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A meaningful life: Being a young New Zealand entrepreneur

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Management

Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

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2009

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the two scholars who supervised this thesis: Professors Claire Massey and Anne de Bruin. Their own standards as researchers meant that what I gained from my time as a doctoral student was not just the mechanics of completing a thesis. I also learnt about the importance of a personal commitment to research, the value of crafting a writing style, and the need to pursue your own academic voice.

There would be no thesis without the ten young New Zealand entrepreneurs who were my research partners – they are the heart of this work. They not only shared the stories of their entrepreneurial lives, they engaged in the research process with commitment, patience, and enthusiasm.

I am grateful for support from Massey University and in particular: a Massey University Research Fund Grant to finance my fieldwork; invitations to writing workshops run by the New Zealand Centre for Women and Leadership and the New Zealand Centre for Small and Medium Enterprise Research; two Advanced Degree Awards; and access to the expertise of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

Thanks to Dr Robyn Walker, who was an invaluable sounding board and always encouraging.

My late parents, Kel and Linda Lewis, taught me the value of hard work, and of diligence, and that adversity builds character. When I finished this thesis I wanted nothing more than to be able to show them.

Finally, thanks to Dr Sue Cassells for the innumerable things you did to support me – and for believing in me, no matter what.

Abstract

Changing characteristics of work and careers have resulted in a shift in perceptions of the potential value of entrepreneurial activity. In parallel there has emerged an appreciation of the non-economic impact of entrepreneurship on those who enact it. However, there still remains a limited understanding of the consequences of choosing to be an entrepreneur, and what that choice means in terms of that individual's life and work. The potential for the young as a group to engage with entrepreneurship as a 'career option' is high, therefore the central research objective of this study was to learn what meaning young New Zealand entrepreneurs attach to 'being in business'.

The study was grounded in an inductive, interpretive research design, underpinned by the tenets of constructivism. Phenomenologically focussed, in-depth interviews were used to gather data from ten young New Zealand entrepreneurs. These interviews were semi-structured and emphasised language, meaning, and narrative. The resulting data were analysed using elements of a constructivist grounded theory approach.

A key finding was that the nature of the relationship between the entrepreneurs and their firms was a strong attachment grounded in emotion. The intertwining of the life of the business with the life of the young entrepreneur was viewed positively, and frequently involved personal transformation. Businesses were more than mechanisms for achieving monetary wealth.

The relationship between the young entrepreneurs and their work was also intense. Balance of work and life was not an issue, nor did they seek to differentiate between the two spheres. They were content to have the two blended in a manner of their choosing. Consistent with this was their drive for personal authenticity and adherence to strong ethical imperatives. Being an entrepreneur was less about career (and even less about a job) and more about fulfilling needs of a higher order.

Almost all the participants strongly identified as entrepreneurs. They felt it was the identity most consistent with their values, attitudes, and aspirations. They accepted that in some instances the label small-firm owner manager was accurate in terms of the scale of their operations, but rejected its appropriateness on any other grounds.

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Chapter 1: A research context

“Entrepreneurship is concerned first and foremost with a process of change, emergence and creation: creation of new value, but also, and at the same time, change and creation for the individual”

Bruyat & Julien (2000, p.173).

Since the industrial age, work has been central to the lives of individuals. The world of ‘work’ is changing, and has been for some time. How we work, at what, and when, are all elements of the construct of ‘work’ that have undergone dramatic changes in the last thirty years. Careers are becoming increasingly boundaryless (Sullivan, 1999); short-term or portfolio working arrangements supersede those of a long-term nature (Cohen & Mallon, 1999); social capital and individual networks are perceived as more valuable than attachments to bureaucratic work organisations (Collin & Watts, 1996); flexibility of working hours is typically more desirable than a regular work routine (Cohen & Single, 2001); and ultimately, new economy jobs are viewed as superior to the old, established economy jobs (Jensen & Westenholz, 2004). Inevitably such changes in what constitutes work have represented transformations in the lives of individuals, as well as in societies and labour markets. As Robertson claims, “our experiences and perceptions of work are shaped by, and help to shape, all our other experiences and perceptions” (1985, p.55).

