded as changed by others may do to how she feels about her business.

> I always find it's like taking away the element of why I almost am using this business as a platform for all the things that I stand for. And what's good about what I want to achieve. I think, as that little platform of projection to sort of do all the things. (Warrior)

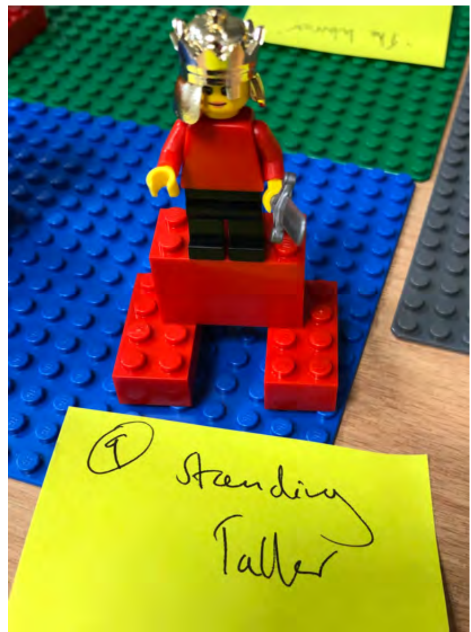

Figure 49. Warrior is now standing taller

The suggestion by Warrior, is that she views her business as a projection of what she cares about. It perhaps allows her to have a voice she once felt she did not have. This suggests that gaining her newfound status as an 'entrepreneur' has enabled her to find a purpose in her world that is more than '*a nice big house'* and 'making *millions*.' In doing so perhaps Warrior now feels she can fulfil, or indeed, break free of the expectations that surround her.

Finally, I end with Joe, who despite selling his venture very shortly before I interviewed him; spent time at the end of his account reflecting on how the experiences made him feel:

> Like I do look after myself more. I know it's not really a business question… But um [pauses]. Before I, I did this I didn't really care. And things. Like. But it gives a purpose in life. Like it's nice to have that purpose. It makes you happier to have a purpose in life… (Joe)

Immediately, as was common with the other participants, the change was most felt *within* himself. The implication that having a purpose appeals to the ideals of ownership, of being responsible for *something* that has a direct impact on you and others. Joe also slips between the first and second person within this extract. This gave me the feeling that he was slipping in and out of a rehearsed narrative *'it makes you happier to have a purpose'*. As if he was simply

repeating what he thought entrepreneurship should achieve. The construction of this makes sense as he turns to reflect on his current situation.

> …But if you ask *me* [points to himself] if I'm happier now, cos' I know you will like… Now I, I don't have all of that stuff… God yeah [laughs], much more happy like. And you know [gestures to Lego – Fig. X], I still have a house, and I a job – stuff like that and you know… I still feel sometimes that I'm almost there, but not quite. (Joe)

Joe put much emphasis on *me,* as if suggesting his past self is an 'other' – something he no longer connects with. Joe carefully lays out how much similar his life looks, but that he is liberated from all that '*stuff*'. I did not probe what this was but assume such '*stuff*' were the constraints he felt when he felt he was running his enterprise; seen and unseen. Yet, despite letting go of his venture and his 'entrepreneurial' past, Joes slips right back into a similar rhetoric: '*I still feel sometimes that I'm almost there, but not quite'*. Once again, I am not sure where '*there'* is for Joe, but reaching it appears to be never-ending, entrepreneur-employer or not.

Figure 50. Joe: *'Almost there'*

5.4.4 Theme Summary

In summary this superordinate theme makes sense of accounts that continually contradicted and also emulated common entrepreneurial discourses. In doing so, my aim here was to

examine universal influences that were commonly experienced amongst my participants before, during and after their employer transition.

The universally felt state of flux of neither feeling nor being an entrepreneur, is reminiscent of Turner's (1974) conception of liminality (see Chapter 3). This is suggested as a state in which the individual was 'betwixt and between' a social position and/or identity, and as such could not be clearly defined. Additionally, Turner describes it as a state from which one can achieve liberation from 'structural obligations' (Turner, 1982, p. 27) and where 'anything may happen' (Turner, 1974, p. 13); a space where one might experience freedom of some kind. My findings within this theme suggest just the opposite takes place within this liminal state. That within this state 'structural obligations' in various guises become far more readily felt. Within this space, freedoms are temporary. For the most part, participants are challenged by a never-ending negotiation between the promises constructed by entrepreneurial narratives and their felt realities.

5.5 Chapter Summary

To bring this chapter to a close, I summarise some key areas for discussion. My findings have begun to carefully map out what I suggest is a complex relational web that defines the transition to entrepreneur-employer. The transition is something I interpret as highly complex and nuanced. Ultimately, it requires participants to negotiate social expectations (*great expectations*) that form the foundation of how they make sense of their experiences; imbalanced employment relationships (*conflicts of interest*); and an ever-present force triggering participants separation of their own realities from discourses that construct what entrepreneurs ought to be and do (*never-ending stories*).

What is most evident is how the additional label of 'entrepreneur' impacts all aspects of my participants' experiences. The impact of this, I suggest, is amplified by the context participants operate and live within. I promised my participants that I would reveal the challenging and gritty realities of growing an enterprise, and I hope I have done them justice.

The next and final chapter of my thesis seeks to provide theoretical insight to understand why participants may have experienced becoming an entrepreneur-employer in the ways outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 6
Discussion and Conclusions

6.1. Introduction

6.2. Theoretical implications

6.2.1 Entrepreneurship: The Impact of Context

6.2.2 The Entrepreneur: The Entrepreneurial Self

6.2.3 The Imperative of Growth: The Never-Ending Staircase

6.3 Methodological Implications

6.4 Practice Implications

6.5 Policy Implications

6.6 Research Limitations

6.7 Conclusions and Contributions

6.8 Future Areas of Research

6.9 Final Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to better understand how entrepreneurs experience becoming an employer by applying a phenomenological lens. Given this, I set three research objectives. My first objective was to understand the nature of finding and hiring a first employee as a critical step in entrepreneurial venture growth (Caliendo et al., 2019; Coad et al., 2017). My second objective was to identify what enables or inhibits the transition from entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer. As this transition is currently an under-researched phenomenon, this will facilitate a better understanding of how entrepreneur-employers can be supported further, and where future research can focus. My final objective stems from an interest in the application of an innovative qualitative methodology. Therefore, in this thesis, I sought to answer the following overall research question and sub-questions:

1) How do entrepreneurs experience the transition from non-employer to employer?
    a) What are the potential enablers or inhibitors to this transition?
    b) What is the impact of this transition from the entrepreneur's perspective?

Overall, this research adds to an established body of empirical and theoretical work that seeks to apply a critical and reflexive approach to entrepreneurship (e.g., Essers at al., 2017; Baker & Welter, 2020). The review of Mainstream and Critical literatures in Chapter 2 problematised the assumption that entrepreneurship, and therefore enterprise growth, are means for job creation. The number of employees an enterprise has become a central measurement for entrepreneurial activity and progress. Accordingly, shifting from non-employer to employer is regarded as a critical transition in achieving enterprise growth. In Chapter 2, Section 2.13, the review of extant entrepreneurship literature found limited empirical studies examining the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition. Furthermore, at the time of writing, there appeared to be a lack of empirical investigation exploring this transition from the entrepreneur's perspective.

Using an innovative qualitative approach, this thesis contributes to the field of entrepreneurship by identifying the transition to entrepreneur-employer as a challenging endeavour and thus, a barrier to enterprise growth. As a consequence, the findings provide new insights and perspectives into the realities of becoming an employer that extend current understandings of entrepreneurial job-creation beyond process perspectives. In particular, the findings evidence becoming an employer to be a challenging endeavour due to participants

attempting to grapple with, and live-out entrepreneurial expectations. While there are known challenges of being a small business employer (Wapshott & Mallett, 2015), the findings provide new insights into how becoming an *entrepreneur-employer* inhibits, rather than enables, enterprise growth. This is a valuable and novel contribution to the field of entrepreneurship.

To further detail the answer to the research questions, I will examine the implications of my findings (Chapter 5) and demonstrate their wider contribution to the field of Entrepreneurship. I discuss these implications from a theoretical (Section 6.2), methodological (Section 6.3) practice (Section 6.4) and policy perspective (Section 6.5). In particular, I return to the key areas of literature considered in Chapter 2 and examine the contribution of my own research findings in light of this. I then reflect on the limitations of this study (Section 6.6), followed by summarising the overall conclusions and contributions of this research (Section 6.7). Opportunities for future areas of research are then explored (Section 6.8) before finally concluding my thesis (Section 6.9).

6.2 Theoretical Implications

In Chapter 2, I concluded that Mainstream Approaches and Critical Approaches studying entrepreneurship, the entrepreneur and enterprise growth are yet to investigate how the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition is experienced. I noted that, at the time of research both Critical and Mainstream Approaches are yet to examine this transition from the entrepreneur's perspective. Therefore, this research makes a much-needed contribution to better understand how entrepreneurs' experience the transition to becoming an employer.

My findings answer my explorative research question; *How do entrepreneurs experience the transition from non-employer to employer?* I find that becoming an entrepreneur-employer is a Catch-22 (Heller, 1961/1999). That is, by fulfilling the implicit assumption that more enterprise growth creates more jobs – as explored in Chapter 2 (Sections 2.3 and 2.11) – paradoxically my participants felt less entrepreneurial, and in most cases not like entrepreneurs at all.

To answer my research questions, in the following subsections I discuss how my findings contribute and extend three Critical Approaches discussed in my literature review (Section 2.8). These are:

- Entrepreneurship and the impact of context (Section 2.9): I demonstrate how taking a phenomenological approach illuminates the nuances and complexities of context. I show how what could be regarded as a similar context (place) acted to enable some, while inhibiting other participant's employer transitions (Baker & Welter, 2018; Parkinson et al., 2017; Welter, 2011);
- The entrepreneur and the entrepreneurial self (Section 2.10): I discuss how being an entrepreneur *and* an employer impacted upon participants. I found the transition prevented them from fully realising their entrepreneurial selves (Bröckling, 2016; Brown, 2015; Rose, 1992); and,
- Growth as a constructed ideal of neoliberalism (Section 2.11): I discuss why growing an enterprise within a neoliberal system is why participants experienced growing levels of constraint and frustration, rather than achieve promised entrepreneurial ideals of success (Dardot & Laval, 2019, 2014).

I will use these theoretical perspectives to answer my research questions and demonstrate my contribution in revealing the entrepreneur-employer's transition as a Catch-22.

6.2.1 Entrepreneurship: The Impact of Context

In this section I explore the research question: *What are the potential enablers or inhibitors to this transition?* To do so I contribute to literatures that theorise the way context shapes how entrepreneurship is both perceived and enacted (Parkinson et al., 2017). In Chapter 2, Sections 2.4.1 and 2.9, I highlighted how scholars are increasingly recognising the importance of studying the relationship between entrepreneurship and context (Baker & Welter, 2020). How to investigate or begin to understand the role and impact of context remains under consideration (Harrison et al., 2020). Most research implicitly assumes a one-way relationship between entrepreneurship and the respective context (Parkinson et al., 2020). Further, Welter (2011) notes one of the challenges in theorising context is that they can be enabling and restraining at the same time, thus indicating a bright and a dark side of context. Baker & Welter (2017) highlight that this leads to conceptual as well as methodological challenges.

Through my research, I demonstrate the value of using phenomenology as a theoretical frame and the manner in which context may act to enable or inhibit my participants. My research makes a much-needed contribution by demonstrating the inherent tensions that come with contextualising entrepreneurship (Baker & Welter, 2020; Jones et al., 2019). In doing so

this research contributes to literatures that theorise context as more than the when, the where or the what of entrepreneurship. These literatures examine the way context shapes how individuals engage with entrepreneurship (Parkinson et al., 2020; Welter et al., 2017). This perspective draws upon the Latin origins of the word *context* (con: together; texere: to weave) to indicate the relevance of understanding the construct as a fluid interplay, or weaving together, of circumstances and practices (Parkinson et al., 2020; Gaddefors & Anderson, 2019). Appreciating context in this way not only requires encounters with entrepreneur's engagements, but also theorising how this may shape or impact the entrepreneur.

In the following sections I show how taking a phenomenological approach has illuminated how entrepreneurs engaged with their contexts. This engagement for some appeared to enable them in becoming and feeling like entrepreneurs. While for others, contexts in the form of social and cultural expectations acted to constrain them when they transitioned to entrepreneur-employers.

6.2.1.1 Context as an Enabler of Entrepreneurship

In my findings, subthemes – *Rejection of Entrepreneurial Expectations* (Section 5.2.1*),* *Gendered Expectations* (Section 5.2.2), and *Regional Expectations* (Section 5.2.3) – reveal how participants made sense of themselves as entrepreneurs. As part of their reflections, participants negotiated between embedded cultural and social expectations. From my literature review (Section 2.9.2), I noted a limited understanding of how circumstances and entrepreneurial activities are woven together, and how these may shape how an entrepreneur perceives the value of their entrepreneurial endeavours (Fiet et al., 2013; Venkataraman et al., 2012). In any community setting, income levels, geography, and resources form only a part of the context (Welter, 2011; Welter et al., 2014; Welter et al., 2019).

For my participants, embedded social norms, cultures and expectations shaped how they made sense of their entrepreneurial endeavours. I found that when discussing the reasons they had started their enterprises, participants readily identified how their contexts enabled them to do so. For example, in *Gendered Expectations* (Section 5.2.2)*,* Bobbie references other enterprises in her local area to emphasise how she is more entrepreneurial, noting particularly as it is not a '*beauticians or hairdressers'.* Using her context, and the stereotypes associated with it in this way *enables* Bobbie to feel more entrepreneurial (Gill & Larson, 2014; Greene et al., 2013; Smith, 2013). In doing so, Bobbie reflects that her own activities are more entrepreneurial than others. Within this extract, Bobbie is joining her own locally

contextualised knowledge of an area (the Welsh Valleys) to what she believes is a wider stereotype of a 'micro-business'. By doing so, this localised knowledge appears to *enable* Bobbie to feel more credible as an entrepreneur, as her images fits with more accepted narratives of 'enterprise culture' (Marlow & Martinez Dy, 2018; Smith, 2013).

