

**THREE PROCESS PERSPECTIVES ON THE HUMAN SIDE OF
CORPORATE ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AND EXPLORATORY INNOVATION**

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CHAPTER 1 | SYNOPSIS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Despite the fundamental role of time and process in all areas of (organizational) life, management and innovation scholarship has traditionally emphasized variance theorizing (Gehman et al., 2018; Langley, 1999) – explaining relationships between variables and treating concepts and ideas mostly in substantialist terms. Process research takes a different approach and invites us to instead focus on “how and why things emerge, develop, grow, or terminate over time” (Langley et al., 2013, p. 1). For example, rather than identifying which factors are correlated with innovation and creativity, a process approach redirects attention to how innovation and creativity unfold over time (Garud et al., 2013; Gehman et al., 2018; Green et al., 2024).

This is not to disregard the importance of variance theorizing but point to an emergent field of theorizing and research that has much to offer researchers and practitioners alike. As Ann Langley so vividly put it: “time is the only thing we cannot escape” (Gehman et al., 2018, p. 289). The importance of process perspectives is evident in recent scholarly attention, with reviews, editorials, and special issues highlighting them as among the most promising areas in innovation and entrepreneurship research (Berends & Deken, 2019; Garud et al., 2013; Kuckertz & Prochotta, 2018; Langley et al., 2013). Likewise, there have been paradigmatic shifts in how different constructs in and around innovation research are studied. For example, creativity researchers advocate studying creativity not merely as an outcome but as an ongoing process and ask new questions about the underlying activities that ultimately constitute being creative (Green et al., 2024; Rouse & Pratt, 2021). Similarly, process research is gaining traction in various areas of innovation research (Garud et al., 2013; Tsoukas, 2017).

Shifting the mode of theorizing to consider the temporal and relational dynamics becomes particularly relevant when applied to another often-overlooked dimension in innovation and especially corporate entrepreneurship research, namely the individual-level or

“human side” (Soto-Simeone & Biniari, 2024; Weiss et al., 2022). After all, processes unfold through the lived experiences of individuals and teams, making their perspectives and dynamics central to understanding how innovation happens over time. However, while research on corporate entrepreneurship (Bierwerth et al., 2015; Urbano et al., 2022), research and development (Un et al., 2010), and new product development (Barczak et al., 2009) has provided important insights into the outcome and performance implications of various structural and organizational factors, we still know little about the individual- and team-level foundations of such activities (Weiss et al., 2022). But understanding these dynamics is important because it is individuals and collectives who develop new ideas and implement them (Brenton & Levin, 2012; Weiss et al., 2022). Consequently, for organizations to remain competitive amid today’s disruptions, they must also understand how their innovation practices affect the innovators themselves. Similarly, if innovation is to be managed effectively, organizations and managers must acknowledge and embrace the messiness and complexity of social phenomena as they evolve over time.

This dissertation therefore explores the human side of innovation (Brenton & Levin, 2012; Weiss et al., 2022) through a process lens. It examines two related contexts where individuals and teams drive innovative outcomes. First, I focus on the context of corporate entrepreneurship. Despite its prevalence in organizations, remarkably little is known about how participation in corporate entrepreneurial activities – such as in internal corporate venturing programs – affects individual employees (Soto-Simeone & Biniari, 2024; Tunstall et al., 2024). Second, I turn to the context of team exploratory innovation. Here, I examine the processes and dynamics through which ideas are collectively elaborated over time. Together, these two contexts provide complementary perspectives on innovation as a fundamentally human process, one that unfolds through individual experiences and interactions. In total, I examine three important areas of the innovation journey, namely, the

process of becoming an intrapreneur (*chapter 2*), processes of both personal and structural change and their implications for intrapreneurs and organizations (*chapter 3*), and team-based innovation and creativity processes (*chapter 4*).

1.2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION: THE HUMAN SIDE OF CORPORATE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EXPLORATORY INNOVATION

Corporate entrepreneurship encompasses the pursuit of entrepreneurial activities within established organizations to explore new opportunities and build new capabilities (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999; Urbano et al., 2022). This approach to innovation can take different forms, for example, internal corporate venturing (Guth & Ginsberg, 1990). Internal corporate venturing is defined as the creation of semi-autonomous venture units staffed with internal employees (Zajac et al., 1991) to identify and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities for new business creation within corporate boundaries (Burgelman, 1983). Unlike more traditional forms of corporate innovation, such as research and development (Un et al., 2010) or more conventional new product development processes (Cankurtaran et al., 2013; O'Connor & DeMartino, 2006), internal corporate venturing extends beyond product development, entailing new business development through the identification and commercialization of (disruptive) entrepreneurial opportunities beyond existing markets.

In practice, internal corporate venturing is often institutionalized in program form – strategic organizational initiatives that adopt a bottom-up approach to cultivating entrepreneurial activities among employees through systematic training and encouragement of the workforce (Jessri et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2015). These programs position participating employees, referred to as intrapreneurs, as proactive change agents who drive organizational transformation toward greater entrepreneurial orientation and mindset throughout the corporation (Kuratko et al., 2023).

Internal corporate ventures, and exploratory innovation more generally, are characterized by their inherent uncertainty and complexity. To manage this uncertainty, organizations typically implement formal evaluation frameworks and systematic assessment processes to monitor project progress and potential (Burgelman, 1983; Garud & van de Ven, 1992). Common governance mechanisms include stage-gate processes (Ettlie & Elsenbach, 2007) where projects undergo regular evaluation by steering committees, typically composed of senior and top management (Garrett & Neubaum, 2013; Saeed et al., 2024), who assess progress, market potential, and strategic fit with the corporate parent's business (Covin et al., 2020; Garrett & Neubaum, 2013). These systematic evaluation approaches serve to protect organizations from overcommitting resources to projects that fail to meet market needs or drift too far from the organization's overarching strategic goals and vision (Patzelt et al., 2021; Shepherd et al., 2013). As a result, project termination represents a frequent outcome that, while often necessary from a managerial perspective, profoundly impacts the intrapreneurs who have invested themselves in these initiatives.

In here lies an important gap in our understanding. While we know much about the strategic and performance dimensions of corporate entrepreneurship (Bierwerth et al., 2015; Urbano et al., 2022), we know far less about its human dimensions (Soltanifar et al., 2023; Tunstall et al., 2024). This sentiment has been echoed in recent publications by Soto-Simeone and Biniari (2024) and Tunstall and colleagues (2024) urging researchers to employ qualitative longitudinal designs to capture the individual- and team-level dynamics underlying corporate entrepreneurship. This gap motivated the central objective of this dissertation: to investigate the human side of such initiatives (Soto-Simeone & Biniari, 2024; Weiss et al., 2022) and unpack the proverbial “blackbox” of individual and team-level processes that unfold over time to shape both individual and organizational trajectories.

