

Making sense of identity transitioning within the new venture creation process

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processes (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006), and engagement with people and place (Anderson *et al.*, 2019; Larson and Pearson, 2012). Previous work (e.g., Snihur and Clarysse, 2022) suggests aspiring entrepreneurs are in a state of dynamic tension (Bauman, 2000) as they navigate the boundaries between founder identity and organisational identity. However, this is a process that has not necessarily been empirically examined to date.

METHODS

Research setting and design

An exploratory, case study research design (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018) was adopted, involving aspiring entrepreneurs in a university incubator. University incubators are an ideal empirical setting within which to explore organisational identity formation in new ventures. This empirical setting provided respondents who are in a state of in-between-ness (Beech, 2011) as they journey towards ‘becoming’ entrepreneurs (Steyaert, 2007), within the parameters of identity formation and new firm creation (Foy and Gruber, 2021). University incubators typically provide access to mentors (Bergman and McMullen, 2022) and co-working facilities (Bouncken *et al.*, 2022), making it easier for aspiring entrepreneurs to establish their own ventures, becoming incubator tenants. Selecting founders in nascent stages (Hoang and Gimeno, 2010) provides the best setting to observe how aspiring entrepreneurs navigate the boundaries between their own individual self-concept and the organisational identity of the new venture.

A number of cases of aspiring entrepreneurs were initially followed based on predefined criteria, as suggested by Eisenhardt (1989). These required respondents to: a) be registered on a university course with access to incubator facilities; b) be individuals seeking to start a firm and within the nascent stages i.e., just coming into existence, displaying entrepreneuring or ‘becoming’ behaviours e.g., proposing possible futures, ideation, pitching, etc. and c) be