This chapter introduces the research in terms of current thinking and trends relating to young entrepreneurs. Here I describe how the research context, and all the elements it contains, translated into a research objective (and sub-questions) and, broadly, how the ‘achievement’ of the research objective will be pursued. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

1.1 The framing of a question

The changing economic theatre in which we play out our working lives (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle, 1999) has witnessed the entrepreneur moving to centre stage – and

becoming an important identity (du Gay, 1996). This rise in the visibility, and potential value, of the 'enterprising self' has been attributed to these new, alternative working arrangements and relationships (Fenwick, 2002; Storey, Salaman & Platman, 2005), as well as to the ascendancy and, some might say supremacy, of the enterprise culture (Gibb, 1987). Entrepreneurship, as a manifestation of an enterprising self, means that 'enterprise' is not just a descriptor of an employment form. It is also now a significant driver of a particular type of discourse within societies and economies – becoming a source of identity for these new 'free economic agents' who engage in what has been described as 'non-standard work' (du Gay, 1996; Fenwick, 2002).

This dominance of enterprise in the modern, post-industrial or post-Fordist work environment (Fenwick, 2002), demonstrates the possibility for entrepreneurship, and being an entrepreneur, to have an impact in ways that are beyond those only economic in nature. Entrepreneurship as a source of identity, form of work, and a cultural imperative, is beginning to supersede perceptions of it as being a solely capitalistic, and ultimately an economically driven activity (Williams, 2007). Along with this appreciation of the potential non-economic 'value', or contribution of entrepreneurship in the modern age, is the realisation that the phenomenon itself "is not just creating jobs, it is creating people's lives" (Steyaert & Hjorth, 2003, p.17). Indeed some scholars have described the increased flexibility of labour markets, and the embracing of alternative, entrepreneurial forms of work, as enhancing rather than undermining "the possibilities for human self-actualization" (Jensen & Westenholz, 2004, p.2). However, the consequences for occupational and/or social identity of this departure from 'traditional' work forms and patterns may yet to be discovered (Jenkins, 2004; Jensen & Westenholz, 2004).

While hitherto not the domain of many entrepreneurship scholars, there is an increasing call for (if not appreciation of) a focus on what might be called this human dimension of entrepreneurship. For example, Gartner describes how:

Scholars studying emerging organizations do a disservice to the phenomena they study if they fail to see a larger set of purposes for why individuals get involved in the formation or organizations other than simplistic economic reasons....Somehow, our studies of the organization formation process have to account for...the pleasures of being human. (1995, p.82)

Hjorth, Johannisson and Steyaert evocatively describe this focus on ‘people’ as a way of not solely focusing on the “economic sparring partner”, and instead recognise that

...the stakes of entrepreneurship are in what it does to society.... all representations are related to one another like different layers of paint on a picture. If you scrape off the economic layer, you are left, not with blankness, but with another layer. (2003, p.99-100)

So, the transformation of work practices, and of what is valued about the way we can work in the modern era, has resulted in a new, and increasing, awareness by many of the benefits of working in a non-standard, enterprising, or entrepreneurial way (de Bruin & Dupuis, 2004). While such change has the capacity to impact on all individuals, it has been posited that some demographic groups are more likely to be influenced, or more likely to engage with ‘enterprise work’ more intensely and for longer (Dupuis & McLaren, 2006).

One such ‘group’ of individuals is the young. Indeed, some have described self-employment as one of the most significant labour market trends impacting upon young people, and have noted that they, as a group, are over-represented in non-standard work (Felstead, Krahn & Powell, 1999). The transitions that young people experience today (e.g. from school to work or from study to the labour market) have been described as being more fraught with complexity than ever before (Lowe, 2001). It could be argued that in terms of the transition into the labour market this complexity represents the increasing irrelevance of attachment to, or engagement with, elements of organisational bureaucracy. For others, it signifies broader social, political, economic and demographic changes occurring in individual countries. Whichever perspective is taken, the reality is that for many young people starting a business (as a manifestation of enterprise/entrepreneurship) can be seen as a more viable, and desirable, option for ‘work’ than, for example, working as an employee in a large organisation (Lowe, 2001).