Conversely, and to demonstrate the complexity of context, on the surface Bruce is very much the stereotype that Bobbie draws her credibility from: a hairdresser from the Welsh Valleys. Bruce's experiences connect the stereotypical narratives Bobbie references to a particular place (the Welsh Valleys). These narratives have, according to Bruce, a particular set of social expectations, '*nobody really gives a damn*' and '*you go on benefits*' (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.3).

Yet for Bruce, these embedded social expectations weave together gendered and cultural norms that fuel a desire to be something different, not to be this stereotype. These findings contribute to research that seeks to better contextualise links between social class, social mobility and entrepreneurial intentions (Apetrei et al., 2019; Gaddefors & Anderson, 2019; Smith, 2013). Research has sought to better understand how these concepts transcend place to influence a wider and more pervasive 'enterprise culture' (Williams & Williams, 2017). In the same way that Bobbie uses her context to justify her entrepreneurial endeavours, Bruce uses it to demonstrate how it motivated her to not conform to what is expected. Both reveal how embedded expectations – social, cultural, economic, entrepreneurial - form the contours shaping their experiences and attitudes that mean they engage with their contexts in different ways.

These findings contribute to understandings of place as partly constituted by popular narratives of enterprise and other social mechanisms (Bjerke & Rämö, 2011). These, as Bobbie and Bruce's experiences demonstrate, operate in a complex interplay of social, temporal and political-economic circumstances to enable and encourage entrepreneurial activities to flourish (Brace & Johns-Putra, 2010; Marlow & Martinez Dy, 2018; Williams & Williams, 2017). Further I demonstrate how applying a phenomenological approach reveals the nuances that come with researching entrepreneurs operating in the same place but interpret it very differently.

6.2.1.2 Context as an Inhibitor of Entrepreneurship

In my literature review, I highlighted an implicit assumption within Mainstream and some Critical literatures, that entrepreneurship is expected to be a valuable economic and social activity, particularly for those in deprived regions (see Section 2.9 and Section 2.11) In my own research, I found that how participants made sense of their entrepreneurial activities diverged when discussing the relationship to where they grew up or lived. In *Regional Expectations* (Section 5.2.3) this was particularly evident.

Participants who had grown up in the Valleys region of South Wales assigned different meanings to enterprise than those that did not. Max, Bruce, Phoenix, Alex, Warrior and Joe readily referred to their endeavours as a means to escape the deprivation of the Valleys. However, when it came to understand their selves as employers in *Mother Hen: Finding Meaning in Hiring Others* (Section 5.3.1)*,* those from the Valleys region particularly reflected the social change narrative highlighted in my literature review. Participants described how their enterprises could be used as a means to help others and their communities. Thus, on the one hand they saw enterprise as a means of escape, and on the other as a means of helping others.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Wales, and in particular the Welsh Valleys (described in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.3), are identified as one of the most deprived areas of the UK and indeed Europe (Francis-Devine, 2020). A measure of economic deprivation, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), evidences Wales as one of the most economically deprived regions in Europe (EuroStat, 2020; Llewellyn et al., 2019). Bennett, Beynon, and Hudson (2000) noted Valleys' areas suffer from a duality of deprivation; social problems associated with urban areas coupled with rural isolation of communities. While there may be recent improvements to GDP rates, many of the socio-economic challenges remain (Llewellyn et al., 2019).

'Deprived' or 'depleted' communities are frequently conceptualised as one context where entrepreneurship is expected to occur (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2019; Parkinson et al., 2017). Narratives of enterprise growth also suggest that these communities will benefit from such activities (Murzacheva et al., 2019). For decades, enterprise was and still is expected to help revive communities and neighbourhoods labelled as deprived (Blackburn & Ram, 2006; Murzacheva et al., 2019). However, there have been criticisms of presumptions that enterprise can fix so-called deprived communities (Mallett & Wapshott, 2020; Ram et al., 2017). Conventional notions of enterprise might have limited purchase in depleted communities with embedded social expectations (McKeever et al., 2014).

Participants spoke not only of a want, but a need, to give back to their local communities. This was especially relevant for Alex, Warrior, Max, Phoenix, Bruce and Joe

who all grew up in the Valleys region. At times it seemed participants were simply relaying a 'deprived' narrative that positions entrepreneurship as a solution to the social and economic problems of the region. The expectation to 'do good' was evident in the account of Max in Section 5.2.3: Regional Expectations.

What is captured by Max, is his reality of operating in an area that is classed as deprived, and that within this context there are social expectations at play that appear to deepen Max's understanding and acting upon this. Thus, how enterprise is perceived by Max, sits in contradiction to those who argue enterprise is only synonymous with entrepreneurship; insofar as it empties entrepreneurship of the social aspects by encouraging an individualistic relationship with commercial value creation (Hjorth & Holt, 2016). On the contrary, my findings reveal participant's engagement with their local contexts shaped how they ran their enterprises and perceived their role as employers. Participants appeared to be guided by a complex web of embedded social expectations: their contexts in totality.

To further demonstrate this, Bruce's experience of her first employee (Section, 5.3.1, Mother Hen: *Finding Meaning in Hiring Others*) demonstrates how this need to do good conflicted with the needs of her business.

While her context also acted as an enabler in wanting to start her enterprise (Section 6.2.1.1), I found it also contributed to inhibiting her transition to becoming an employer. As my literature review highlighted, the recognition that enterprise could be a means for doing good is embedded within narratives of social entrepreneurship (see Section 2.9.2). Hjorth and Holt (2016) for example, suggest that entrepreneurship should be understood as the relational capacity to act; a generosity of action opening up possibilities with no end. These notions change and muddy the narratives of entrepreneurship as not just an economic, but as a philanthropic act (Kibler & Kautonen, 2016). My findings suggest that in engaging with these narratives, the employment transition of participants from and operating enterprises in areas labelled as 'deprived' is inhibited.

This extends the work of Nordstrom et al. (2020) who note how ethics and morality are sustained and enacted through entrepreneurship within communities labelled 'in poverty'. Many of these ethical practices are framed as of benefit for both the entrepreneur and their community. Within narratives of entrepreneurship as a means for social change, there is an implicit assumption that doing good (enacting the deprived narratives) for others must be good for the enterprise (Bandinelli, 2020a). However, I found that at times participants struggled to negotiate between the expectation to do good and run a successful enterprise (Egan-Wyer et al., 2018).

This contributes and further extends the work of Parkinson et al., (2020) and Parkinson et al., (2017) who find that social and economic deprivation shape a community's relationship with enterprise. Parkinson et al. (2017) apply a discursive psychological approach to examine how a community depicts itself as a context for enterprise (or not). The authors found that if we – as researchers – do not look beyond entrepreneurs and conventional 'contexts', we will not be able to see how enterprise becomes disabled as well as enabled (Parkinson et al., 2020). They conclude that we should better consider the context in which attitudes are occasioned and conditioned. My research supports this conclusion. My findings show how context was significant in shaping participant's thoughts, feelings and how these were enacted through their entrepreneurial endeavours. This shaping of entrepreneurial behaviour was particularly evident in participants born and running their enterprises within regions labelled as 'deprived'.

To summarise, my findings illuminate the variability and complexity of context. In particular I found that participants from, and running enterprises in, the Valleys found the transition to employer far more challenging. I evidenced how my participants engaged with various parts of their contexts and reciprocally how their contexts engaged with them. In doing so this research contributes to literatures that theorise context as more than the when, where and what of entrepreneurship, instead it regards the entrepreneur as part of the context (Parkinson et al., 2020; Welter et al., 2017).

6.2.2 The Entrepreneur: The Entrepreneurial Self

In this section, I discuss how my findings help answer the research question: *What is the impact of this transition from the entrepreneur's perspective?* The literature review (Section 2.5) highlighted that Mainstream Approaches implicitly construct and emphasise the entrepreneur as an autonomous individual, capable of achieving economic and social change. However, the role of the autonomous entrepreneur in concepts of enterprise growth (Section 2.3) and entrepreneurship (Section 2.4) is almost invisible. From a Critical perspective (see Section 2.10), 'The Entrepreneur' is constructed by implicit assumptions that position 'the entrepreneur' as a symbol of freedom and economic success. However, as I alluded to in the previous section, it is also positioned by some critical literatures as a social force for good (Hjorth & Holt, 2016).

My findings echo theologically charged narratives that entangle morality with enterprise (Anderson & Smith, 2007; Kibler & Kautonen, 2016). Enterprise is claimed as a

means to express and achieve these core values, and my participants' narratives reflect this. Joe regarded his venture as a vehicle to a different social status: '*…I feel like everyone wants to see themselves as an important person. Like I want people, it would be nice if people looked up to me as they would someone else'.* Joe implies that his enterprise is not just a means for social good, but a means to change how others perceive him: his enterprise shapes him. It suggests that for Joe, outcomes such as personal fulfilment, charity and economic good become 'entwined' (Ahl & Marlow, 2021, p. 41), and appealingly tangible by becoming an entrepreneur.

This finding is reflected in a small but emerging body of literature that investigates the role and influence of neoliberalism in contemporary understandings of the entrepreneur (Section 2.10). In critical literatures (explored in Chapter 2, Section 2.10) neoliberalism is conceptualised as a ubiquitous phenomenon (Bettache & Chiu, 2019); formed of 'narratives, practices and apparatuses that govern human beings in accordance with the universal principle of competition' (Dardot & Laval, 2014, p. 4). A large body of scholarship is dedicated to the study of neoliberalism as a form of governing apparatus. The implication is that neoliberal ideals impact upon us, and all aspects of our lives (Birch & Springer, 2019; Dean, 2014). The desire to realise a fully autonomous self – the entrepreneurial self – is central to fulfilling the neoliberal ideology of individualism (Birch & Springer, 2019).

However, as Ahl and Marlow (2019) note, entrepreneurship scholars have long neglected the role of neoliberal ideology in understandings of the entrepreneur, or indeed how this shapes behaviours of those labelled as entrepreneurs (Scharff, 2016b). In the following sections, I contribute to literatures (reviewed in Section 2.10.1) evidencing how neoliberally informed narratives of entrepreneurship impact on my participants lived experiences of becoming an entrepreneur-employer (Gill & Scharff, 2013; Scharff, 2016b). This, in part, responds to Scharff's (2016b) call for more empirical research on how neoliberalism is lived out by entrepreneurs. To do so, I expand on how my own research contributes to the concept of the *entrepreneurial self* (Bröckling, 2016). I will illustrate how becoming an employer constrained participant's ability to fully realise their entrepreneurial selves (Bröckling, 2016).

6.2.2.1 Me Ltd: The Entrepreneurial Self

Narratives emphasising on self-interest, bounded by the burdens of personal responsibility form the foundations of an 'enterprise culture' (Rose, 2017) that seeks to govern individuals lives, hopes and dreams (Dean, 2014). Creating calculating, entrepreneurial and

'responsibilised subjects', wholly responsible for their own life outcomes, limits dependence on state structures (Brown, 2015). Rather than govern the 'enterprise' as a separate structure within a neoliberal system, instead, the individual becomes inseparable from, and in some cases *is*, the enterprise (Bröckling, 2016, p. xvi; Brown, 2015; Dardot & Laval, 2014; Rose, 1992). This *enterprising self* is neither an *ideal type* nor 'empirically observable' (Bröckling, 2016, p. 20) but rather an ideal that shapes, alters, produces and reproduces the subject in a particular mould.

My findings evidence how participants used their enterprises as a means to make sense of their selves. For participants like Warrior, their enterprises were the reason they felt more capable. The business is regarded as a vehicle of personal growth. Warrior emphasises this in Section 5.2.2, where she described how her enterprise had enabled her to feel more '*confident'* and '*stronger'*.

The entrepreneurial self, therefore, is linked to the dynamics of governing the 'free' individual in neoliberal society (Rose, 1992). It offers individuals an abundance of opportunities to develop themselves and become empowered by being employable, flexible and risk willing, turning personal lives into appropriate projects (Bröckling, 2016).

As highlighted in the literature review, Bröckling's (2016) conception of the *Entrepreneurial Self* is a genealogy of what we are urged to become (see Section 2.10.1). Bröckling exposes a series of absurd contradictions in the notions and injunctions to the *entrepreneurial self*. For example, he shows the extent to which the privileging of business and in particular risk taking should be monitored by a self-controlled and responsible entrepreneur. This separation between personal responsibility versus capital risk was evident in the narratives of my participants. The rhetoric of taking responsibility was far more common than the language of taking risks, within this responsibility the logics of capital and business were inferred (Brown, 2015). This became evident in the subtheme *The Mother Hen* (Section 5.3.1), where participants began to make sense of themselves as an employer:

Phoenix, for example lives out this contradiction when explaining how he helps his employees in need. In the very same sentence, he claims '*but I'm rescuer'* which is then opposed by the capital logic of not wanting to '*lose the investment'*: the social versus the economic outcome. Bröckling (2016) amplifies many of these paradoxes, tensions and contradictions, and my research adds empirical weight to demonstrate how these are lived out, every day by my entrepreneur-employers. Within my findings, it was not difficult to find common ground with Bröckling's arguments. It was apparent that narratives of entrepreneurship were complicit in the making and remaking of a particular kind of

entrepreneurial employer. One that is maternal/paternal, regarding their employees as something to be cared for, to be fostered. These ideas are particularly resonant in the discourse on mechanisms of creativity and empowerment (Fine & Saad-Filho, 2017).