Accordingly, this dissertation not only considers the individual-level foundations of such activities, but also how collective processes shape the trajectories of ideas. As alluded to in the introduction, creativity as process represents a fundamental shift from traditional outcome-focused conceptualizations that define creativity primarily through the generation of ideas that are both novel and useful (Amabile et al., 1996; Amabile & Pratt, 2016; George, 2007). Process-oriented creativity research emphasizes that collective creativity encompasses more than the mere aggregation of diverse perspectives contributed by different individuals, recognizing that collective creativity emerges from momentary social interactions within groups (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Harvey & Kou, 2013). Viewed from this perspective, idea evaluation, rather than functioning as separate, convergent decision-making stage, is seen as a process embedded within ongoing interactions (Harvey & Kou, 2013).

1.3 RESEARCH GAPS AND OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Innovation unfolds through complex, dynamic processes that involve multiple actors across different organizational levels and temporal horizons (Garud et al., 2011, 2013; Tsoukas, 2017). While substantial research has examined innovation outcomes and performance, our understanding of the underlying processes remains fragmented (Kouamé & Langley, 2018). This dissertation addresses three critical gaps in our process- and human-oriented understanding of innovation, examining how intrapreneurs' identities evolve over time, how prolonged involvement in corporate entrepreneurial projects can lead to the emergence of turnover intentions, and how idea elaboration unfolds in teams working on exploratory innovation.

Chapter 2 focuses the context of a 9-month internal corporate venturing program. Such programs represent significant transitions for employees who find themselves embedded between traditional corporate employment and innovative entrepreneurial activities. While research has extensively studied the performance effects of corporate

venturing at the level of the organization (Bierwerth et al., 2015; Urbano et al., 2022), the gradual identity processes that unfold in the process of becoming an intrapreneur remain unclear, representing an important theoretical puzzle.

In fact, prior research has shown that corporate entrepreneurial activities attract employees who display strong organizational identification (Blanka, 2019; Moriano et al., 2014). Consequently, prospective intrapreneurs are typically the organization's most proactive and dedicated employees. Yet, recent work on the human side of corporate entrepreneurship (Soto-Simeone & Biniari, 2024; Tunstall et al., 2024) points towards an important paradox. Employees operating in corporate entrepreneurial roles seem to distance themselves from their organizations, even describing the corporate parent as an “iron cage” constraining them (Tunstall et al., 2024). The change from organizational champions to active distancing represents a fundamental contradiction that has not been resolved by existing research.

Moreover, the corporate entrepreneurship literature has implicitly assumed that employees can develop coherent and positively valued identities as intrapreneurs or corporate entrepreneurs that align with their formal roles (Hamrick et al., 2024; Zhang & Biniari, 2021). However, unlike independent entrepreneurs, who have accessible role models to serve as templates for identity construction, there are no widely accessible role schemas for the intrapreneurial role (Corbett & Hmieski, 2007). The absence of such role schemas may lead intrapreneurs to construct their identities building on popular entrepreneurial archetypes. Furthermore, the majority of extant research has relied on cross-sectional designs, missing the crucial transition period when identity work in corporate entrepreneurship (or innovation) is most pronounced. However, without understanding how identities evolve during the process of becoming an intrapreneur, we cannot explain why initial organizational commitment

transforms into active distancing, nor can we predict when and why organizations risk losing their most engaged and entrepreneurial talent.

The latter is especially important considering that most corporate entrepreneurial projects are ultimately terminated (Behrens & Patzelt, 2016; Shepherd et al., 2013). *Chapter 3* therefore considers the post-project reintegration process. For individuals who have invested themselves in corporate entrepreneurial projects, project failure and the transition back to conventional work roles presents unique challenges that organizations rarely anticipate or manage effectively (Patzelt et al., 2021; Shepherd et al., 2009, 2013). This oversight represents an important gap in corporate entrepreneurship and innovation management research, as the downstream consequences of project termination can substantially impact both talent retention and future innovation capacity. Although most corporate entrepreneurial projects end in termination (Behrens & Patzelt, 2016; Shepherd et al., 2013), the human capital implications of such outcomes have received scant attention. Therefore, the reintegration process and its inherent challenges deserve closer scrutiny, particularly given that returning participants may experience fundamental misalignment between their perceived capabilities and their actual responsibilities in their conventional job roles.

For instance, research on former entrepreneurs in paid employment suggests that entrepreneurs often have a difficult time (re)adjusting to corporate employment (Feng et al., 2022). With former entrepreneurs being prone to develop turnover intentions, corporate entrepreneurial actors might face similarly complex challenges returning to their more conventional work roles. To date, however, we lack understanding of how corporate entrepreneurship and particularly project failure shapes whether former corporate entrepreneurs develop turnover intentions. *Chapter 2* and *chapter 3* thus address overarching

Research Question 1:

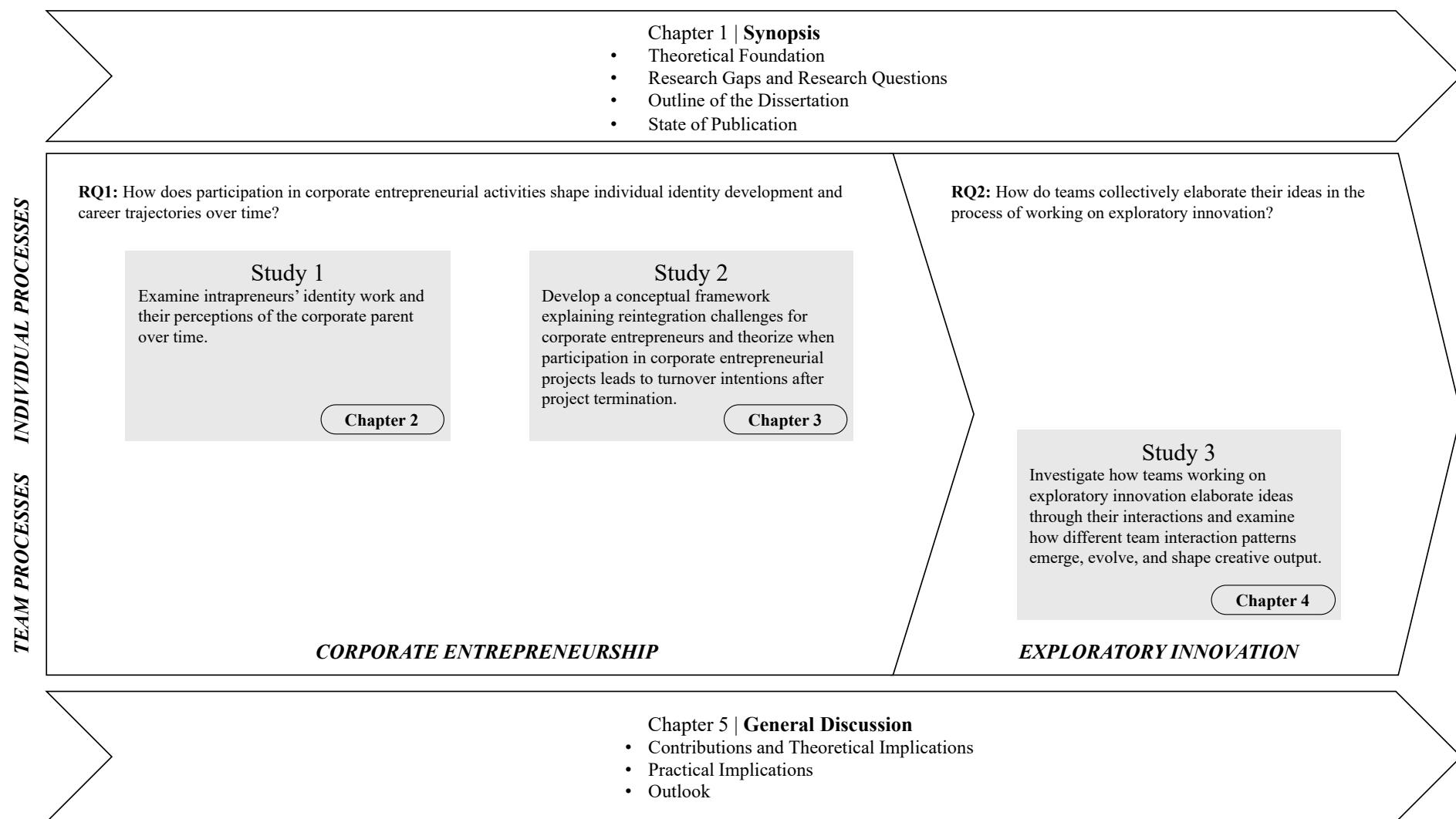
Research Question 1: How does participation in corporate entrepreneurial activities shape individual identity development and career trajectories over time?

Exploratory innovation, as pursued through corporate entrepreneurship, increasingly occurs through collaborative efforts, yet teams often struggle to realize their creative potential. Indeed, research consistently shows that teams can underperform individuals in creative tasks, failing to generate, select, or develop ideas effectively (Rietzschel et al., 2010; Stroebe et al., 2010). While we understand many barriers to team creativity, including groupthink (Rietzschel et al., 2019), evaluation apprehension (Larey & Paulus, 1999), and conformity pressure (Stroebe et al., 2010), we do not yet fully understand how successful teams engage with and collectively elaborate ideas over time (Rietzschel et al., 2019).

The team creativity and innovation literature has largely focused on idea generation, while the crucial process of idea elaboration, that is, how initial creative insights are developed, combined, and refined into implementable innovations (Mannucci & Perry-Smith, 2022; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017), has received little attention. This gap is particularly pronounced in exploratory innovation contexts (March, 1991), where teams, in the absence of simple reference solutions and evaluative schemas, face genuine uncertainty. *Chapter 4* thus addresses the need to understand the micro-processes of creative collaboration (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Harvey & Kou, 2013) as they naturally occur in entrepreneurial teams, providing insights into when and why teams succeed or fail in developing innovative solutions collectively. Thus, *chapter 4* addresses the following question:

Research Question 2: How do teams collectively elaborate their ideas in the process of working on exploratory innovation?

Figure 1.1: Dissertation Outline



1.4 DISSERTATION OUTLINE, RESEARCH AIMS, AND CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation comprises three research papers that advance our understanding of individual- and team-level innovation processes. Figure 1.1 illustrates the dissertation's overall structure and links each study's research aim to its corresponding overarching research question.

The two research questions are linked by their focus on temporal and dynamic processes that shape innovation outcomes at different levels of analysis. Collectively, they trace the innovation journey from initial creative collaboration through identity development during project participation to reintegration and prospective career transitions following project conclusion. By examining innovation as an inherently human and processual phenomenon, this dissertation contributes to a more complete understanding of how innovation unfolds in practice, offering insights that can help teams, individuals, and organizations navigate the complexities of innovative and entrepreneurial work more effectively. In short, *studies 1* and *2* examine the process of becoming an intrapreneur and its implications for both the individual and the organization. *Study 1* extends corporate entrepreneurship literature by introducing an individual-level process perspective and challenges the literature's implicit assumption of a stable and coherent self-concept as intrapreneur or corporate entrepreneur. *Study 2* conceptually expands on these findings by drawing on the literature on person-job fit, making several propositions regarding the consequences of project failure for the individual and the organization, and theoretically links these to two concurrent underlying processes. *Study 3* focusses on the relational and processual nature of team innovation and creativity. Specifically, we analyze momentary instances of collective idea engagement and explore how interactions between team members shape team exploratory innovation. The following sections outline each paper's theoretical

background, methodology, and contributions. Table 1.1 provides an overview of all three research papers.

1.4.1 Study 1: The Intrapreneur Identity Illusion: Unraveling the Identity Work of Intrapreneurs in Internal Corporate Venturing

Study 1 (co-authored) integrates identity scholarship (Alvesson et al., 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) with the corporate venturing literature to address a fundamental gap in understanding individual-level processes during participation in internal corporate venturing programs. The theoretical foundation builds on the recognition that identity plays a pivotal role in entrepreneurial behavior and decision-making (Mmbaga et al., 2020), yet its role in corporate innovation processes remains underexplored. Consequently, *study 1* addresses a theoretical puzzle: research consistently shows that corporate entrepreneurial activities attract employees with strong organizational identification (Moriano et al., 2014), yet recent studies reveal that these same employees actively distance themselves from their organizations over time (Tunstall et al., 2024).