The situation in New Zealand reflects the trend towards entrepreneurially-oriented work options, and there are a number of indicators to suggest the presence of an enterprising culture. Not the least of these is a deliberate attempt by politicians and policy-makers to design and launch initiatives that encourage the pursuit of business start-up (and to support firms and their owners after launch – e.g. the BIZ and

Enterprise Training programmes delivered by New Zealand Trade and Enterprise), and many instances of programmes in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions to 'educate for enterprise' (e.g. the programmes offered by the Enterprise New Zealand Trust).

In New Zealand, there has been little attempt to formally study aspects of youth entrepreneurship – although I have carried out some research prior to this study on the topic (e.g. Lewis, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006, 2008; Lewis & Harris, 2006; Lewis & Massey, 2001, 2003b, 2003c). Therefore, there does exist the opportunity to carry out studies that investigate the intangible, subjective and intensely personal experience of young entrepreneurs, their participation in the business start-up process, and their engagement in, and with, their firms. Such investigations have the potential to bring to light new insights into the way in which new patterns of work, and new levels of engagement with entrepreneurship, are being experienced by young New Zealand business owners. Thus, they can enrich the body of knowledge about the group, and demonstrate the diversity in experience and participation within the population of New Zealand entrepreneurs.

1.2 Defining the boundaries

Choosing to explore subjective manifestations of entrepreneurship as a form of work for young entrepreneurs means it is essential to define what is meant by both the descriptors 'young' and 'entrepreneur'. Globally there exist variations of what constitutes 'young' in terms of self-employment or entrepreneurial activity. Internationally some agencies define 'youth' as ending at the age of 24 (e.g. OECD, 1992). Others extend the youth age bracket to include those aged up to 35 (e.g. Capaldo, 1997). For the purposes of this study, it was important to consider both how the literature defined youth, while choosing an age span that would facilitate the identification of a suitable number of research participants. It was thought unlikely that there would be many potential research participants either having started a firm during, or remaining in, the 15-20 age bracket. Therefore, a decision was taken to extend the range. Consequently, in this study, an extra five years was added to the consensus definition of youth, establishing 30 years and under as constituting 'young'.

Defining the term entrepreneurship, and therefore entrepreneur, was also somewhat problematic because both have drawn the attention of many scholars and led to the creation of a significant body of work on that specific topic (see for example: Aldrich & Martinez, 2003; Bruyat & Julien, 2000; Jones & Spicer 2005; Shane, 2003). While it was beyond the scope of the thesis to devote, for example, an entire chapter to such matters, it is important to describe what is meant by the use of the term entrepreneur in the context of this work, and what elements of the body of knowledge have been drawn upon to make the choice of usage. This diversity within the field led Gartner to point out that, such is the complexity, and ideologically loaded nature, of entrepreneurship, that in many respects it is only possible to reach a ‘personal definition’ (Gartner, 1995).

In work seeking to define entrepreneurship, it is well established that it “is a multifaceted phenomenon that cuts across many disciplinary boundaries” (Low & MacMillan, 1988, p.500; Shane, 2003). As these authors go on to suggest, the downside of this plurality of both origin and focus can be a situation where there is no one definition that does justice to the phenomenon in its entirety, or is sufficient to represent all the elements of the construct itself. The result is frequently a series of separate, but inter-related, micro definitions that focus on different constituents of entrepreneurship as the broadest subset of activity – and use their own distinct language and points of reference.

Having established (and accepted) the definitional multiplicity inherent within entrepreneurship as both an activity and field of study, it became essential to begin reducing the multiple options down to those that best shed light on the facets of entrepreneurship that were the topic of investigation in this study. Necessarily this narrowing of focus ensured emphasis on the entrepreneur, rather than the firm, and on the essence of the experience of entrepreneurship for this group. As well as establishing the way in which entrepreneurship was to be conceptualised in the study, it was necessary to decide upon criteria that could be used to identify individuals who could be described as ‘entrepreneurs’ both in terms of the literature, and for the purposes of participating in the fieldwork.