6.2.2.2 The Entrepreneurial Self as an Employer

In Chapter 2, Section 2.6.1 I found that only HRM literatures explored various facets of employment relationships in SMEs in depth. Current literature on employment in small firms does not appear to capture the nuances or complexities of the entrepreneur-employer or contextualise them. It spans across disparate literatures on SMEs, HRM and small business management. I concluded that existing studies omit what I found to be a key challenge to my participants becoming an employer, that of being labelled an *entrepreneur* as an employer: *the entrepreneur-employer.*

My research demonstrates that omitting the label entrepreneur fails to account for what may be preventing owner-managers (entrepreneurs) from relinquishing control to their employees. For example, in their study exploring the concept of employee voice in small enterprises, Gilman et al. (2015) found that owner-managers do not stand back and relinquish control to any degree.

Applying the concept of the neoliberally informed *entrepreneurial self* (Bröckling, 2016) provides theoretical insight into why participants struggled to balance responsibility for their enterprises, alongside an overwhelming sense of responsibility for their employees. I turn to Warrior to illustrate this point. Warrior, like other participants, grappled with trying to balance the responsibility of her enterprise *'you're responsible for them getting paid',* with feelings of responsibility for her employee(s) *'which means you're responsible for potentially them paying their rent and getting their food'* (Chapter 5, Section 5.3.1).

This evidences another contradiction within the notion of the entrepreneurial self, particularly when becoming an employer. If fulfilling the idea of becoming an enterprise is the ultimate means of taking responsibility for the self, then how does an entrepreneur-employer manage responsibility for employees (who are supposed to also be responsible for themselves)? This is especially the case in a neoliberal system that encourages individuals to maximise their selves and take ownership of their lives, especially in work (Cowley & Hodson, 2014). Phoenix exposes this contradiction, noting that his employees are supposed to be '*responsible for their actions'*. Yet, in the subtheme *What If They Don't Turn Up* (Section 5.3.2) participants spoke about an uncomfortable reality of becoming an employer: a growing

relational imbalance of power between employee and employer that resulted in their feeling less in control.

The fully autonomous, free and responsible entrepreneur begins to be unable to enact the neoliberal ideals 'doing' entrepreneurship is supposed to realise (Rose, 2017). It opens the entrepreneur up to the possibility that their enterprise may not enable them to maximise their selves. For participants, becoming an employer has meant not being able to be a fully autonomous self, leaving their initially found entrepreneurial-selves vulnerable. Tree Lady neatly captures her realisation by describing the feeling of not feeling in control of her employees turning up to work or not in Section 5.3.2.

In summary, Tree Lady's vulnerability illuminates just one of the many tensions inherent within Bröckling's (2016) entrepreneurial self. This contributes to work evidencing how neoliberalism is subjectively lived-out through those positioned as ideal entrepreneurial subjects (Cook, 2020; Scharff, 2016a, 2016b). My participant's experiences demonstrate the potential impact being labelled an entrepreneur has on their lived realities. Initially felt benefits of becoming an autonomous *entrepreneur* began to fade during the transition to employer. A double-edged sword is being drawn.

My findings reveal an inherent contradiction at the heart of narratives encouraging more enterprise growth (as explored in Chapter 2). That is, if entrepreneurial success is defined by enterprise growth, why do my participants feel less entrepreneurial when they attempt to grow? To further investigate this tension, the final sections engage with critical literatures that suggest that within a neoliberal system, like the UK's, achieving entrepreneurial success is a never-ending endeavour (reviewed in Chapter 2, Section 2.11).

6.2.3 The Imperative of Growth: The Never-Ending Staircase

In this final section, I draw together relevant literatures and evidence from my findings, to theorise why my participants experienced the transition to employer as a Catch-22. That is, by fulfilling the implicit assumption that more enterprise growth creates more jobs (an imperative of growth) paradoxically my participants felt less entrepreneurial, and in most cases not like entrepreneurs at all.

In Chapter 2, I highlighted that an implicit assumption within Mainstream Approaches is that that more enterprise growth creates more jobs. Indeed, I noted in Section 2.2 that entrepreneurship is regarded as a means to 'end' broad societal issues like poverty and inequalities (GEM, 2020). On an individual level it is also promoted by the UK government

as 'a way to take control of your life and fulfil your dreams' (Dept. Work and Pensions, *New Enterprise Allowance Scheme* Website, 2020). Both Mainstream and some Critical literatures, as I highlight in Section 2.11, in various ways continually reinforce the belief that more entrepreneurship is a good thing.

In contrast, my research contributes to a growing body of critical scholarship that challenges the assumption that more entrepreneurship (whether social or economic) is always a good thing (Fletcher et al., 2019; Marlow, 2020; Martinez Dy et al., 2018). In particular, my participants' experiences of becoming employers reflects an uglier reality of enterprise growth as a means of job creation. Specifically, I demonstrate how participants became increasingly frustrated, feeling more constrained having achieved enterprise growth, than when they were just entrepreneurs.

My findings demonstrate participant's ever-growing awareness that the promises of entrepreneurial success – freedom, control, gaining more wealth, transforming of the self – were not being realised. On the contrary, in the theme, *Never-Ending Stories* (Section 5.4.1), participants expressed increasing feelings of constraint and entrapment after becoming employers. Participants alluded to the idea that achieving notions of entrepreneurial success were becoming ever more impossible to achieve. Despite managing to achieve the imperative of growing their enterprises, participants felt increasingly constrained. Phoenix and Warrior were left unable to buy property; Melissa was left never able to take holiday or pay herself beyond minimum wage; Tree Lady and Bruce felt increasingly vulnerable due to financial concerns that employing staff brought.

These findings contribute to literatures that suggest neoliberal systems promote entrepreneurial selves that continuously pursue growth, self-development, and refinement of their own capital (Rose, 2017). A neoliberal system positions these outcomes as different forms of 'success' (Rose, 2017). Scholars have described mainstream idealising of entrepreneurial successes as an 'elixir' (Lundmark & Weselius, 2014) and 'post-fact glorification' (Gerpott & Kieser, 2017) designed to entice and encourage the creation of more ideal neoliberal subjects, who will hopefully create more enterprises.

6.2.3.1 Gendering Success

My review of the literature in Chapter 2, Section 2.10, highlighted that some implicit assumptions made within Mainstream Approaches are gendered (Pritchard et al., 2019; Rottenberg, 2019). These speak to concepts of neoliberal femininity (Rottenberg, 2018) and

masculinity (Garlick, 2020; Knights & Tullberg, 2012) and how this constructs the 'successful entrepreneur' (Angel et al., 2018).

My findings demonstrate how women participants, in particular, interpreted their entrepreneurial endeavours as transformatory. Often women participant's narratives appeared to echo those that link increasing self-confidence with becoming a successful woman-entrepreneur (Gill & Orgad, 2018). In Section Chapter 5 Section 5.2.1, Tree Lady, Warrior and Alex all refer to how their entrepreneurial endeavours made them feel more '*confident'* or had increased levels of '*self-belief'*.

Mostly, women participants were united in identifying feeling more 'self-confident' as a result of their entrepreneurial endeavours, a sensibility no male participants expressed. Such evidence aligns with an established body of literature that highlights how postfeminist assumptions are melded in narratives of neoliberalism and entrepreneurialism (Lewis et al., 2017b; Marlow, 2020). This evidence raises the question as to whether participants actually did feel more confident, or whether they were simply reflecting a common discourse because it aligns with what a woman *should* feel when they start a venture? My research was not intended to explore this question and it remains open.

These findings reflect postfeminist perspectives promoting a form of individualism instead, where women can apply entrepreneurialism of the self to achieve success (Marlow, 2020). Indeed, Warrior specifically ties feelings of personal *growth, confidence* and being *stronger*, to her entrepreneurial activities. This reflects critical work that suggests neoliberalism constructs gendered narratives promoting the use of agency as a pathway to achievement, and that a denial of structural barriers is a source of inequality (Adamson & Kelan, 2019; Gill & Scharff, 2013; Gill & Orgad, 2017, 2018). This is empirically demonstrated by Pritchard et al.'s (2019) exploration of 'entrepreneur barbie'.

My findings also contribute to work that theorises how neoliberalised postfeminist discourses underpin Western entrepreneurial policy initiatives (Ahl & Marlow, 2021; Berglund et al., 2018). These initiatives are aimed at encouraging more women to select self-employment and to grow their ventures (Foss et al., 2019). One recent and relevant example is the '*Supporting Entrepreneurial Women in Wales'* initiative, launched by the Welsh Government in 2019.

Male participants alluded to various facets of embedded masculinised expectations of success. Discussions of male role models, family, and physicality featured throughout their accounts. In making this connection, I contribute to recent work on the importance of affect

in critical studies of masculinities (Allan, 2016, 2018; de Boise, 2019; Reeser & Gottzen, 2018).

Despite being cloaked as a form of liberal success, it has been suggested that neoliberalism often relies on ideologies of 'traditional' family relations (Cooper, 2017). Max, Phoenix and Joe described various pressures that revolved around being a certain 'type' of successful family man. Whereas women participants who had children separated their roles as 'business owner' and 'mothers' within their accounts, male participants regarded their ventures as an extension of what it means to be a good father. For example, Phoenix interprets running a successful venture as leaving a '*legacy*' for his son.

However, contextual uncertainties may mean men struggle to realise masculine ideals of entrepreneurial success (Cornwall et al., 2018). Neoliberal masculinities can thus become more fragile, producing reactionary responses from men who assert an illusory form of autonomy (Knight & Tullberg 2012) to demonstrate that they match norms of a successful male. Indeed Phoenix (Section 5.2.2), shows a reactionary response by demonstrating his 'masculineness' when he felt it was being undermined by another male, *'and he tried pushing me, and I just went… guillotined him…'*.

Literature examining embedded neoliberal masculinised ideals of entrepreneurial success suggest it is framed as the personal burdening of risk (Connell, 2016). This sits in opposition to narratives that position entrepreneurship as a means to achieve freedom and security (Connell, 2016; Garlick, 2020; Salzinger, 2016). My findings contribute to literatures exploring this contradiction. For example, Bish, Max, Joe and Phoenix all discussed the relative discomfort that came with trying to keep their businesses financially afloat, as Max described, at points he felt he was just '*surviving'*. Max's increased feelings of insecurity contrast with masculinised neoliberal narratives of control, that Garlick (2017) identifies as central to the construction of hegemonic Western forms of masculinity. These hegemonic forms are reflected in parts of Joe's descriptions: *I was struggling and going down quick… You just… Don't expect that from a man-in-a-van, do you?* In particular, and as I noted in my analysis (Section 5.2.3), these hegemonic forms are reflected in Joe's use of the '*White Van Man'* (Leake, 1997; Smith, 2013).

The result, for Joe was that in taking on huge risks, financial insecurity worked in contention with neoliberal ideals of success that include providing for family and control over his life. For Joe, it got to the point that he lost control of his life altogether. The expectations to fulfil ideals became too much, something he felt he was '*drowning'* in. In this vein, Joe's story reflects another ugly reality of job-creation in his pursuit of entrepreneurial success.

Consequently, my findings demonstrate that achieving entrepreneurial feelings of success, whether man or woman, appears to come with separate challenges. These challenges are continually emphasised, yet bounded by, gendered neoliberal ideals of success. This finding reminds me of Phoenix, and his '*masquerade'* (Section 5.2.3). Phoenix believed that he must present a version of an expected entrepreneurial 'life' to the world, even though he did not personally feel he was achieving it. He refers to Macbeth to make sense of this experience: *'Macbeth, it looks like the innocent flower… but it is the serpent underneath it'*. This is in reference to Lady Macbeth encouraging her husband to appear to be one thing, in order to hide another. This alludes to how entrepreneurial success is bound up with aesthetics, you need to 'look' like an entrepreneur to then feel like one. Success becomes an embodied complex dynamic of material and social entities. These need to be seen in order to be felt.

Accounting for wider relationships between material and social environments as mutually reenforcing particular aesthetics of entrepreneurship is an emerging topic of interest. The work of Pritchard et al. (2019) unravels this notion further; using both neoliberalism and postfeminism to reconceptualise female entrepreneurial success as a form of aesthetic labouring. Phoenix referenced a constant need to portray himself in a certain way on social media, and this perhaps suggests that masculinities not only constrain women (Lewis, 2014a; Lewis et al., 2017b; Treanor & Marlow, 2021), but also men (Marlow et al., 2018; Rumens, 2017; Rumens et al., 2019).

With regard to material environments that entrepreneurs operate within, in Chapter 4, Section 4.9, I introduced the participants using their own words. Within this, I included personal reflections of each interview taken from field notes and video journals. They detail the everyday spaces the entrepreneurs inhabit and note observations beyond the context of the interview. For example, in Section 4.9.3, I note Max's reaction as I walked into his business premises: he apologised, 'sorry', and gestured to the room and explaining 'it's probably not what you were expecting'. Not only does this provide further insight into how the material organisation of space contributes to the construction of a certain entrepreneurial aesthetic, but how these material environments work in deconstructing narratives of entrepreneurial success for participants.

The work of Shortt and Izak (2020) provides a useful lens to better understand why Max highlighted his material environment as contradictory to his and my own expectation. The authors highlight contemporary constructions of the workplace as sanitised, shiny, and new, rather than manifestations of the 'everyday scars' of labouring. Workplaces instead seek render to render these scars as invisible (Shortt & Izak, 2020, p. 21). In further observations

of Max's environment, I noted that the 'old products, machinery and empty energy drinks cans [were] strewn everywhere'. These micro-level observations reflect Shortt and Izak's observations (2020, p.22), and their warnings of 'airbrushed workplaces', to entrepreneurial workspaces.