The study employs an 18-month longitudinal qualitative design to examine intrapreneurs' identity work as it unfolds over time. The research setting involves an ICV program within a large German multinational organization, tracking 21 intrapreneurs across two cohorts participating in a nine-month ICV program. Data collection includes 73 semi-structured interviews totaling over 63 hours of recordings, conducted at strategic intervals aligned with critical program events (before program initiation, after gate pitches, and at three- and nine-months post-program). We triangulated across multiple data sources including participant observations, internal documents, gate pitch recordings, and social media content to enhance the validity of our findings. The analysis followed a four-stage process: developing rich case descriptions for each intrapreneur, conducting open coding focused on feelings and self-perception, reassembling codes into categories using axial

coding with particular attention to identity-related themes, and refining the emergent theory through iterative engagement with identity work and corporate venturing literature. Using a temporal bracketing approach (Langley, 1999), we developed a process model showing how identity work unfolds across three sequential phases, revealing the interplay between individual identity work and organizational identification (Brown, 2017).

Study 1 makes three theoretical contributions to corporate entrepreneurship and innovation management research. First, it provides an individual-level view that offers a fresh perspective on corporate innovation by adding a process dimension that explains how intrapreneurs' identity work changes their contextual interpretations over time, leading to a transformation from organizational commitment to emotional exhaustion and disassociation. Second, the study challenges the literature's implicit assumption of a coherent intrapreneur identity by revealing the "*intrapreneur identity illusion*" – the inability to construct a coherent and positively valued self-concept based on the intrapreneurial role. The findings show that intrapreneurs instead tend to construct idealized entrepreneur identities due to negative connotations of organizational dependence, lack of individual achievement recognition as intrapreneurs, and intrapreneurship's derivative nature defined primarily in relation to entrepreneurship. Third, the study contributes to innovation management literature by expanding the conversations on innovation practices and individual ambidexterity (Bledow et al., 2009; Raisch & Tushman, 2016) arguing that the entrepreneurial cultural artifacts pervading many innovation activities contribute to the idealization of entrepreneurship and intensify the perceived misfit between explorative and exploitative activities.

1.4.2 Study 2: No Way Back? The Challenges of Reintegrating Corporate Entrepreneurs After Project Termination

Study 2 (single-authored) argues for a shift in research and practice attention to the largely unexplored post-project phase when corporate entrepreneurs must reintegrate into conventional corporate job roles following project termination. The theoretical foundation integrates person-job fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Tims et al., 2016) with literature streams on corporate entrepreneurial projects (Behrens & Patzelt, 2016; Shepherd et al., 2013), entrepreneurial identity aspirations (Farmer et al., 2011; Gregori et al., 2021; Hamrick et al., 2025), and employee turnover (Hom et al., 2017; Kraimer et al., 2012). Person-job fit theory provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how participation in corporate entrepreneurial projects can create misalignments between evolved personal characteristics and job requirements, encompassing both demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit dimensions.

In *study 2* I develop a conceptual framework attempting to explain the challenges of reintegrating corporate entrepreneurs after project failure. In so doing, I emphasize two distinct processes: the development of entrepreneurial identity aspirations and corporate job role diminishment. The framework theorizes how these processes interact to influence person-job fit and subsequent career trajectories following project termination. As a result, the study develops propositions that link project duration, identity development, role diminishment, and different outcome scenarios including transition to entrepreneurship, seeking opportunities within the firm, job searching, and unchanged return. The propositions are grounded in existing theory while extending current understanding to address previously unexplored post-project dynamics.

The contributions to corporate entrepreneurship and innovation management literature are threefold. First, *study 2* extends the corporate entrepreneurship literature beyond its traditional focus on project outcomes and failure consequences to examine reintegration dynamics, addressing a critical gap in understanding the individual-level implications of

corporate entrepreneurial activities and their downstream effects on talent retention. This contribution is particularly important given that corporate entrepreneurs are typically among organizations' most motivated and proactive employees (Blanka, 2019; Hamrick et al., 2024; Moriano et al., 2014), making their potential loss especially costly. Second, the study points to potential downsides of corporate entrepreneurial projects by demonstrating how participation can create unintended consequences for both individuals (e.g., identity conflicts, job role diminishment) and organizations (e.g., talent loss, reduced innovation capacity) that must be actively managed. This contribution draws parallels to research on former entrepreneurs in paid employment (Feng et al., 2022) while extending understanding to corporate entrepreneurial contexts. Third, the study provides a configurational framework for understanding different career trajectories following project termination, offering specific targets for organizational intervention. Furthermore, I highlight how anticipated role diminishment can make corporate entrepreneurial projects less attractive to employees, creating feedback loops that undermine program effectiveness over time.

1.4.3 Study 3: Creative Synthesis, Patchworking, and Static Evaluation: How Different Modes of Collective Idea Elaboration Shape Team Exploratory Innovation

Study 3 (co-authored) builds on the emerging process perspective in creativity research that challenges traditional outcome-focused approaches (Green et al., 2024; Rouse & Pratt, 2021). While substantial research has examined team creativity, teams often struggle to realize their creative potential, frequently underperforming individuals in creative tasks due to well-documented barriers such as the premature tendency to seek consensus (Rietzschel et al., 2019; Stroebe et al., 2010). The study draws on team innovation and creativity literature (van Knippenberg, 2017; van Knippenberg & Hoever, 2021) and dialogical perspectives on knowledge creation (Tsoukas, 2009) to examine the crucial but understudied activity of idea elaboration.

The study employs qualitative inductive video analysis, recognizing video's unique capacity to capture the dynamic, audiovisual nature of team interactions over time (Jarrett & Liu, 2018; LeBaron et al., 2018). The research examines 79 Indian entrepreneurial teams engaged in a 60-minute exploratory innovation task, challenging participants to develop new products or services for Mars inhabitants. The task design provides a novel, open-ended creative challenge that requires teams to move beyond conventional constraints while ensuring all participants operate from a similar knowledge baseline. Teams collaborated virtually via Zoom and documented their process using shared Google Slides, culminating in the creation of digital posters to advertise their proposed solutions. The analysis followed a multi-step inductive process.