So, given that the focus of the study is on the individual, it was important to decide on criteria that would enable a person to be described as an entrepreneur (as against criteria that would enable, for example, a firm to be described as entrepreneurial in

nature). Irrespective of diversity, there are elements of language that are common to just about all articulations of the premise of entrepreneurship – and these were a useful starting point. The most useful descriptor was that of organisational creation (e.g. Brush, Duhaime, Gartner, Stewart, Katz, Hitt, Alvarez, Meyer & Venkataraman, 2003; Gartner, 1988; Gartner, Bird & Starr, 1992; Gartner & Carter, 2003; Shane, 2003; Shane & Venkataraman 2000). Davidsson claims that such an approach (i.e. focussing on venture creation) could be seen as a “minimalist definition”, but adds “Gartner does not exclude other aspects of entrepreneurship, but argues that organization creation is a situation where we should ‘all’ be able to argue that entrepreneurship is taking place” (2003, p.333). In terms of this study, the choice of this type of ‘definitional’ perspective allowed business start-up (i.e. the creation of an organisation) to act as a proxy for entrepreneurship.

In addition to business start-up two other criteria were also established as necessary in ensuring a sufficient, and identifiable, presence of entrepreneurial activity in terms of the individuals invited to participate in the research. These criteria were that the entrepreneur founded the business as a limited liability company (representing the formality of their commitment), and had been operating the same firm for at least three years (representing the sustainability of their commitment, and giving them some experiences on which to base their perceptions). Having met these three key criteria the study participants were categorised as entrepreneurs (i.e. a label that has, at this stage, been imposed by me).

1.3 The path to the research question

The research objective at the heart of this study is to learn what meaning young New Zealand entrepreneurs attach to ‘being in business’. It is an objective that will be examined through the lens of youth entrepreneurship, but which involves facets of the constructs of identity, career, and work.

This thesis was written in the 21st century, in what is commonly described as the era of ‘the enterprise culture’, and at a time when entrepreneurship (as a phenomenon, way of work and/or source of identity) is no longer on the periphery of experience, knowledge or desirability. As New Zealand’s Growth & Innovation Advisory Board

attested, being an entrepreneur is a 'new form of cool' (2004). So, as well as being contemporary, what else should this study be? Rossman and Rallis describe these dilemmas around the selection of a study topic as being "should-do-ability", "do-ability" and "want-to-do-ability" (2003, p.115). Essentially the should-do-ability of this study can be justified by the relevance of entrepreneurship in today's cultures, communities, societies and economies – and in the potential applicability of new knowledge it will create on the topic to individuals, firms, agencies and governments. However, should-do-ability together with do-ability, are alone insufficient to sustain a significant research project. For this it is necessary to have a passion for the question, for the topic and for the potential outcomes of the work. What Rossman and Rallis (2003) call the want-to-do-ability is why you start, why you continue and why, ultimately, you finish the task.

My want-to-do-ability is grounded in an ongoing research interest in youth entrepreneurship. I have carried out a number of projects in this area to date and published a number of associated outputs (such as those cited earlier in this chapter). In parallel I have also done research with entrepreneurs on other topics, and these experiences have frequently highlighted the apparently contrasting nature of experiences between the younger and older entrepreneurs I worked with. A number of those research projects also had an applied focus and/or had been commissioned by policy-makers. Those practical experiences have given me some awareness of the way in which entrepreneurship is understood by policymakers, and the assumptions that are sometimes relied on to understand behaviour, or in order to group entrepreneurs together to make generalisations.

My own research experiences mean that in some ways this study represents a growing realisation that there are identifiable gaps in the knowledge about young entrepreneurs that can be filled. The study also reflects a personal curiosity about the people 'behind' businesses, and similarly, about the inter-relationships between those people and their firms – the "threads that bind people and firms" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p.12). Questions about who people can 'be' by starting up a firm (Rouse, 2004) further stimulated my enthusiasm for the topic. Overall then, the topic warranted investigation on all of Rossman and Rallis's (2003) grounds: I had evidence I should do it, I knew it could be done, and I wanted to do it.