It not only highlights the significance of spaces entrepreneurs' dwell within, but also signals the researcher to be attentive to them (Shortt, 2014). Therefore, field notes and reflective journals also form part my findings, contributing to wider understandings of entrepreneurial aesthetics and their significance in constructions of entrepreneurial success. This extends the work of Daniel and Ellis-Chadwick (2016), who found entrepreneur's running self-storage businesses experienced 'reputational anxiety' (p. 16). The authors contend that this stems from operating in 'liminal' locations situated outside the entrepreneurial norms, like pop-up's, enterprise parks, co-working spaces (Daniel & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016).

6.2.3.2 The Growing Constraints of Success

In this final section I explore a significant contradiction that was at the heart of participant's experiences of becoming an entrepreneur-employer. This centres around the idea that entrepreneurship is framed by neoliberalism as a means to emancipation (Rindova et al., 2009). As I highlighted in the review of the literature, this traces back to a capitalist logic built on the assumption that economic freedom is causally related to political freedom (Forder, 2019). This draws from Friedman's (1962) supposition that capitalism is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for political freedom. Therefore, becoming an entrepreneur, and achieving economic and social growth are constructed as a means to achieve emancipation (Jones & Murtola, 2012; Rindova et al., 2009).

In light of the neoliberal imperative of growth, it could also be assumed that in growing their enterprises and realising entrepreneurial success, freedom would be readily felt by my participants. However, participants' accounts reflected feelings of frustration and a sense of confusion. Rather than feeling free, becoming an employer introduced participants to structural constraints not previously felt.

My findings reveal that in pursuing the neoliberal ideal of growth (and therefore emancipation), moving from sole entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer, additional constraints were acutely perceived and 'a never-ending story' emerged. Melissa explains this

feeling as being *'trapped, a victim of your own success'* (Chapter 5, Section 5.4.1). Therefore, I contribute to the work of Verduijn et al., (2014) that repositions entrepreneuring using Laclau's (1996, p. 98) conceptualisation of emancipation 'as intimately related to oppression' (Sections 2.9 and 2.11).

In the experiences of participants, common struggles were shared during their transitions to become employers. During this transition they became exposed to structural constraints (maternity pay, tax, payroll) only after employing staff, and this was suggestive of a constant oppressive state (the impossible staircase) (Section 5.4.1). Additional empirical evidence also finds similar inherent tensions that prevent rather than encourage entrepreneurial diversity (Jennings et al., 2016; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Gill & Ganesh, 2007).

Bobbie and Melissa left their status quo corporate worlds on the basis that owning their own enterprise would enable them to have more autonomy. However, as Melissa, described, the entrepreneurial dream did not match up to her reality. This was particularly felt when describing the day-to-day realities of being an employer (Sections 5.3.1, 5.3.2 and 5.3.3). Within Melissa's account she points towards common structures of employment in the UK (e.g., payroll, holiday entitlement) (Mallett et al., 2019), that Melissa felt not only constrained but also trapped her. The transition, for Melissa introduced a level of relationality exposing her to structural constraints she had not previously experienced.

These research findings expose experiential tensions that support Laclau's (1992) conception of emancipation as 'intimately related to oppression'. They demonstrate a plurality of particularised and fleeting emancipations bound within a relational nexus. For example, micro-emancipatory moments (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1992, 2012), were revealed as participants described how they were able to make more choices. When reflecting on why she decided to start her enterprise, Bobbie indicated that freedom of choice was key: '*Freedom. So, there's a real thing about freedom for me. I'm probably working harder than I've ever worked before…. But, it's my decision'* (Section 5.4.1). These attempts to pursue neoliberally informed entrepreneurial ideologies form a mechanism of self-affirmation (Rose, 2017). However, as participants, like Melissa, begin to reflect on their wider worlds, and in particular their employees, they are introduced to oppressive structures (Klikauer, 2018) that are universally felt. This negative relational affect appears to be complex and multifaceted.

Through the lens of Laclau (1992) it is impossible to have a fully realised utopian concept of entrepreneuring-as-emancipation as proposed by Rindova et al. (2009) (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Indeed, my findings expose the tension Laclau (1992) highlights. This tension was particularly felt by participants during and after transitioning to become employers. In

being labelled as entrepreneurs (wilfully or not) my participants are exposed to narratives, and popular cultures, and expectations that construct entrepreneurial success in certain ways. The challenge for participants was negotiating a realisation that their entrepreneurial realities did not reflect these idealised constructions.

However, if entrepreneurial success is only achievable for a select few, why do participant's accounts suggest they believe it is, or was, achievable? It is as Dardot and Laval (2019) reflect, the *appearance* of success that seems to be an essential element to neoliberal subjectification: the power of the imaginary dimension. To understand the impact of neoliberalism is to recognise how it is established and maintained by this dimension. Specifically, the 'entrepreneurial imaginary' that offers a more desirable way of life (Dardot & Laval, 2019, p. 65). These imaginaries create an illusion of completeness: the possibility of reconciliation between some mythical origin and a future utopian ideal; an ideal that is captured by the notion of entrepreneurship as a means to 'emancipation' (Rindova et al., 2009). This use of illusion, and our ability to imagine, is a reminder of the warning that is central to the story of 'The Emperor's New Clothes'.

Participants narratives revealed glimpses of these imaginaries in their desire to liberate from their pasts, and to relocate their sense of self in an entrepreneurial future that is free and autonomously controlled. Indeed, as Phoenix declared, it involves trying to find the '*pot of gold at the end of the rainbow'*. After becoming employers, my findings evidence how participants were exposed to structures beyond their control. These structures encouraged them to become entrepreneurs in the first place, and now appear to be preventing them from doing the very thing they are encouraged to do: grow. The result is that participants feel stuck, *'victims of their own success'* (Melissa). Phoenix's reference to Penrose and Penrose's (1958) 'impossible staircase' (Section 5.4.1), neatly demonstrates the never-ending nature of realising entrepreneurial success.

6.3 Methodological Implications

In Chapter 2, I reviewed both Mainstream and Critical Approaches to the study of three key concepts: entrepreneurship, the entrepreneur and enterprise growth. Theoretical development within the entrepreneurship field has been influenced by a number of implicit philosophical assumptions (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1, Table 2). The result of this, as I highlighted in my Theoretical Perspectives Chapter (3), is that Critical and Mainstream Approaches are ontologically distinct forms of enquiry (see Section 3.3).

In ensuring clarity in the theoretical positioning of my research I provide a clear rationale as to why I chose to take a phenomenological approach. Situating my ontological position as sitting between realism and relativism, I noted that in even asking the research questions I did, both positions were implied, and I take a middle ground that accepts the interaction of both. In assuming a phenomenological stance, I admittedly side-stepped (rather than directly addressed) a potential ontological paralysis within the field (see Section 3.3), and indeed the management discipline more broadly (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017).

As I explore in depth in Chapter 3, choosing IPA allowed for a facilitation between cognition and discourse (Smith, 2019). Locating IPA within an epistemological 'middle ground' allows for:

- the existence of a reality independent of the knower;
- an exploration of cognition, (particularly perceptions, thoughts and attention processes);
- an acknowledgement of the important role of language in making sense of and articulating our experiences; and,
- the assumption that individual subjectivities are embedded within their personal, social-economic and cultural histories (Smith, 2019).

Within this study, IPA enables me to not only understand the different experiences of each participant, but also identify what unites them at the phenomenological level. Responding to calls in the literature to better account for the role of context in entrepreneurship (Baker & Welter, 2020), my findings demonstrate the value in using a phenomenological approach as an investigatory tool. I have extended this tool through the use of a co-creative methodology that attempts to expose, rather than simplify, social phenomena that should be understood in context for what they are: complex and multifaceted.

Therefore, as noted in Chapter 4, I contribute to a small and emerging group of entrepreneurship studies that have used IPA as their epistemic framework (Cope, 2011; Heinze, 2013). To extend this further and meet the phenomenological commitments of this study, a co-creative approach was used. I demonstrate how the use of object interviews (Woodward, 2020) (through the use of Lego) are complementary to the demands of an IPA study, and a valuable tool for accessing complex and nuanced entrepreneurial experiences. This is part of an emerging trend in IPA studies more broadly (Boden et al., 2019), and reflects an increased

use of participatory, visual and multimodal methods in the entrepreneurship field (Berglund & Wigren-Kristoferson, 2012; Clarke & Holt, 2017, 2019).

While visual and creative methods are becoming firmly embedded approaches in organisation and management research more broadly (Höllerer et al., 2019), I am careful to distinguish my work from this 'visual turn', where scholars have begun to pay closer attention to the 'visualisation' within their areas of study (Bell at al., 2014; Boxenbaum et al., 2018). This work tends to focus on the analysis of pre-existing or created in-situ images (Rose, 2016).

In contrast, my research explicitly used objects as material elicitation tools alongside long, unstructured interviewing techniques (Crawford et al., 2020). I found this to be empowering for participants, affording them control of narratives explored during an interview, but it did bring with it some ethical challenges (Borer & Fontana, 2014) (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4). Participants engaged and consistently offered feedback on how much they enjoyed the experience. Significantly, participants felt they were able to reflect on experiences in new ways, and in most cases for the first time at all.

I found using Lego helped disrupt participants rehearsed narratives (Mannay, 2016). Constructions provided a platform for exploring their worlds in reflexive depth, helping participants to 'see' their worlds beyond the means of language (Ward & Shortt, 2017). The use of materials afforded me with alternative vehicles for accessing, creating and communicating meaning (Ward & Shortt, 2020). However, I caution they should be employed reflexively to understand their impact on a practical and theoretical level. I am optimistic that entrepreneurship scholars will continue to follow the calls to implement 'interesting' research designs (Essers et al., 2017; van Burg et al., 2020), and seek out opportunities to better understand how entrepreneurship is lived out in a variety of contexts.

6.4 Practice Implications

My first recommendation is to call for more evidence-based entrepreneurship policy that considers better marrying theory with practice. Entrepreneurship researchers can play a role in this to ensure we better understand the realities of owning and running a venture in various parts of the UK. This also means being more aware of the implicit assumptions and biases that have historically guided the field. Identifying specific industries and ensuring they are investigated using a diverse range of methods would be beneficial (as explored in Chapters 3 and 4). My participants revealed their own perceptions of how their particular industry sector was viewed. For example, two of my participants worked in the hair and beauty industry and

raised the biases that exist in owning and running a venture within it, whereas my participant in a technology-based venture assumed a superior status. These perceptions had a direct effect on how participants behaved.

The conclusion that the hair and beauty industry is one sector ripe for further research is not a new one. Shortt and Warren's (2012) work noted there is a 'poor recognition of hairdressing as an occupational group worthy of research and a commonly held opinion that hairdressing, in common with other body workers, such as beauty therapists and masseurs, does not represent a serious profession or career'. Sadly, in light of my participant's experiences and indeed my own literature searches reveals that other industry sectors that are key employers (such as those in the service sector) share similar challenges (Mallett & Wapshott, 2020).

Most significantly, this research highlights the challenge that comes with trying to fulfil entrepreneurial expectations, and in particular the imperative of growth. Negotiating the formal obligations of being an employer with the expectations of being an entrepreneur appeared to inhibit participant's ability to grow their enterprises. For example, both Bruce and Max highlighted a desire to fulfil entrepreneurial expectations by providing jobs to those in need within their local contexts. However, a lack of performance management structures or available knowledge impacted their ability to manage employees, to either develop or hold them accountable. Therefore, while hiring fulfilled Bruce and Max's social desire, structures were not in places to ensure their business's objectives could also be achieved.

Three participants mentioned that most of the advice received on employment was from their accountants. An emerging area of research explores the significance of the relationship between small business owners and their accountants, often linking it to better long-term firm performance (Arshed et al., 2020; Barbera & Hasso, 2013; Blackburn et al., 2018; Dyer & Ross, 2007; Gooderham et al., 2004). Blackburn et al. (2018) note that local accountants could play a greater role in small business growth, as they are well-placed to offer broader yet more contextualised business advisory services.

Given the points raised in this section, there are several recommendations for practice with the aim of reducing the relational challenges of becoming an entrepreneur-employer:

- readily available HR packages of support (e.g., basic performance management structures/systems and/or advice), made available through accountants (Blackburn et al., 2018);

- targeting support by industry/enterprise-size rather than by broad demographics (e.g., gender);
- consider context as relevant in inhibiting or enabling growth enterprise growth; and,
- more autonomy to localised institutions to provide targeted support and funding.

6.5 Policy Implications

My first recommendation relates to how enterprises are defined to ensure that policies and initiatives are impactful. Further examination of the disconnects between how government presents starting a business/enterprise, and the realities of how policy regulates small businesses would be beneficial. In my research, I found there are many contradictions. These encourage individuals to start a business on the basis it enables more individual autonomy (e.g., the Entrepreneurship Allowance Policy), but as an entrepreneur transitions to be an entrepreneur-employer I found my participants encountered structures that restricted their very ability to be autonomous (Section 6.2.3.2).

Currently in the UK, there are approximately 5.7 million 'SMEs' representing some 4.3 million businesses without employees (ONS, 2019, 2020). Even if considering the diversity of business sectors, business goals and so on, it would be surprising if all these businesses shared the same problems that would be addressed by common solutions. This represents a fundamental challenge for any 'enterprise policy' that seeks to encourage these businesses, which represent a large proportion of businesses in the UK (ONS, 2019, 2020). Diversification of policy could enable better targeting of support to business through critical points of growth, and particularly as they take on staff. Employing staff placed a large financial burden on my participants. In 2019 workplace policy changes made it a legal requirement for all limited companies to pay a minimum 3% pension contribution to employees (The Pensions Regulator, 2020); this change alone almost ended Bish's venture. I believe that policy focused on reducing the fiscal burden of becoming an employer would be beneficial. With this in mind, below are some policy change recommendations that would have benefited my participants through their transition to entrepreneur-employer:

- means tested business property rate relief for the first three years after hiring initial employees;

- corporation tax relief for entrepreneur-employers (registered for and using PAYE); and,
- national insurance and pension contribution relief for new businesses with one or more employees (not inclusive of the owner-manager).