Study 3 makes three contributions. First, it advances understanding of team creativity and innovation by developing a two-dimensional framework that captures the dynamics of collective idea elaboration through engagement intensity (how deeply teams engage with ideas) and engagement orientation (whether teams focus on developing or evaluating ideas). This framework reveals four distinct modes: creative synthesis, patchworking, static evaluation, and expedited closure – each affecting the creative output differently and providing mechanisms to explain why teams often fail to engage with others' ideas in-depth (Harvey & Kou, 2013). Second, the study contributes to dialogical perspectives on creativity (Tsoukas, 2009) by demonstrating how productive and unproductive dialogue manifests in the creative work process, emphasizing the importance of team reasoning processes (collective reasoning vis-à-vis individual parallel reasoning) in shaping an idea's trajectory. Third, the study extends recent findings on creative processes (Rouse & Harrison, 2022) to entrepreneurial teams in an exploratory innovation context, demonstrating how time pressure salience affects both team and content engagement dimensions and shifts the responsibility for synthesis and integration from the collective to a single individual.

Table 1.1: Overview of Studies Included in the Dissertation

Title	Research Aims	Contributions	Literatures and Theoretical Perspectives	Core Constructs	Method	Sample
Study 1: The Intrapreneur Identity Illusion: Unraveling the Identity Work of Intrapreneurs in Internal Corporate Venturing	Examine intrapreneurs' identity work and their perceptions of the corporate parent over time.	1) Contributes individual-level process perspective on corporate entrepreneurship foundations; 2) Challenges assumption of coherent intrapreneur identity, revealing <i>intrapreneur identity illusion</i> ; 3) Extends innovation management literature on cultural artifacts and individual ambidexterity tensions	Identity Work; Internal Corporate Venturing	Identity work, Intrapreneur identity illusion, Idealized entrepreneur identity	Inductive qualitative process analysis over 18-month period	73 semi-structured interviews with 21 intrapreneurs from 2 cohorts in 9-month ICV program at German multinational home appliance manufacturer; participant observations, internal documents, social media data, field notes, pitch recordings
Study 2: No Way Back? The Challenges of Reintegrating Corporate Entrepreneurs After Project Termination	Develop a conceptual framework explaining reintegration challenges for corporate entrepreneurs and theorize when participation in corporate entrepreneurial projects leads to turnover intentions after project termination.	1) Extends focus beyond project failure to reintegration challenges; 2) Highlights potential pitfalls of corporate entrepreneurial projects for individuals and organizations; 3) Provides configurations for investigating talent retention strategies and career trajectories of corporate entrepreneurs	Corporate Entrepreneurial Projects; Entrepreneurial Identity Aspirations; Person-Job Fit Theory	Entrepreneurial identity aspirations, Role diminishment, Person-job fit, Turnover intentions	Conceptual paper; Theory development through literature integration and development of propositions	N/A - conceptual
Study 3: Creative Synthesis, Patchworking, and Static Evaluation: How Different Modes of Collective Idea Elaboration Shape Team Exploratory Innovation	Investigate how teams working on exploratory innovation elaborate ideas through their interactions and examine how different team interaction patterns emerge, evolve, and shape creative output.	1) Develops two-dimensional framework and theoretical model of collective idea elaboration dynamics; 2) Advances dialogical perspectives on creativity showing how productive dialogue manifests in creative work processes; 3) Extends findings on creative processes to entrepreneurial teams in exploratory innovation contexts	Team Innovation and Creativity; Dialogical Perspectives	Creative synthesis, Patchworking, Static evaluation, (Expedited) closure, Engagement intensity, Engagement orientation	Qualitative process analysis using video observations to capture audio-visual team interactions	79 entrepreneurial teams engaged in a 60-minute exploratory innovation task (Mars colonization products/services)

1.5 STATE OF PUBLICATION AND ACADEMIC LEARNING JOURNEY

This cumulative dissertation comprises three independent studies designed for publication in international, peer-reviewed journals. *Study 1 (chapter 2)* has already been accepted for publication and is forthcoming in *Journal of Product Innovation Management* (VHB: A). Overall, engaging with the peer review process, presenting at international conferences, and collaborating with co-authors from diverse institutions has helped me tremendously in my academic journey. These experiences, which I briefly discuss in the following, have strengthened both my research capabilities and my scholarly network. Table 1.2 provides a comprehensive overview of each study's publication status, co-author constellations, and the relative contribution of each co-author to the research.

1.5.1 Study 1: Publication State and Development

Study 1 was co-authored with Slawa Tomin, Sylvia Hubner-Benz, and Rüdiger Kabst. The article is forthcoming in *Journal of Product Innovation Management*¹ (VHB: A; ABS 4; SCJ Q1; CiteScore: 18.6) after undergoing three rounds of reviews from three anonymous reviewers and the associate editor. Prior to acceptance the article was presented at a professional development workshop at the AOM Annual Meeting 2023 in Boston (USA), received valuable feedback at the 6th Paper Development Seminar 2023 in Seville (Spain), and was awarded with the KSG Best Entrepreneurship Research Award² at the G-Forum 2023 in Darmstadt (Germany).

We submitted the first version of this paper to the *Journal of Product Innovation Management* on May 10th 2024. Since then, it has benefitted tremendously from the peer review process until its acceptance on June 30th 2025. Initially receiving an invitation to resubmit a major revision, we completely revised all parts of the manuscript. For example,

¹ Article DOI: 10.1111/jpim.12798

² <https://www.ksg-stiftung.de/news-entrepreneurship-award-2>

we restructured our theoretical background section to more clearly articulate and problematize the gaps in the literature and strengthen our argument for the study's significance. Moreover, we substantially revised our process model and process narrative to capture and foreground the lived experiences of intrapreneurs. Following the recommendations of the reviewers, we adopted a model-led composition structure (Berends & Deken, 2019), and rather than simply outlining the tensions experienced by intrapreneurs, we illuminated the core dynamic: how interactions with organizational actors and processes created growing discrepancies between context and desired self-identity. Additionally, to ground our theoretical insights more firmly in the data, we developed a rich process narrative that captures the processual nature of identity work of intrapreneurs participating in corporate entrepreneurship activities. Furthermore, we incorporated additional sources beyond interview data to triangulate our findings. Next, we overhauled the discussions section to explain and develop our theory of intrapreneurs' identity work and clearly articulate our theoretical contributions relative to existing knowledge.

After resubmitting the paper, we received an invitation for a minor revision. In addressing the reviewers and editor's main concerns, we substantially shortened the paper and simplified our process model further by consolidating the (originally three) aggregate dimensions related to the intrapreneurs' perceptions of the organization into one overarching category. In addition, we continued revising our discussion section. Overall, the manuscript developed and improved substantially through the peer review process.