As Gartner notes, “‘what we focus on’, what we specifically pay attention to, is a significant issue in our studies....Whatever we pay attention to becomes, for us, what is important about the phenomenon we are studying (1995, p.77). Therefore, for me the importance is attached to the person behind the firm, rather than the firm itself as an economic unit. Logically then, that inclination is reflected in the choice of research questions, and the emphasis their structure gives. My overarching research objective introduced at the outset represents the essence of the ‘intellectual puzzle’ (Mason, 2002a), and is:

What meaning do young New Zealand entrepreneurs attach to being in business?

The objective is further refined in the following three sub-questions, devised to guide the research process more specifically and facilitate the collection of data that would attempt to address the primary research question:

- 1. According to young New Zealand entrepreneurs, what links are there between self and firm?**
 - 2. Do young New Zealand entrepreneurs think of entrepreneurship as a form of work?**
 - 3. Do young New Zealanders who run businesses identify as entrepreneurs?**
-

Each of the sub-questions above is linked to a particular section of the research literature that was used to inform the study (chapter two of the thesis presents this literature and is divided into sections that can be linked to each question). All three of the questions stem from the research gap that exists in relation to youth entrepreneurship. In New Zealand especially, there is a relative lack of research specifically focussing on young entrepreneurs. The first sub-question is grounded in

the literature on youth entrepreneurship generally (covered in section 2.1 of the next chapter), and represents my desire to contribute findings that seek to capture the nature of the experience of firm ownership for young people. That is, to make young people the central focus of the study and contribute new findings, rather than try to replicate or disprove other research results. The second sub-question relates to material linking career theory to entrepreneurial endeavours (presented in section 2.2 of the next chapter) where there is relatively little prior research and none with young entrepreneurs specifically. The third, and final, sub-question is based on my reading of work on entrepreneurial identity (covered in section 2.3 of the next chapter). This is an emerging area within the field of entrepreneurship and one which complements the first and second sub-question, and contributes to addressing the overarching research question underpinning the study.

1.4 The research design

The objective and questions this study is centred upon (which focus upon the meaning and perceptions of experiences of entrepreneurship for young business owners) need to be balanced with the assumptions brought to bear on the research process by the researcher. Thus, I selected a research strategy and method that were consistent with a worldview that holds that individuals play an active role in the ‘construction’ of knowledge and that that knowledge consists of multiple realities.

The result was an inductive, interpretive research design, underpinned by the tenets of constructivism. The method choice, of in-depth interviewing from a phenomenological perspective as a method for collecting data, was consistent with the aforementioned worldview, and appropriate to the research design strategy. Ten young entrepreneurs participating in the research were each interviewed three times. The interviews were semi-structured, enabling the use of a ‘grand tour’ question and a focus on language, meaning, and narrative. The resulting data were analysed using elements of a constructivist grounded theory approach and the ‘thinking units’, or themes that resulted, are used to present and structure the findings that emerged.

1.5 Thesis structure

The next chapter of the thesis (chapter two) considers how current scholarship relating to the research question informs this study, exploring salient dimensions of a number of bodies of knowledge. The chapter primarily examines literature relating to youth entrepreneurship, but, where appropriate, it focuses on literature pertinent to a particular facet of a research question. For example, material relating to the link between an entrepreneur and his or her firm is covered irrespective of whether it deals specifically with *young* entrepreneurs. Similarly, attention is given to career theory (especially that relating to self-employment as a form of work) and research on entrepreneurial identity as these dimensions of the literature were judged as having something to contribute to this study, in the light of the research questions.

Chapter three outlines the research strategy, explaining the worldview that underpins that strategy and the methods that were chosen to address the research question. Following that, chapters four, five and six describe the outcomes (i.e. findings) of the fieldwork. These findings are presented thematically, and discussed in terms of their significance, potential impact, and their relationship to relevant existing scholarship. The final chapter (seven) frames the findings in relation to the research questions, outlines how the study contributes to existing knowledge, and points to areas for further investigation.