In addition to these recommendations, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted additional challenges faced by individuals who own and run their own businesses in the UK (Yue & Cowling, 2021). There are key differences in government income support schemes for workers and self-employed (Yue & Cowling, 2021). While both schemes appear generous, the reality is that waged workers were offered a guarantee of 80% of their incomes while the self-employed faced a maximum level of income support of 70% (Reuschke et al., 2020).

Self-employed owners of incorporated (Limited.) companies are also disproportionally affected, and are, at the time of writing still unable to access any income support or compensation (Agyemang, 2021). For a number of my participants, this has meant they have not received any income support throughout the duration of the pandemic. This points to a challenge that comes with conflating entrepreneurs with the terms self-employment, business owner, and limited company director. The reality is that legal structures differentiate between various types of business ownership and labour, yet broader entrepreneurship policies do not (Martinez Dy et al., 2018).

The economic impact COVID-19 has had on the small business community is a source of concern (Bank of England, 2020). Further, research identifies how the UK's COVID-19 response is worsening already extant socio-economic inequalities and increasing unemployment rates (Reuschke et al., 2020). However, the Government response highlights the positive impact targeted tax relief (e.g., business rates and V.A.T relief) can have on business survival.

While my recommendations were made and identified in an arguably very different context, prior to the pandemic, I believe my policy recommendations remain relevant. They are about not only encouraging small businesses to take on staff, but actively rewarding them for continuing to do so. For example, this could be done through the continuance of the Job Retention Bonus scheme (HM Treasury, 2020). During pandemic, employers were able to receive a one-off payment of £1,000 for every employee who had previously been furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS, HM Treasury, 2020). Applying this policy to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) could incentivise, and provide much-

needed capital, for SMEs businesses to continue employing and retaining staff. Conversely, it may also encourage entrepreneurs without any employees, to cross the threshold and become entrepreneur-employers.

6.6 Research Limitations

This thesis examined the experiences of entrepreneurs becoming an entrepreneur-employer. A good discussion will also acknowledge the study's weaknesses (given that all studies have limitations) and offer opportunities for future research that can extend knowledge of entrepreneurial phenomena by overcoming the limitations and boundary conditions of this thesis (Shepherd & Wiklund, 2020). In this section I provide a critical reflection of my approach and recognition that my work is temporally, methodologically and geographically limited in its scope. Additionally, I explore how I, as the central analytic instrument, limit my findings and raise how, as with any piece of research, certain themes were neglected that could be explored in future research.

Limitations of IPA as an approach have been considered and discussed in the Theoretical Perspective (Chapter 3) and Research Methods (Chapter 4) chapters, and this section will extend that discussion in order to outline a number of potential limitations which appear pertinent to this study.

The wider application of this study is limited to its geographical and temporal scope. In choosing not to conduct a prolonged engagement and observation of participants, I limited the study to a specific moment in time. However, a choice was made to examine just the transition from non-employer to employer, as literatures indicated there was limited understanding of how this moment in time was experienced. Similarly, and in keeping with a methodological commitment for contextual homogeneity, my sample of participants were all based in South Wales. To conduct a thorough examination of individuals, IPA requires a commitment to 'the particular' or the idiographic (Smith et al. 2009, p. 29). Idiographic commitments contrast with a nomothetic stance where the researcher is primarily concerned with making claims at the group or population level. As such, any knowledge claims of IPA studies (including my own) are intended to provide contextual insight of particular phenomenon rather than speaking explicitly to the breadth of applicability of certain constructs. This idiographic commitment does not negate a concern for generalisability, but it does reframe how findings from my study may be considered as transferrable to other domains beyond the context of the investigation.

Ultimately, the findings of IPA investigations are focused on providing deep insight as connected to extant theory, this facilitates the readers capacity to re-envision how they might see the phenomenon in question. Thus you, the reader, form part of a broader (and subjective) validation process in whether you find my study thought-provoking, important or useful (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Using IPA as an analytic framework requires also committing to interpretative phenomenology's principles of not over-interpreting to keep as close to the participants' accounts as possible. However, there is always a danger in this, and as I spent a lot of time with my data, there is always a potential for this to happen. However, I do recognise this and have been careful to reflect and reread analysis to ensure participant's individual voices and different experiences are not lost.

Furthermore, my findings are limited by the theoretical commitments IPA ties itself to. I recognise that the use of other methods may be beneficial, including discursive analysis, or even Foucauldian discourse analysis would bring new and additional insights. However, a solution for me was to look at studies that used different methods but reported coherent themes, or analysis to mine (Yardley, 2017; Bishop et al., 2007). This formed a means to compare my findings with other studies using methods (e.g., discursive analysis) that cannot be coherently mixed with my own.

My intention was to write this thesis in a reflexive and accessible way, without sounding too self-indulgent while ensuring that my presence and influence was felt. Indeed, I was and, still am, the central analytic instrument to my research. This is both beneficial as much as it can be (and has been) limiting. Interpreting data is very much guided by my own worldview and understandings. As I noted in Chapter 4, Section 4.6.3, conducting an IPA study is a challenging endeavour, especially during the analytic stages of this study. Bound up within this, is a commitment to tell the stories of participants who wish their realities to be heard and known. I often shared in the frustration of my participants, even re-reading interview transcripts would trigger feelings I experienced during and after interviews. As I explored in more detail in Chapter 4 (Section 4.6) I aimed to keep a level of critical distance (Cassell at al., 2018) throughout this process; although this was not always easy to do. To try and achieve this, I engaged in different types of reflexive tasks, including keeping a video journal (Section 4.6.2). Together with my field notes, these reflexive tools ensured I kept my own thoughts and feelings at a distance. This helped to keep participants interpretations at the forefront of my work.

6.7 Conclusions and Contributions

This research makes four distinct contributions to the field of entrepreneurship, and particularly to Critical Approaches. First and more broadly, using an innovative qualitative approach, this thesis contributes to the field of entrepreneurship by identifying the transition to entrepreneur-employer as a barrier to enterprise growth. As a consequence, the findings provide new insights and perspectives into the realities of becoming an employer that extend current understandings of entrepreneurial job-creation. In particular, the findings evidence becoming an employer to be a challenging endeavour due to participants attempting to grapple with, and live-out entrepreneurial expectations. There are known challenges of being a small business employer (Wapshott & Mallett, 2015). However, the findings from this study provide new insights into how becoming an *entrepreneur-employer* inhibits, rather than enables, enterprise growth. This is a valuable and novel contribution to the field of entrepreneurship.

Second, by taking a phenomenological position, my findings reveal the entrepreneur to entrepreneur-employer transition as a double-edged sword, where neoliberal entrepreneurial ideas do not reflect the day-to-day realities of being an entrepreneur-employer. My findings indicate that ideals such as entrepreneuring-as-emancipation (Rindova et al., 2009) are never fully realised. However, it is the endless potential for emancipation that can be seen as a core assumption in neoliberalism, and as the foundations of the entrepreneurial self (Bröckling, 2016). In this my research exposes a Catch-22 in becoming an entrepreneur-employer. That is, by fulfilling the implicit assumption that more enterprise growth creates more jobs, paradoxically my participants felt less entrepreneurial, and in most cases not like entrepreneurs at all.

Thirdly, this research adds to an established body of empirical and theoretical work that seeks to apply a critical and reflexive approach to entrepreneurship (e.g., Essers at al., 2017; Baker & Welter, 2020). I have been careful to address how I have theoretically positioned my research and brought to the fore the assumptions that guided my approach within this body of work. I have demonstrated that by taking a phenomenological approach, it is possible to explore an ontological middle ground and facilitate a connection between realist and constructionist agendas. This is yet to be fully exploited in entrepreneurship research (Packard, 2017).

My final contribution relates to my methodology. By using an innovative co-creative method, I demonstrate how the use of Lego Interviews are complementary to the demands of an IPA study. The Lego Interview was a valuable tool for accessing complex and nuanced

entrepreneurial experiences. The use of creative and visual methods forms part of an emerging trend in IPA studies more broadly (Boden et al., 2019), and reflects a small but increased use of participatory, visual and multimodal methods in the entrepreneurship field (Berglund & Wigren-Kristoferson, 2012; Clarke & Holt, 2019). I contribute to this emerging body of scholarship by demonstrating the value in this methodological approach.

6.8 Future Areas of Research

This study has demonstrated the value of in-depth qualitative approaches in exposing the nuances and complexities of everyday entrepreneurial experiences. However, this study was limited by its geographical, temporal and methodological scope. Consequently, there are a number of areas that I would recommend for future research that would be beneficial.

First, as the scope of my research was limited to looking at a specific transition of first employee, I believe there would be benefit in conducting longitudinal studies that better track the transition as it unfolds. Studies could track participants for a significant time after the employer transition to understand how it impacts on subsequent decisions and the entrepreneur. Additionally, as the label '*entrepreneur*' had a significant impact on how participants made sense of their transition, it would be useful to understand if size of a venture would impact upon this. Is there a critical point where participants begin to 'feel' like entrepreneurs and move beyond feelings of constraint?

I believe it would also be beneficial to gain a better understanding of the assumptions that lead to gender specific support programmes and government marketing. In-depth explorative research could better make sense of how women who access these programmes are impacted, or indeed if they feel supported at all. Similarly, studies in contextually deprived areas could examine the lived experiences of those who have taken advantage of government grants that encourage the unemployed to start their own business. These research areas would contribute to understanding how wider structures work to influence and impact upon entrepreneurs in different contexts.

With an established and successful body of work that examines and challenges entrepreneurial femininities, I found less research had been conducted on how and if masculinities are lived out by male entrepreneurs (Smith, 2013). In my own research I found that the effects of 'living out' neoliberalised masculine norms were often detrimental and fraught with tensions between the self, work and family present in the accounts of my male participants. There are a number of studies (Giazitzoglu & Down, 2017) emerging that are

beginning to do so, and some that also intersect this with sexuality (Rumens, 2017; Rumens & Ozturk, 2019).

Given the focus on transition and thresholds within this study, there is scope to apply liminality as a conceptual lens to gain new insights. A conscious decision was made to not use liminality as a conceptual lens (Turner, 1974). It was felt that neoliberalism provided more explanatory scope that encompassed the entirety of participant's experiences. Therefore, this would be more in keeping with the phenomenological commitments that frame this study. However, several opportunities for future research could be pursued.

As I noted in the final superordinate theme 'Never-ending stories', participants universally felt state of flux of neither feeling nor being an entrepreneur. I highlighted how this finding of is reminiscent of Turner's (1974) conception of liminality. Within the entrepreneurship field more broadly, as highlighted in Chapter 2, Section 2.9, liminality has been applied to explore the 'betwixt and between' of entrepreneurial processes (Cardon et al., 2012; Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018; Hjorth, 2004, 2005). Much of this literature makes use of van Gennep's (1960) conception of 'liminality', referring to these transitional phases as potentially creative and positive spaces (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2020; Swan et al., 2016). For example, liminality has been used to indicate transformative stages (Anderson, 2005) that allow entrepreneurs to discover their true selves (Brooker & Joppe, 2014; Henfridsson & Yoo, 2014).

More widely in organisation literatures, increasing attention has been paid to the conception of liminal occupational identities (Reed & Thomas, 2021) and careers (Budtz-Jørgensen et al., 2019). The 'subjective state of being on the "threshold" of two different existential positions' (Ybema et al., 2011, p. 21) presents a particular challenge for the construction of stable occupational identities (Bamber et al., 2017; Izak, 2015). Conversely liminality, rather than being a temporary state has also been conceptualised as a continual, and in some cases, permanent state (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003; Budtz-Jørgensen et al., 2019). This results in individuals struggling to resolve on-going experiences of identity deconstruction and reconstruction (Ybema et al., 2011; Ybema et al., 2009). Conceptualising liminality as a continual state of 'becoming' also links back to previous arguments in this chapter that highlight neoliberalism's reliance on the entrepreneurial-self remaining in an oscillating, and constant, state of 'becoming' (Bröckling, 2016; Sennett, 2006).

Entrepreneurship literature echoes these conclusions. Relatedly, Muhr and colleagues (2019) explored how entrepreneurial discourses play out in the identity work of a nascent entrepreneur. There findings support work by Daskalaki et al. (2015) who found that

entrepreneurial identities were full of paradoxical tensions catalysed by ‘always being on the way to somewhere else’ (Sørensen, 2008, p. 91). Thus, within these literatures and indeed within my own findings, entrepreneurial life can be considered as a permanent liminal state of being ‘in-between’ (Steyaert, 2005) where ‘identities are continuously contested and in flux’ (Clarke & Holt, 2017, p. 479). Consequently, my findings provide further empirical evidence to support the conclusions of a number of the studies highlight, but do not necessarily contribute anything new conceptually.

However, where there is potential for new and valuable insights that are more relevant to the context of this study, is the use of a lesser-known concept of Turner (1974): the liminoid. Turner (1974) developed his conceptualisation of the liminoid – broadly, the playful experiences sought as an escape from the realities of everyday life – as a post-industrial alternative to the transitory liminal experiences he identified as influential in the ritual processes of pre-industrial societies (Taheri et al., 2016). For Turner, the liminoid occurs within leisure settings, away from work and everyday responsibilities. As Turner writes, ‘bars, pubs, some cafés, social clubs, etc.’ may be seen as ‘permanent’ liminoid ‘settings’ (Turner, 1974, p. 86). The liminoid is a less-structured space than those often experienced in modern life (e.g., those associated with the responsibilities of work and home-life), representing the opportunity for individual movement, expression (Daskalaki & Simosi, 2018). Participant’s accounts reflected the messy and complex nature that comes with starting and growing an enterprise. Consequently, I believe there is opportunity to apply Turner’s (1974) ‘liminoid’ as a conceptual frame to explore these nascent transitional phases, where work and homelife often become unbounded, within the entrepreneurial process.