1.5.2 Study 2: Publication State and Development

Study 2 (single-authored) is currently undergoing final revisions before submission to the *Journal of Product Innovation Management*. While I previously presented this work at the G-Forum 2023 in Darmstadt (Germany) the theoretical framework has since evolved significantly.

Initially, I conceived this paper as a conceptual extension of *study 1*, focusing on experiences of loneliness and alienation among corporate entrepreneurs. However, after engaging with the workplace loneliness literature and soliciting feedback from scholars across multiple research fields, I decided to reframe the study. The new conceptual model centers on the challenges of corporate entrepreneurial reintegration. This shift was also informed by what Dean Shepherd and Johan Wiklund coined as “me-search” (Shepherd et al., 2021). Through conversations and ongoing relationships with corporate entrepreneurs across various organizations, I observed how their careers unfolded after participating in internal corporate venturing projects. This personal engagement led me to theorize how two concurrent forces shape the intrapreneurs’ experiences upon reintegration: their evolving identity aspirations and the simultaneous diminishment of their original job roles (as supervisors prepare for their potential departure should the project succeed). Together, these forces impact corporate entrepreneurs’ person-job fit (Tims et al., 2016) upon reintegration. Given *study 1*’s recent acceptance, I plan to strengthen the propositions related to the development of entrepreneurial identity aspirations before submission.

1.5.3 Study 3: Publication State and Development

Study 3, co-authored, with Sylvia Hubner-Benz, Michael Frese, and Zhaoli Song, is the most recent project I have been working on. As part of a collaborative cross-cultural team innovation research symposium, this paper has been accepted for presentation at the AOM Annual Meeting 2025 in Copenhagen (Denmark) and for presentation at the G-Forum 2025 in Stuttgart (Germany). *Study 3* is part of a larger cross-cultural research project comprising researchers from China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Germany. As a research collective we meet monthly to discuss the progress of our various projects, exchange feedback, and challenge our emerging theories. Being part of this group of internationally renowned researchers has

not only benefited my own capabilities as a researcher but also exposed me to new research areas and conversations in international entrepreneurship.

Currently, *study 3* undergoes final revisions and will be submitted to *Academy of Management Journal*. Throughout the research and writing process of this study, the study's theoretical model and two-dimensional framework have changed substantially. Initially, we intended to study how cultural practices shaped the creative output, especially with regard to Jugaad. Jugaad is a Hindi term that refers to a frugal approach to innovation and problem-solving (Hubner et al., 2022; Shepherd et al., 2020). As such, Jugaad embodies a pragmatic mentality emphasizing creative and low-cost solutions. Engaging with the data and discussing our early observations regarding more vis-à-vis less creative teams redirected our attention to micro-processes of collective idea engagement and elaboration, precisely, team member interactions over time (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Harvey & Kou, 2013; Lavoie et al., 2024).

Table 1.2: Summary of Publication Progress

Chapter No.	Study Title	Current state	Conferences	Share of Contribution (in %)
<i>Chapter 2</i>	The Intrapreneur Identity Illusion: Unraveling the Identity Work of Intrapreneurs in Internal Corporate Venturing	Forthcoming in <i>Journal of Product Innovation Management</i> (VHB: A; ABS: 4; SCJ: Q1; CiteScore: 18.6) Article DOI: 10.1111/jpim.12798	AOM Annual Meeting 2023, Boston, USA Paper Development Seminar 2023, Seville, Spain <i>G-Forum 2023, Darmstadt, Germany (Awarded KSG Best Entrepreneurship Research Reward)</i>	Frederic-Alexander Starmann (55) Slawa Tomin (20) Sylvia Hubner-Benz (20) Rüdiger Kabst (5)
<i>Chapter 3</i>	No Way Back: The Challenges of Reintegrating Corporate Entrepreneurs After Project Termination	In preparation for submission to <i>Journal of Product Innovation Management</i>	G-Forum 2023, Darmstadt, Germany	Frederic-Alexander Starmann (100)
<i>Chapter 4</i>	Creative Synthesis, Patchworking, and Static Evaluation: How Different Modes of Collective Idea Elaboration Shape Team Exploratory Innovation	In preparation for submission to <i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	AOM Annual Meeting 2025, Copenhagen, Denmark G-Forum 2025, Stuttgart, Germany	Frederic-Alexander Starmann (45) Sylvia Hubner-Benz (35) Michael Frese (10) Zhaoli Song (10)

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**CHAPTER 2 | THE INTRAPRENEUR IDENTITY ILLUSION:
UNRAVELING THE IDENTITY WORK OF
INTRAPRENEURS IN INTERNAL CORPORATE
VENTURING**

Chapter 2:
The Intrapreneur Identity Illusion:
Unraveling the Identity Work of Intrapreneurs in Internal Corporate Venturing³

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CHAPTER 3 | NO WAY BACK? THE CHALLENGES OF REINTEGRATING CORPORATE ENTREPRENEURS AFTER PROJECT TERMINATION

Chapter 3:

**No Way Back? The Challenges of Reintegrating Corporate Entrepreneurs After Project
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CHAPTER 4 | CREATIVE SYNTHESIS, PATCHWORKING, AND STATIC EVALUATION: HOW DIFFERENT MODES OF COLLECTIVE IDEA ELABORATION SHAPE TEAM EXPLORATORY INNOVATION

Chapter 4:

Creative Synthesis, Patchworking, and Static Evaluation: How Different Modes of Collective Idea Elaboration Shape Team Exploratory Innovation⁵

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CHAPTER 5 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

5.1 CONTRIBUTIONS AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation set out to examine innovation as an inherently human and temporal process by addressing two overarching research questions: (1) How does participation in corporate entrepreneurial activities shape individual identity development and career trajectories over time? and (2) how do teams collectively elaborate their ideas in the process of working on exploratory innovation? By adopting process perspectives across multiple temporal horizons, the three studies collectively demonstrate that innovation is fundamentally about people – and that innovative practices, in turn, impact them in ways that organizations rarely anticipate or manage effectively.

To explore these transformative effects, the dissertation’s first overarching research question is addressed through two complementary studies. *Chapters 2 and 3* illuminated how participation in corporate entrepreneurial activities creates cascading effects that transform individuals and their relationships with their respective organization over time. The findings challenge fundamental assumptions in corporate entrepreneurship research and provide new theoretical insights into the individual-level processes underlying corporate innovation.