Finally, I would like to see further methodological developments within the field. I believe there is value in a plurality of approaches, including more use of multi-modal, visual and creative methods (Van Burg et al., 2020). I would particularly like to see studies applying innovative and novel methods to analyse images and/or materials (e.g., Pritchard, 2020; Shortt & Warren, 2019). As discussed in Section 4.3.1, despite recognising the value of using these analytic approaches, this is something my methodology did not allow scope for due deciding not to incorporate visual analysis within my IPA framework. Therefore, there remains scope to further investigate the interaction of material, visual and verbal realms from a phenomenological perspective (Tilley, 2020). While I did not analyse the visual data in any formal sense, there is no denying it was not of use. I reflected in Sections 4.8.4 and 4.8.5, on how the visual and material data (either produced by me or the participants) was used as an analytic tool, helping me to piece individual experiences together. Hermeneutic

phenomenology is committed to revealing meanings that 'lie hidden' (Heidegger 1962, p. 59). Taking a conceptual leap and developing a framework that steps away from the textual bounds of IPA as it stands would have been beneficial to this study. Thus, I believe that developing an IPA framework that better integrates, and guides the researcher through a material, visual and textual analysis would be a significant contribution to both the field of entrepreneurship, and organisational studies more broadly.

Furthermore, approaches such as storytelling (Jørgensen, 2020) could also be useful to better understand how we communicate about entrepreneurship to each other. Thinking about multi-modal forms of communication opens up the possibility for further digital and online research. Such approaches will contribute to better understandings of how we 'see' and construct entrepreneurship through various digital platforms. I believe this is an exciting field to provide new insights and different theoretical perspectives that continue to challenge mainstream assumptions.

6.9 Final Conclusions

To conclude this thesis, I end very much where I began my journey. I return once again to the fable I started with: The Emperor's New Clothes. Like the new clothes the Emperor never wore, entrepreneurship as a means of job creation remains an illusion (Eurostat, 2020). The imperative of growth exploits our ability to imagine that we can all become entrepreneurs and take control of our lives (Dardot & Laval, 2019).

My research has found that it is when an entrepreneur becomes an employer these such illusions begin to be questioned for what they really are. The entrepreneurial cloak that my participants wore so proudly when starting their ventures – with all its promises of freedom and success – constrained them as they became employers. After moving beyond the transition, the cloak had disappeared altogether.

In light of these findings, perhaps, the focus should be more on the label that we give to the clothes we are given to wear. A label – the entrepreneur – that wider society says is venerable and should be worn with pride, but as Judt (2011, p. 4) warns, 'just like a well-designed outer coat, it conceals more than it displays'. The problem is not in what we do, or how we choose to wear this coat. It is, perhaps, more to do with who is selling it; and how the promises that come with wearing such a coat will never be fully realised.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Papers Included in Initial Literature Review

A.1 Journals Included in Initial Review

A.2 Articles Included in Initial Review

Appendix B: Pilot Study Forms

B.1 Ethical Approval Form

B.2 Participant Information Sheet

B.3 Consent Form

Appendix C: Main Study Forms

C.1 Ethical Approval Form

C.2 Participant Information Sheet

C.3 Consent Form

C.4 Participant Information Form

C.5 Interview Prompt Sheet

C.6 Participant Interview Debrief Form

C.7 Lone Fieldwork Risk Assessment and Management

C.8 GDPR Data Flow Table

Appendix A. Initial Review Information

A.1 Journals Included in Initial Literature Review

Table 12. Initial Review Journals

Summary of included ABS journals for initial review to map field assumptions (2018 rankings)

4*	4	3
Academy of Management Journal	Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development
Academy of Management Review	Journal of Business Venturing	Family Business Review
Administrative Science Quarterly	Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal	International Small Business Journal
Journal of Management	Academy of Management Annals	Journal of Small Business Management
Organisation Science	British Journal of Management	Small Business Economics
	Business Ethics Quarterly	Journal of Management Studies
	Journal of Management Studies	California Management Review
	Human Relations	Gender, Work and Organization
	Leadership Quarterly	Journal of Business Research
	Organisation Studies	Journal of Management Inquiry
	Organisation Research Methods	MIT Sloan Management Review
		Academy of Management Perspectives
		Business and Society
		European Management Review
		Gender and Society
		Gender, Work and Organization
		International Journal of Management Reviews
		Journal of Business Ethics
		Group and Organisation Management
		Organization
		Research in Organisation Behaviour
		Research in the Sociology of Organizations
		Applied Psychology: An International Review

A.2 Articles Included in Initial Review

Table 13. Articles Included in Initial Review

Literature Reviewed for Chapter 1: Initial Mapping of the Entrepreneurship Field

ABS 2018 Rank	Reference	Year Published
4	Chell, E. (2000). Towards researching the "opportunistic entrepreneur": A social constructionist approach and research agenda. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *9*(1), 63-80.	2000
4	Ogbor, J.O. (2000). "Mythicizing and reification in entrepreneurial discourse: Ideology-critique of entrepreneurial studies", *Journal of Management Studies*, *37*(5), 605-635.	2000
4*	Shane, S., & Venkataraman, S. (2000). The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of Management Review*, *25*(1), 217-226.	2000
4	Bruyat, C., & Julien, P. A. (2001). Defining the field of research in entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *16*(2), 165-180.	2001
4	Chandler, G. N., & Lyon, D. W. (2001). Issues of research design and construct measurement in entrepreneurship research: The past decade. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *25*(4), 101-113	2001
4	Davidsson, P. & Wiklund, J. (2001). Levels of analysis in entrepreneurship research: Current research practice and suggestions for the future. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *25*(4), 81-99.	2001
4	Davidsson, P., Low, M. B., & Wright, M. (2001). Editor's introduction: Low and MacMillan ten years on: Achievements and future directions for entrepreneurship research. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *25*(4), 5-15.	2001
4	Gartner, W. B. (2001). Is there an elephant in entrepreneurship? Blind assumptions in theory development. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *25*(4), 27-39.	2001
4	Gartner, W.B. & Birley, S. (2002). Introduction to the special issue on qualitative methods in entrepreneurship research. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *17* (5), 387-395.	2002
3	Grant, P. & Perren, L. (2002). Small business and entrepreneurial research: Meta-theories, paradigms and prejudices. *International Small Business Journal*, *20*(2), 185-211.	2002
4*	Busenitz, L. W., West, G. P., Shepherd, D., Nelson, T., Chandler, G. N., & Zacharakis, A. (2003). Entrepreneurship research in emergence: Past trends and future directions. *Journal of Management, 29* (3), 285–308.	2003
4	Fried, V. H. (2003). Defining a forum for entrepreneurship scholars. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *18*(1), 1-11.	2003

4	Hindle, K. (2004). Choosing qualitative methods for entrepreneurial cognition research: A canonical development approach. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *28*(6), 575-607	2004
3	Perren, L., & Ram, M. (2004). Case-study method in small business and entrepreneurial research: Mapping boundaries and perspectives. *International Small Business Journal*, *22*(1), 83-101.	2004
4	Sarasvathy, S.D. (2004). The questions we ask and the questions we care about: Reformulating some problems in entrepreneurship research. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *19*(5), 707-717.	2004
4	Coviello, N. E., & Jones, M. V. (2004). Methodological issues in international entrepreneurship research. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *19*(4), 485-508.	2004
3	Cope, J. (2005). Researching entrepreneurship through phenomenological inquiry: Philosophical and methodological issues. *International Small Business Journal*, *23*(2), 163-189.	2005
4	Ireland, R. D., Reutzel, C. R., & Webb, J. W. (2005). Entrepreneurship Research in AMJ: What Has Been Published, and What Might the Future Hold? *The Academy of Management Journal*, *48,* 556-564.	2005
4	Perren, L., & Jennings, P. (2005). Government discourses on entrepreneurship: Issues of legitimization, subjugation, and power. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice, 29*(2), 173–184.	2005
4	Cornelius, B., Landström, H., & Persson, O. (2006). Entrepreneurial studies: The dynamic research front of a developing social science. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *30*(3), 375-398.	2006
4	Gartner, W.B., Davidsson, P., & Zahra, S.A. (2006). Are you talking to me? The nature of community in entrepreneurship scholarship. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *30*(3), 321-331.	2006
4	Grégoire, D. A., Noel, M. X., Déry, R., & Béchard, J. P. (2006). Is there conceptual convergence in entrepreneurship research? A co–citation analysis of frontiers of entrepreneurship research, 1981–2004. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *30*(3), 333-373.	2006
4	Shah, S. K., & Corley, K. G. (2006). Building better theory by bridging the quantitative–qualitative divide. *Journal of Management Studies*, *43*(8), 1821-1835.	2006
3	Hisrich, R., Langan-Fox, J., & Grant, S. (2007). Entrepreneurship research and practice: a call to action for psychology. *American Psychologist*, *62*(6), 575.	2007
4	Blackburn, R. A., & Smallbone, D. (2008). Researching small firms and entrepreneurship in the UK: Developments and distinctiveness. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *32*(2), 267-288.	2008
4	Brush, C.G., Manolova, T.S., & Edelman, L.F. (2008). Separated by a common language? Entrepreneurship research across the Atlantic. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *32(*2), 249-266.	2008

3	Gartner, W. B. (2008). Variations in entrepreneurship. *Small Business Economics*, *31*(4), 351.	2008
4	Hjorth, D. (2008). Nordic Entrepreneurship Research. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *32*(2), 313-338.	2008
4	Welter, F. & Lasch, F. (2008). Entrepreneurship Research in Europe: Taking stock and looking forward. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *32*(2), 241-248.	2008
3	Mullen, M.R., Budeva, D.G., & Doney, P.M. (2009). Research Methods in the Leading Small Business/Entrepreneurship Journals: A critical review with recommendations for future research. *Journal of Small Business Management, 47*(3), 287-307.	2009
4	Crook, T.R., Shook, C.L., Morris, M.L., & Madden, T.M. (2010). Are We There Yet?: An assessment of research design and construct measurement practices in entrepreneurship research. *Organizational Research Methods*, *13*(1), 192-206.	2010
4	Leitch, C., Hill, F., & Neergaard, H. (2010). Entrepreneurial and business growth and the quest for a "comprehensive theory": tilting at windmills? *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *34*(2), 249-260.	2010
4	Leitch, C. M., Hill, F. M., & Harrison, R. T. (2010). The philosophy and practice of interpretivist research in entrepreneurship: Quality, validation, and trust. *Organizational Research Methods*, *13*(1), 67-84.	2010
4	Short, J. C., Ketchen Jr, D. J., Combs, J. G., & Ireland, R. D. (2010). Research methods in entrepreneurship: Opportunities and challenges. *Organizational Research Methods*, *13*(1), 6-15.	2010
4	Crook, T. R., Shook, C. L., Morris, M. L., & Madden, T. M. (2010). Are we there yet? An assessment of research design and construct measurement practices in entrepreneurship research. *Organizational Research Methods*, *13*(1), 192-206.	2010
4	Jones, M. V., Coviello, N., & Tang, Y. K. (2011). International entrepreneurship research (1989–2009): a domain ontology and thematic analysis. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *26*(6), 632-659.	2011
3	Korsgaard, S., & Anderson, A.R. (2011). Enacting entrepreneurship as social value creation. *International Small Business Journal*, *29*(2) 1-17.	2011
3	Steyaert, C. (2011). Entrepreneurship as in(ter)vention: Reconsidering the conceptual politics of method in entrepreneurship studies. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, *23*(1-2), 77-88.	2011
4	Welter, F. (2011). Contextualizing entrepreneurship—conceptual challenges and ways forward. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *35*(1), 165-184.	2011
4	Wiklund, J., Davidsson, P., Audretsch, D. B., & Karlsson, C. (2011). The future of entrepreneurship research. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *35*(1), 1-9.	2011
3	Molina-Azorín, J. F., López-Gamero, M. D., Pereira-Moliner, J., & Pertusa-Ortega, E. M. (2012). Mixed methods studies in	2012

	entrepreneurship research: Applications and contributions. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, *24*(5-6), 425-456.	
3	Davidsson, P. (2013). Some Reflection on Research 'Schools' and Geographies. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, *25* (1-2), 100-110.	2013
3	Lee, B., & Cassell, C. (2013). Research Methods and Research Practice: History, Themes and Topics. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *15*(2), 123-131.	2013
3	Chetty, S. K., Partanen, J., Rasmussen, E. S., & Servais, P. (2014). Contextualising case studies in entrepreneurship: A tandem approach to conducting a longitudinal cross-country case study. *International Small Business Journal*, *32*(7), 818-829.	2014
3	Hlady-Rispal, M., & Jouison-Laffitte, E. (2014). Qualitative research methods and epistemological frameworks: A review of publication trends in entrepreneurship. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *52*(4), 594-614.	2014
3	Karatas-Ozkan, M., Anderson, A. R., Fayolle, A., Howells, J., & Condor, R. (2014). Understanding entrepreneurship: challenging dominant perspectives and theorizing entrepreneurship through new postpositivist epistemologies. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *52*(4), 589-593.	2014
4	Van Burg, E., & Romme, A. G. L. (2014). Creating the future together: Toward a framework for research synthesis in entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *38*(2), 369-397.	2014
3	Audretsch, D. B., Kuratko, D. F., & Link, A. N. (2015). Making sense of the elusive paradigm of entrepreneurship. *Small Business Economics*, *45*(4), 703-712.	2015
4	Shepherd, D. A. (2015). Party On! A call for entrepreneurship research that is more interactive, activity based, cognitively hot, compassionate, and prosocial. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *30*(4), 489-507.	2015
4*	Ramoglou, S., & Tsang, E. W. (2016). A realist perspective of entrepreneurship: Opportunities as propensities. *Academy of Management Review*, *41*(3), 410-434.	2016
3	Ramoglou, S., & Tsang, E. W. (2017). Accepting the unknowables of entrepreneurship and overcoming philosophical obstacles to scientific progress. *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, *8*, 71-77.	2017
4*	Shepherd, D. A., & Suddaby, R. (2017). Theory building: A review and integration. *Journal of Management*, *43*(1), 59-86.	2017
4	Welter, F., Baker, T., Audretsch, D. B., & Gartner, W. B. (2017). Everyday entrepreneurship: a call for entrepreneurship research to embrace entrepreneurial diversity. *Entrepreneurship, Theory & Practice*, *41*(3), 311-321.	2017
3	Angel, P., Jenkins, A., & Stephens, A. (2018). Understanding entrepreneurial success: A phenomenographic approach. *International Small Business Journal*, *36*(6), 611-636.	2018