The first of these two research projects, *chapter 2*, makes three important contributions to understanding the individual-level foundations of corporate entrepreneurship. First, it provides an individual-level process perspective that explains an important puzzle in the literature: how those who initially identify strongly with their organization, actively distance themselves from it over time (Moriano et al., 2014; Tunstall et al., 2024). Through an 18-month longitudinal study, tracing the experiences of 21 intrapreneurs, the study shows how identity work unfolds during participation in an internal corporate venturing program (Brown, 2017; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Specifically, we show how employees in such programs gradually construct idealized entrepreneur identities rather than identities as intrapreneurs. This, in consequence, changes the intrapreneurs’ perception of their organizational context and embedding. Second, *chapter 2* challenges the corporate

entrepreneurship literature's implicit assumption that employees can develop stable and coherent identities as intrapreneurs (Hamrick et al., 2024; Zhang & Biniari, 2021). Our concept of the *intrapreneur identity illusion* describes the inability to construct a coherent and positively valued sense of self based on the notion of intrapreneurship. This is because of three reasons: organizational dependence that diminishes individual achievement, lack of recognition compared to independent entrepreneurs, and its derivative definition primarily in relation to entrepreneurship rather than through distinct characteristics. These limitations make intrapreneurship unsuitable as a foundation for sustainable identity construction, forcing individuals to lean toward either entrepreneurial or employee identity categories. Third, the study contributes to innovation management literature by revealing how entrepreneurial cultural artifacts pervading (internal) corporate venturing programs (Brattström & Faems, 2024) contribute to the idealization of entrepreneurship rather than intrapreneurship validation. This finding demonstrates how well-intentioned cultural design efforts (Brattström & Faems, 2024) can have unintended consequences that intensify the perceived misfit between explorative and exploitative activities (Bledow et al., 2009; Zimmermann et al., 2018).

Chapter 3 extended these identity development insights to theorize about subsequent career trajectories, making three contributions of its own. First, *chapter 3* addresses a critical gap in corporate entrepreneurship research by directing attention to the largely overlooked post-project reintegration phase (Patzelt et al., 2021; Shepherd et al., 2013). The study develops a conceptual framework for understanding reintegration challenges and their implications for talent retention, revealing how corporate entrepreneurship participation can create rather than satisfy entrepreneurial aspirations. Second, *chapter 3* reveals potential downsides of corporate entrepreneurial projects by demonstrating how participation creates unintended consequences for both individuals and organizations. Specifically, I identified two

key processes – the development of entrepreneurial identity aspirations and corporate job role diminishment – that decrease person-job fit over time (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Tims et al., 2016). The model illustrates how participation can trigger turnover intentions when projects are terminated, and no managerial support systems are in place. Third, through the configurations of both processes I theorize four distinct career trajectories: transition to entrepreneurship, seeking opportunities within the firm, job searching with other organizations, and unchanged return. This framework offers specific targets for organizational intervention while revealing how anticipated role diminishment can make corporate entrepreneurial projects less attractive to employees, creating feedback loops that undermine program effectiveness over time.

Together, *chapters 2 and 3* provide a comprehensive answer to how corporate entrepreneurial participation shapes identity development and career trajectories. The findings show that participation triggers identity work that gradually transform participants' self-concepts from an employee identity towards an entrepreneur identity (*chapter 2*), which then creates misalignments with traditional corporate roles that can manifest in different career outcomes depending on contextual factors (*chapter 3*). In sum, both chapters demonstrate that corporate entrepreneurship is not simply a work assignment but a transformational journey with lasting consequences for individuals and organizations that extend far beyond immediate project outcomes.

Complementing these individual-level process insights, the dissertation's fourth chapter shifted the focus to the collective dynamics of innovation. In so doing, *chapter 4* addressed the second research question by examining how teams engage with ideas during the crucial but understudied phase of idea elaboration (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). In turn, *chapter 4* makes three significant contributions to team innovation and creativity literature (Acar et al., 2024; van Knippenberg, 2017; van Knippenberg & Hoever, 2021).

First, the study advances our understanding of collective creativity (Acar et al., 2024; van Knippenberg, 2017) by developing a two-dimensional framework that captures the dynamics of engagement with team and content through engagement intensity (how deeply teams engage with ideas) and engagement orientation (whether teams focus on developing or evaluating ideas). The resulting framework highlights four distinct modes of interaction: creative synthesis, patchworking, static evaluation, and (expedited) closure. Each mode affects the creative output and thus exploratory innovation differently. Furthermore, the study's theoretical model of collective idea elaboration provides mechanisms to explain why teams often fail to engage deeply with the ideas of others (Harvey & Kou, 2013) and moves beyond the identification of barriers to untangle the specific interaction patterns that enable or constrain team exploratory innovation. Second, *chapter 4* contributes to dialogical perspectives on creativity (Kou & Harvey, 2022; Tsoukas, 2009) by demonstrating how productive and unproductive dialogue manifest within the creative work process. Creative synthesis embodies productive dialogical exchange through collective reasoning. In contrast, patchworking, characterized by parallel individual reasoning without deep engagement, shows overlap with Tsoukas' (2009) conceptualization of unproductive dialogue in the sense that it does not precipitate self-distanciation in interlocutors. Consequently, patchworking tends to result in superficial aggregation rather than meaningful synthesis. Third, *chapter 4* extends recent qualitative findings on creativity processes (Rouse & Harrison, 2022) to an important yet less researched context for creativity: entrepreneurial teams working on exploratory innovation for unelaborated markets. Focusing on the dynamic and interactive nature of collective idea elaboration allowed us to show how entrepreneurial teams navigate the challenges of integrating their often diverse perspectives as required for capturing new opportunities (i.e., synthesizing ideas into products or services). Additionally, we show how over time the responsibility for synthesis appears to shift from the collective to a single

person and how interactions between team members subside in consequence (Lavoie et al., 2024). In sum, *chapter 4* contributes to a deeper appreciation of the social and temporal dynamics of exploratory innovation by providing insights into how and why different modes of collective idea elaboration emerge and change over time.

Overall, the dissertation's contribution lies in demonstrating the explanatory power of process perspectives for understanding innovation phenomena that remain puzzling from variance-oriented approaches (Berends & Dekker, 2019; Gehman et al., 2018; Kouamé & Langley, 2018; Langley, 1999). Each study unveils temporal dynamics that would be invisible to cross-sectional research designs, showing how innovation unfolds through cascading processes at different levels that accumulate and interact over time (Garud et al., 2013; Tsoukas, 2017). Collectively, the findings demonstrate that innovation is not merely about generating new ideas or launching successful ventures, but that innovation transforms individuals, teams, and their relationships with organizations through processes that unfold across different time scales. The dynamics of creative collaboration shape the trajectories of ideas; engagement in entrepreneurial work shapes individuals' self-concepts; and these accumulated changes ultimately shape organizational relationships and career trajectories.