3	Berglund, H., Dimov, D., & Wennberg, K. (2018). Beyond bridging rigor and relevance: the three-body problem in entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, *9*, 87-91.	2018
3	Xu, N., Chen, Y., Fung, A., & Chan, K. C. (2018). Contributing forces in entrepreneurship research: A global citation analysis. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *56*(1), 179-201.	2018
4	Lerner, D. A., Hunt, R. A., & Dimov, D. (2018). Action! Moving beyond the intendedly-rational logics of entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *33*(1), 52-69.	2018
3	Trehan, K., Higgins, D., & Jones, O. (2018). Engaged scholarship: Questioning relevance and impact in contemporary entrepreneurship/small and medium-sized enterprise research. *International Small Business Journal*, *36*(4), 363-367.	2018
4	Wiklund, J., Wright, M., & Zahra, S. A. (2018). Conquering Relevance: Entrepreneurship Research's Grand Challenge. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice, 43*(3), 419-436.	2018
3	Landström, H., & Harirchi, G. (2018). “That’s Interesting!” in Entrepreneurship Research. *Journal of Small Business Management, 57*(2), 507-529.	2019
3	Ji, J., Plakoyiannaki, E., Dimitratos, P., & Chen, S. (2019). The qualitative case research in international entrepreneurship: a state of the art and analysis. *International Marketing Review*, *36*(1), 164-187.	2019
4*	Shepherd, D. A., Wennberg, K., Suddaby, R., & Wiklund, J. (2019). What Are We Explaining? A Review and Agenda on Initiating, Engaging, Performing, and Contextualizing Entrepreneurship. *Journal of Management*, *45*(1), 159-196.	2019
4	Grégoire, D. A., Binder, J. K., & Rauch, A. (2019). Navigating the validity tradeoffs of entrepreneurship research experiments: A systematic review and best-practice suggestions. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *34*(2), 284-310.	2019

Appendix B. Pilot Study Forms

B.1 Ethical Approval Form

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

LIGHT-TOUCH ETHICAL REVIEW FORM

To be completed for all research involving human subjects or datasets

Name of PI or PGR Student	Helen Williams
Staff Number or Student ID	[redacted]
Supervisors*	Dr. Katrina Pritchard and Dr. Cara Reed
Date Submitted	
Title of Project	Entrepreneurial Experiences of Becoming an Employer: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
Name of Funder / Sponsor*	NA
Finance Code / Reference*	NA
Duration of Project	3 months

** Complete if appropriate*

***Risk evaluation**: Does the proposed research involve any of the following?*
✓ Tick** those boxes for which the answer is **YES
X Cross** those boxes for which the answer is **NO

☒ Will the research harm or pose any risk to the environment? (e.g. research in environmentally sensitive areas (e.g. SSSIs); permission needed to access field sites; transport of samples between countries (e.g. soil); sampling of rare or hazardous material (e.g. invasive species) that could deplete or endanger)

☒ Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data or premises and/or equipment? If this is the case, the project **must** be reviewed by the NHS

☒ Does the study involve participants aged 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent? (e.g. people with learning disabilities: see Mental Capacity Act 2005. All research that falls under the auspices of the Act **must** be reviewed by the NHS)

☒ Does the research involve other vulnerable groups: children, those with cognitive impairment or in unequal relationships? (e.g. your students). This **may** require NHS review, and will typically require the researcher to get **Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) clearance** (formerly CRB checks)

☒ Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (e.g. students at school, members of self-help group or residents of nursing home?)

☒ Will the research involve any form of deception? (e.g. misinformation or partial information about the purpose or nature of the research)

Appendix B.1 Pilot Study Ethics Approval Form

- ☒ Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (e.g. covert observation of people or use of social media content)
- ☒ Will the study discuss sensitive topics or require the collection of sensitive information? (e.g. terrorism and extremism; sexual activity, drug use or criminal activity; collection of security sensitive documents or information)
- ☒ Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. foods or vitamins) to be administered to study participants, or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind? (If any substance is to be administered, this **may** fall under the auspices of the Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) Regulations 2004, and require review by the NHS)
- ☒ Will tissue samples (including blood) be obtained from participants? (This would fall under the terms of the Human Tissue Act 2004. All research that falls under the auspices of the Act **must** be reviewed by the NHS)
- ☒ Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?
- ☒ Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?
- ☒ Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?
- ☒ Will the research involve administrative or secure data that requires permission from the appropriate authorities before use?
- ☒ Is there a possibility that the safety of the researcher may be in question? (e.g. in international research: locally employed researchers)
- ☒ Could the research impact negatively upon the reputation of the University, researcher(s), research participants, other stakeholders or any other party?
- ☒ Does the research involve members of the public in a research capacity? (e.g. participant research; participants as co-producers or data collectors)
- ☒ Will the research take place outside the UK where there may be issues of local practice and political or other sensitivities?
- ☑ Will the research involve respondents to the Internet or other visual/vocal methods where respondents may be identified?
- ☒ Will the research involve the sharing of data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given?
- ☒ Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?
- ☒ Do any of the research team have an actual or potential conflict of interest?
- ☒ Are you aware of any other significant ethical risks or concerns associated with the research proposal? (If yes, please outline them in the space below)

Appendix B.1 Pilot Study Ethics Approval Form

Other significant ethical issues or concerns: *(If None, then please state 'None'*
None

If any answer to the questions above is ***YES****, then a* ***Full*** ***Ethical Review*** *may be required.*

If the project involves ***none of the above****, complete the* ***Declaration****, send this form and a* ***copy of the proposal*** to the **School of Management Research Support Officer**. Research may only commence once approval has been given.

Declaration: *The project will be conducted in compliance with the University's Research Integrity Framework (P1415-956). This includes securing appropriate consent from participants, minimizing the potential for harm, and compliance with data-protection, safety & other legal obligations. Any significant change in the purpose, design or conduct of the research will be reported to the SOM-REC Chair, and, if appropriate, a new request for ethical approval will be made to the SOM-REC.*	
Signature of PI or PGR Student	
Signature of first supervisor (if appropriate)	
Decision of SOM-REC	APPROVED
Signature of SOM-REC Chair or SOM-REC deputy Chair Date	14-5-1[illegible]
SOM-REC Reference number (office use only)	

B.2 Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet: Entrepreneurial Experiences of Becoming an Employer

This pilot study is being conducted by Swansea University and forms part of a PhD research project. The lead researcher is Helen Williams ( ) who will be conducting the interviews and is able to answer any questions you have about participating in this research interview. The study is overseen by my supervisory team, Professor Katrina Pritchard and Dr. Maggie Miller (who are both based at Swansea University's School of Management. Should you have any concerns, or wish to contact someone else about the study you can contact my supervisory team or the School of Management Research Office (somresearch@swansea.ac.uk).

We know that growing a business and making the leap from running the business yourself to employing others is one of the biggest challenges an entrepreneur can face. Despite this, there has been limited research conducted into how this transition takes place. My research seeks to explore your experiences of hiring your first employee(s) and becoming an employer. At this early stage, I am hoping to gain insights into your experiences of starting-up your business and taking on your first members of staff. Interviews will help to develop research objectives and inform the subsequent project scope. Generally speaking, I am interested in talking to you about: your perceptions of entrepreneurship

- your experiences of setting up your business
- your decision to hire employees and how you experienced this transition
- what impact being an employer has had on you and your business.

The interview will take roughly 2 hours and can take place at a location convenient to you. You do not have to answer any question if you do not wish to and you are able to withdraw from the study at any time. At the time of the interview you will be asked to sign a consent form that outlines more about your rights during the project and guarantees confidentiality of your information. The interview will be recorded for later transcription by a professional confidential transcriber. We do this so we can capture what is said in the interview without being distracted by the need to take notes. However, you can ask not to have your interview recorded or ask to have the recording device stopped at any time during the interview.

We believe that communication isn't just about words! The interview may be quite different from any you've experienced before as you'll also be encouraged to use either use LEGO® or draw images to help you visualise and explain some of your answers. For example, I may ask you to build a LEGO® version of yourself and describe it to me. Or, you may be asked to draw out a timeline to help explain your entrepreneurial journey. If you haven't used LEGO® before, or for a long time, don't worry, we will have time before the interview starts to get familiar with it! Your LEGO® models and drawings will be captured using a camera and won't include identifying information of you or your business. You can ask for no images to be recorded at any time during your interview.

Once all interviews have been conducted, common themes will be identified and summarised by myself and my supervisors. You will be provided with a summary report with details about the study and its findings. No information that could identify an individual will be used. Academic publications based on this work may be developed, however, these too will be anonymised, both individual participants and their businesses.

B.3 Consent Form

Consent Form: Entrepreneurial Experiences of Becoming an Employer (Pilot Study)

I, ...agree to take part in this research project.

Please tick as appropriate	Yes	No
I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.		
Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.		
I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason.		
I understand I may decline to answer any particular questions.		
I agree to provide information to the researcher(s) on the understanding that neither my name nor that of my organisation will be used in reports on the research without my permission. If the researchers subsequently propose to use my name or that of my organisation in a publicly available report I will be asked for my consent at that point, and will be free to choose not to be so identified. (The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.)		
I agree to the interview being recorded.		
I understand that I have the right to ask for the recording device to be turned off at any time during the interview.		
I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact Helen Williams at Swansea University.		
I understand that if I want to talk to someone else about this project, I can contact the primary research supervisor Dr. Katrina Pritchard), Associate Professor, Swansea University, School of Management.		
I assign the copyright of my contribution to Swansea University School of Management Business School for use in education, research and publication.		
I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet and specified above.		

Signed: ....

Name: ....   Date: ....

Received by: Date:

Appendix C. Main Study Forms

C.1 Ethical Approval Form

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

LIGHT-TOUCH ETHICAL REVIEW FORM

To be completed for all research involving human subjects or datasets

Name of PI or PGR Student	Helen Williams
Staff Number or Student ID	[redacted]
Supervisors*	Dr. Katrina Pritchard and Dr. Cara Reed
Date Submitted	
Title of Project	Entrepreneurial Experiences of Becoming an Employer: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
Name of Funder / Sponsor*	NA
Finance Code / Reference*	NA
Duration of Project	24 months

** Complete if appropriate*

***Risk evaluation**: Does the proposed research involve any of the following?*
*✓ **Tick** those boxes for which the answer is **YES***
*✗ **Cross** those boxes for which the answer is **NO***

☒ Will the research harm or pose any risk to the environment? (e.g. research in environmentally sensitive areas (e.g. SSSIs); permission needed to access field sites; transport of samples between countries (e.g. soil); sampling of rare or hazardous material (e.g. invasive species) that could deplete or endanger)

☒ Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data or premises and/or equipment? If this is the case, the project **must** be reviewed by the NHS

☒ Does the study involve participants aged 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent? (e.g. people with learning disabilities: see Mental Capacity Act 2005. All research that falls under the auspices of the Act **must** be reviewed by the NHS)

☒ Does the research involve other vulnerable groups: children, those with cognitive impairment or in unequal relationships? (e.g. your students). This **may** require NHS review, and will typically require the researcher to get **Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) clearance** (formerly CRB checks)

☒ Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (e.g. students at school, members of self-help group or residents of nursing home?)

☒ Will the research involve any form of deception? (e.g. misinformation or partial information about the purpose or nature of the research)

Appendix C.1 Main Study Ethical Approval Form

- ☒ Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (e.g. covert observation of people or use of social media content)
- ☒ Will the study discuss sensitive topics or require the collection of sensitive information? (e.g. terrorism and extremism; sexual activity, drug use or criminal activity; collection of security sensitive documents or information)
- ☒ Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. foods or vitamins) to be administered to study participants, or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind? (If any substance is to be administered, this **may** fall under the auspices of the Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) Regulations 2004, and require review by the NHS)
- ☒ Will tissue samples (including blood) be obtained from participants? (This would fall under the terms of the Human Tissue Act 2004. All research that falls under the auspices of the Act **must** be reviewed by the NHS)
- ☒ Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?
- ☒ Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?
- ☒ Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?
- ☒ Will the research involve administrative or secure data that requires permission from the appropriate authorities before use?
- ☒ Is there a possibility that the safety of the researcher may be in question? (e.g. in international research: locally employed researchers)
- ☒ Could the research impact negatively upon the reputation of the University, researcher(s), research participants, other stakeholders or any other party?
- ☒ Does the research involve members of the public in a research capacity? (e.g. participant research; participants as co-producers or data collectors)
- ☒ Will the research take place outside the UK where there may be issues of local practice and political or other sensitivities?
- ☑ Will the research involve respondents to the Internet or other visual/vocal methods where respondents may be identified?
- ☒ Will the research involve the sharing of data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given?
- ☒ Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?
- ☒ Do any of the research team have an actual or potential conflict of interest?
- ☒ Are you aware of any other significant ethical risks or concerns associated with the research proposal? (If yes, please outline them in the space below)

Appendix C.1 Main Study Ethical Approval Form

Other significant ethical issues or concerns: *(If None, then please state 'None'*
None

*If any answer to the questions above is **YES**, then a **Full Ethical Review** may be required.*

*If the project involves **none of the above**, complete the **Declaration**, send this form and a **copy of the proposal** to the* **School of Management Research Support Officer**. Research may only commence once approval has been given.

Declaration: *The project will be conducted in compliance with the University's Research Integrity Framework (P1415-956). This includes securing appropriate consent from participants, minimizing the potential for harm, and compliance with data-protection, safety & other legal obligations. Any significant change in the purpose, design or conduct of the research will be reported to the SOM-REC Chair, and, if appropriate, a new request for ethical approval will be made to the SOM-REC.*	
Signature of PI or PGR Student	
Signature of first supervisor (if appropriate)	
Decision of SOM-REC	Approved
Signature of SOM-REC Chair or SOM-REC deputy Chair	
Date	27/07/2018
SOM-REC Reference number (office use only)	

C.2 Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

Information Sheet: Entrepreneurial Experiences of Becoming an Employer

This study is being conducted by Swansea University and forms part of a PhD research project. The lead researcher for these interviews is Helen Williams ([redacted] who will be conducting the interviews and is able to answer any questions you have about participating in this research interview. The study is overseen by my supervisory team, Dr. Katrina Pritchard ([redacted]) and Dr. Cara Reed ([redacted]) who are both based at Swansea University's School of Management. Should you have any concerns, or wish to contact someone else about the study you can contact my supervisory team or the School of Management Research Office (SoMresearch@swansea.ac.uk).

We know that growing a business and making the leap from running the business yourself to employing others is one of the biggest challenges an entrepreneur can face. Despite this, there has been limited research conducted into how this transition takes place. My research seeks to explore your experiences of hiring your first employee(s) and becoming an employer. I am hoping to gain insights into your experiences of starting-up your business and taking on your first members of staff. Generally speaking, I am interested in talking to you about:

- Your perceptions of entrepreneurship
- Your experiences of setting up your business
- Your decision to hire employees and how you experienced this transition
- What impact being an employer has had on you and your business?

The interview will take roughly 2 hours and can take place at a location convenient to you. You do not have to answer any question if you do not wish to and you are able to withdraw from the study at any time. At the time of the interview you will be asked to sign a consent form that outlines more about your rights during the project and guarantees confidentiality of your information. The interview will be recorded for later transcription by a professional confidential transcriber. We do this so we can capture what is said in the interview without being distracted by the need to take notes. However, you can ask not to have your interview recorded or to have the recording device stopped at any time during the interview.

We believe that communication isn't just about words! The interview may be quite different from any you've experienced before, as you'll be encouraged to use use LEGO® or draw images to help you visualise and explain some of your answers. For example, I may ask you to build a LEGO® version of yourself and describe it to me. Or, you may be asked to draw out a timeline to help explain your entrepreneurial journey. If you haven't used LEGO® before, or for a long time, don't worry, we will have time before the interview starts to get familiar with it! Your LEGO® models and drawings will be captured using a camera and won't include identifying information of you or your business. You can ask for no images to be recorded at any time during your interview.

Once all interviews have been conducted, common themes will be identified and summarised by myself and my supervisors. You will be provided with a summary report with details about the study and its findings. No information that could identify an individual will be used. Academic publications based on this work may be developed, however, these too will be anonymised, both individual participants and their businesses.

C.3 Consent Form

Consent Form: Entrepreneurial Experiences of Becoming an Employer

I, ...agree to take part in this research project.

Please tick as appropriate	Yes	No
I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.		
Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.		
I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason.		
I understand I may decline to answer any particular questions.		
I agree to provide information to the researcher(s) on the understanding that neither my name nor that of my organisation will be used in reports on the research without my permission. If the researchers subsequently propose to use my name or that of my organisation in a publicly available report I will be asked for my consent at that point, and will be free to choose not to be so identified. (The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.)		
I agree to the interview being recorded.		
I understand that I have the right to ask for the recording device to be turned off at any time during the interview.		
I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact Helen Williams [redacted] at Swansea University.		
I understand that if I want to talk to someone else about this project, I can contact the primary research supervisor Dr. Katrina Pritchard ([redacted] Associate Professor, Swansea University, School of Management.		
I assign the copyright of my contribution to Swansea University School of Management Business School for use in education, research and publication.		
I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet and specified above.		

Signed: ....

Name: ....   Date: ....

Received by: Date:

C.4 Participant Information Form

Entrepreneurial Experiences of Becoming an Employer

Participant Information Form

Name: ____

Business Name: ____

Business Type/Industry: ____

Year business started: ____________________ Year first employee hired: ____________________

Number of employees: ____

Is this your first business? (If no, what was your previous business)? ____

____

Previous occupation: ____

C.5 Interview Prompt Sheet

Interview Schedule

Introduction
Thank you for participating in this study about your experiences as an entrepreneur transitioning from being self-employed to an employer. This interview will last for approximately two hours and will be audio-recorded to use as part of the study.

- The interview will also involve the use of Lego, which you may or may not be familiar with. Feel free to take some time to re-familiarise yourself with it. During the interview, I may ask you to use Lego to help explain some of your answers. You are also free to use it to illustrate any points, or to help answer any questions I ask. If you aren't comfortable using it, you are under no obligation to do so.

- If you are comfortable doing so, you are also free to draw out anything you think will help explain or explore anything we discuss during the interview.

Just to remind you that all information you provide will be strictly confidential and anonymised in the results of this study. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, we can take a break or stop the interview. You are under no obligation to complete this interview and can withdraw your data at any time, without having to give any reason.

Before we start, do you have any questions or concerns about the process or study?

Questions

1. **What does the term entrepreneur mean to you?** *(Will ask participants to build 'Entrepreneurship'/ or an 'Entrepreneur' from Lego)*
    - Based on your description, do you see yourself as one?
    - Why did you decide to become an entrepreneur?

2. **Can you take me back to the time you decided to set up your current business/venture and talk me through your experiences?**
    - Is there a significant moment that stands out to you?
    - What about being an entrepreneur gives you the most energy?
    - What aspects have you found least enjoyable?
    - What does your venture/ventures mean to you and is there anything which would stop you from continuing it?

3. **I'd like to focus on your experiences as an employer. Could you talk me through your experiences of hiring your first employee?**
    - How did the decision to hire staff come about?
    - What has been the most significant part of the transition for you?

4. **Do you think becoming an employer has had any impact on you?**
    - What have you learnt about yourself?
    - Is there anything that you would change?

5. **What challenges have you/do you think you face now and in the future?**
    - What would enable those changes/plans to take place?

6. **What do you think the biggest advantage of becoming an employer is?**
    - Have you experienced any disadvantages?

7. **Where do you see yourself/your business in five years' time?**

1

C.6 Participant Interview Debrief Form

Swansea University
School of Management
Department of Business and Management

Researcher: Helen Williams

Debrief Form

I would like to take this opportunity to say **thank you** for taking the time to take part in this study.

Please be assured, all data collected will be treated in the strictest confidence. You are free to withdraw your data from the study at any time without having to give any reason, by contacting myself (Helen Williams) at

The completed research will help to gain an in-depth understanding of entrepreneurship and the transition from self-employment to employer. You were chosen to take part in the study because of your experiences as a business owner who has recently hired your first employee(s).

If you were unduly or unexpectedly affected by taking part in the study, please feel free to contact myself directly. If you feel unable, for any reason, to talk with me then please feel free to contact my supervisory team, Dr. Katrina Pritchard k k and Dr. Cara Reed or the School of Management Research Office SoMresearch@swansea.ac.uk.

The following support services may be of interest to you:

Great Business
http://www.greatbusiness.gov.uk/where-to-get-start-up-advice/
T: 0300 456 3565

Federation of Small Businesses, Wales
https://www.fsb.org.uk/first-voice/regional-voice/regions/wales
T: 029 2074 7406

Business Wales
https://businesswales.gov.wales
T: 0300 060 3000

C.7 Lone Fieldwork Risk Assessment and Management

Identified Risks	Likelihood	Potential Impact/Outcome	Risk Management/Mitigating Factors
Identify the risks/hazards present	High/Medium/Low	Who might be harmed and how?	Evaluate the risks and decide on the precautions, e.g., Health & Safety
Travel risks to location of research project: • Road/rail accident • Physical assault	Low	Researcher: • Physical injury • Psychological harm	• Awareness of options for mode of travel • Awareness of physical environment, e.g., alleyways, open spaces • Researcher to inform designated contacts about travel plans, location and timings • Researcher to be aware of health and safety policies of research location: Fire bells and location of fire alarms & exits.
Data collection taking place in an unfamiliar location with people not already known to researcher	High	Researcher: • Physical injury • Psychological harm	• Visit location prior to data collection to assess possible risks associated with built and social environment • Use this information to plan session • Identify back up at location • Allow extra time to familiarise participants with research and environment • Researcher to have contact details and means of making timely contact with back up/key contacts • Time, location and duration of interviews to be shared with designated contacts.

Discussion of a sensitive topic in an interview has potential to cause distress to participant	Low	Participant: • Psychological stress Researcher: • Anxiety about dealing with a complex situation	• Offer to cease interview • Signpost participant to external support services • Researcher interviewing experience
Research participant becomes unwell during interview	Low	Immediate or urgent response may be required from emergency services	• Researcher to ensure participant is happy to be interviewed before interview begins • Offer to cease interview • Access to phone to contact emergency services

C.8 GDPR Data Flow Table

Purpose	Whose Data?	What?			When?		Where?	Who?
		Type of data	Source	Legal basis	Updated	Retention Period	Secure Storage	Access
Why is the data being collected/kept/processed?	**Who will the data belong to?**	**What potential participant data will be collected?**	**Who has provide information?**	**What provid legitimate grounds for t data to be collected and used?**	**Will information be kept up to date?**	**How long will the data be kept?**	**Where and how will this data be stored?**	**Who will have access to the data?**
Participant recruitment for study	**Potential study participants**	Names Address Email Mobile Business Type/Name	Individual	Consent individual	As required	Deleted once all study participants have been recruited. Consent withdrawn	Researcher's University SharePoint portal. Information will be held on a password protected document.	Researcher
Storage of recruited participant's contact and basic information for reference. (information gained from basic information forms given to participants)	**Study participants**	Names Addresses Email Mobile Business name and ty Age Previous occupations /businesses	Individual	Consent individual	Participants will be asked to choose a pseudonym for themselves and their business. This information will be updated as it will be required to help the researcher identify their participants.	Deleted by December 2021 or before if consent is withdrawn	This information will be stored in an encrypted folder in a password protected file. This file will not be shared or copied to other devices. Files will be stored on University's secure SharePoint portal.	Researcher Supervisors
Recording of interviews using a digital recording device, for later analysis.	**Study participants**	Interview audio-files include: Names Locations Addresses Business type Name of business Employee names Family names/backgr Age	Individual	Consent individual	NA	Deleted from device once transferred onto researcher's computer immediately after interview has taken place. This will take place before transportation.	Digitally recorded audio folders will be encrypted, and each audio file password protected onto the researcher's computer (laptop) before transportation. Files will be saved using participant's chosen pseudonyms.	Researcher

						Deleted immediately if consent is withdrawn.	Files will be stored on University's secure SharePoint portal.	
Interview data audio transcription (via a professional transcriber)	**Study Participants**	Interview audio-files include: Names Locations Addresses Business type Name of business Employee names Family names/backgr Age	Individual	Consent individual	NA	Contracts (in the form of a confidentiality agreement) with transcribers will stipulate that the transcriber is required to securely erase all data from their computer once interview transcription files has been securely passed back to the researcher. Will be asked to be deleted before this time if consent is withdrawn.	If a professional transcriber is to be used, then they must have signed a confidentially form and comply with GDPR 2018 regulations. All files sent to the transcriber will be password protected and encrypted. Audio files may be uploaded directly to a transcribing company that provides a secure facility/portal. If necessary pre-encrypted audio files will be transported to the transcriber's computer via an encrypted memory stick. Files will be stored on University's secure SharePoint portal.	Researcher, Transcriber
Recording and short-term storage of visual data after interviews	**Study Participants**	Photos taken by researcher of Lego o built by participants drawings constructe participants may inclu Self-portraits Company logos Identifiable features handwriting) Other individuals	Individual	Consent individual	NA	Photos taken using the researcher's iPhone will be securely transferred to researcher's computer and deleted from the device before transportation,	Initially, visual data will be recorded using an iPhone camera belonging to the researcher. The device is passcode protected. Immediately after the interview, all photos will be transferred to the researcher's personal computer and	Researcher, Supervisors

						or before if consent is withdrawn. Stored visual data on researcher's computer and University's SharePoint folder will be securely deleted before December 2021 or before if consent is withdrawn.	researcher's University SharePoint account. Separate folders containing visual files for each participant will be encrypted. Folders will be saved using participant's chosen pseudonyms.	
Long-term storage of interview audio recordings, anonymised visual data, anonymised interview transcripts and study consent forms	**Study participants**	Files may include: Names Locations Addresses Business type Name of business Employee names Family names/backgr Age	Individual	Consent individual	As required	Interview recordings, anonymised transcripts, unpublished visual data and consent forms will be deleted by December 2021 or before if consent is withdrawn.	Each participant will have their own encrypted folder which will contain their audio and visual files, anonymised transcripts and consent forms. Each of these files will saved separately with password protections. The files will be named using participant's chosen pseudonyms. Files will be saved on the researcher's University SharePoint account and will also be backed up onto an encrypted USB, stored in a locked cabinet.	Researcher, Supervisors
Use of anonymised visual data, anonymised interview transcripts	**Study participants**	Anonymised data pr by participants (inte quotes and photos of LEGO models or draw	Individual	Consent individual (although not GDPR as dat be anonymised).	As required	Data will be available to the public if published.	Data will be published as part of a PhD Thesis. May also be published in academic journals, conference presentations and papers.	Public