5.2 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the three research projects offer important implications for practitioners.

Chapter 2's findings have direct implications for designing and managing internal corporate venturing programs that acknowledge the reality of identity work processes. Organizations should recognize that corporate entrepreneurs may develop entrepreneurial aspirations that need acknowledgment and potential accommodation rather than suppression. This requires creating mentoring and coaching support to help individuals navigate identity tensions, developing specialized roles that can accommodate returning intrapreneurs with expanded capabilities, and designing innovation spaces that blend corporate professionalism with

entrepreneurial elements rather than creating artificial divides through theatrical (entrepreneurial) cultural artifacts (Brattström & Faems, 2024). Importantly, when projects exceed organizational boundaries or participants develop strong entrepreneurial aspirations, organizations should consider alternative arrangements such as favorable IP licensing or minority equity positions that allow employees to pursue their projects more independently while maintaining beneficial relationships with the corporate parent.

Chapter 3 presents the argument that organizations cannot assume reintegration will happen naturally but must actively prepare for and manage the transition back to traditional corporate roles through deliberate policies and practices. This could include support mechanisms that recognize and potentially accommodate entrepreneurial aspirations developed during project participation, strategically managing role diminishment by maintaining core responsibilities while redistributing only peripheral tasks, and developing robust reward and recognition systems that adequately acknowledge corporate entrepreneurial participation even when projects are terminated.

Finally, *chapter 4* provides actionable guidance for structuring creative collaboration to maximize the effectiveness of idea elaboration. For one, we recommend that teams should foster a charitable attitude toward unrefined, early ideas, focusing on collective development and refinement rather than immediate judgement and assessment. When teams collectively reason about ideas to develop them further, they might be able to overcome their biases against novelty in idea selection. Moreover, the findings suggest that teams can facilitate a dialectical approach to team innovation (i.e., creative synthesis) by assigning complementary advocacy roles. Specifically, some members could champion novelty by proposing original and ambitious concepts and ideas, while others could advocate for feasibility by evaluating practical constraints and implementation pathways. Crucially, such an approach would

require ground rules that frame opposition as collaborative inquiry and team members who remain open to revising their positions based on compelling counterarguments.

5.3 OUTLOOK

The findings of this dissertation open several promising avenues for advancing process perspectives on innovation and their human implications. In this section, I discuss the key opportunities for extending this work across different temporal horizons, organizational contexts, and methodological approaches, building directly on the theoretical insights and empirical findings from each research project.

Because we focused on the process of becoming an intrapreneur and its immediate consequences over an 18-month timespan, the long-term effects of ICV participation remain unclear and warrant further research. Ideally, longitudinal research tracks former corporate entrepreneurs across multiple years to examine how their identities evolve and adapt, once removed from the intrapreneurial context. Such studies would reveal whether idealized entrepreneurial self-concepts persist over time, mature into more realistic frameworks, or gradually diminish as individuals face the realities of independent entrepreneurship or pursue alternative career paths. Likewise, it is possible that individuals on the employee trajectory may later rekindle their entrepreneurial (and perhaps intrapreneurial) intentions once they rebuild their self-efficacy. Future research could explore targeted interventions – particularly those related to program design and structure (Brattström & Faems, 2024) – to understand how an intrapreneur identity could be successfully nurtured or how organizational identification can be sustained despite the development of an idealized entrepreneur identity. Moreover, since we observed that intrapreneurs struggle to integrate the exploratory and exploitative aspects of their roles (Zimmermann et al., 2018), perceiving them as opposing forces, we call for further research into the (psychological) tensions arising from individual-level ambidextrous demands. Such research should examine the underlying mechanisms and

their implications across different innovation contexts, particularly given our observation that the intrapreneurs' identity work appeared to intensify the perceived opposition between exploration and exploitation.

Related avenues for future research emerge from *chapter 3*. *Chapter 3* conceptually builds on *chapter 2* to theorize the linkages between participation in corporate entrepreneurial projects and turnover intentions following project termination. Consequently, the developed propositions offer fertile ground to be tested in future empirical research. Beyond that, I see great potential in ethnographic approaches for building theory around corporate entrepreneurs' reintegration experiences. Ethnographic research can capture the nuanced dynamics that purely retrospective accounts might miss, through the researcher's immersion in the particular context (Hlady-Rispal et al., 2021). Another promising avenue for qualitative research could be to examine not only the experiences of the intrapreneurs but also turn to the experiences of their supervisors in their conventional job roles. Understanding how these managers navigate the participation period – and how they prepare for employees' eventual return or exit – could illuminate crucial dynamics that shape reintegration success. Moreover, since our findings in *chapter 2* do not reflect such long-term trajectories, future quantitative research is needed to explore the turnover rates and career trajectories of former intrapreneurs.

Finally, *chapter 4* provided insights into the process and dynamics of idea elaboration in teams working on exploratory innovation. Here, I highlight three particularly fruitful research directions that could deepen our theoretical understanding further. First, our sample of Indian entrepreneurial teams raises important questions about cultural boundary conditions (De Dreu, 2010; Taylor & Wilson, 2012; Tian et al., 2018), as (societal) culture likely influences whether teams gravitate toward *creative synthesis* versus *static evaluation* or *patchworking*. For example, cross-cultural research could study whether high power distance

cultures inhibit the challenging behaviors essential to productive dialogical engagement (Tsoukas, 2009), while collectivist cultures might show greater tendencies toward *patchworking* to maintain harmony. Second, since teams are no blank slates but composed of different people with different beliefs, goals, and traits, we suggest future research to consider how individual differences and team composition may predispose members toward certain elaboration modes. Third, we studied a 60-minute exploratory innovation task. Although we occasionally observed teams to split up to brainstorm ideas individually, most creative work took place collectively. In longer-term organizational innovation projects, however, there are likely prolonged individual idea incubation periods between team interactions. These extended periods may lead to greater entrenchment in one's way of thinking, and, as a result, could reduce the likelihood of members embracing a developmental engagement attitude when they resume collaboration. Consequently, future studies should examine how prolonged gaps between interactions shape team dynamics when members reconvene to collaborate.

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