1.6 Chapter closing

Chapter one provided a brief insight into the scope of the research that will be reported on in this thesis. The chapter paints a picture of a changing work context and changing priorities for individuals in terms of how they choose to work, with young entrepreneurs emerging as a group that such trends have particular relevance for. While providing a broad rationale for the study, the chapter also foreshadows key aspects of research design, and outlines how the thesis will progress. The next chapter elaborates on the literature that: informed the research questions; situated the data collection process within a particular context; and, contributed to both the findings and conclusions that will be presented in chapters four to seven of the thesis.

Chapter 2: The journey to this point: Examining the literature

Chapter one set the research question in its contemporary context. In chapter two it is examined from both an historical and theoretical perspective. The purpose of the chapter is to demonstrate the roots of the question, that is, to identify those fields and disciplines from which frameworks and lenses can be brought to bear on it. As was elucidated in the first chapter, the question by its very nature cannot be addressed by remaining in one literature or ‘body of knowledge’. Instead, a number have been searched and the most salient dimensions of each reviewed in this chapter.

The prime focus of the first section of the chapter is the work that has been carried out on the young (as a group) in relation to entrepreneurship and self-employment¹. Several sub-topics were then chosen around which to arrange the discussion: entrepreneurship and the young; start-up and firm development; barriers faced; assistance and the policy infrastructure; and, typologies. The second section of the chapter is concerned with what has been written about running a business as a ‘career’. In order to adequately contextualise that material, a brief overview of career theory is given, as is a discussion of ‘modern’ career models (or those that are most pertinent to entrepreneurial activities). The final section of the chapter is concerned with entrepreneurial identity. The significant contributions made to the emerging area of entrepreneurial identity are discussed, as is the way in which the theory of work, or occupational identity, has contributed to such endeavours.

2.1 Entrepreneurship and the young

Research to date in the area of youth entrepreneurship has offered some conflicting results on the relationship between age and the many dimensions of self-employment activity. For example, the idea of capital constraints being a barrier to self-employment entry for young people has been viewed in two contradictory ways in the

¹ Terms will be used in the way in which they have been used by the author(s) of the source (e.g. self-employed, business owner, entrepreneur etc).

literature. Evans and Leighton (1989) found that capital constraints were no more of a burden for younger people than older people. In contrast, Blanchflower and Oswald (1998) found that capital constraints did bind more on the young.

While differing conclusions are almost a given among research (especially accounting for differences in research context and design) and in fact by their very nature help further knowledge in a particular field, they can make studying an emerging phenomenon a tricky business. It is necessary to accept that knowledge is imperfect and constantly evolving with the advent of new pieces of research, and that as new pieces are added to the body of understanding the picture of youth self-employment will become more complete.

The prevalence of contradictory findings about the young and self-employment has meant that when there are pieces of research that conclude the same thing, there is a desire to seize upon these conclusions as the 'truth'. The lived experiences of young self-employed people are diverse, and research will differ between contexts. If this heterogeneity of experience is not accepted, there is a propensity for research 'users' to cling to findings that are similar to others as if this similarity is some measure of their validity and worth. This adherence perpetuates the stereotypes of the young self-employed instead of encouraging new research, and forestalls the exploration of new and better methods by which to uncover the experiences of the young self-employed instead of predicting them. Findings that have achieved some consensus in the literature include:

- ✦ self-employment is unlikely to be a young person's first form of work (Feldman & Bolino, 2000; Shane 1996);
- ✦ the young person's work experience before starting self-employment will be in the same industry as the firm they start up (Alsos & Kolvereid, 1998; Birley & Westhead, 1993; Lorrain & Raymond, 1990);
- ✦ the best source of start-up assistance (including advice, support and finance) will be the young person's family (Payne, 1984);
- ✦ having self-employed parents will have positively influenced a young person's decision to become self-employed (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2007; Curran & Blackburn, 1991; Scott & Twomey, 1988).

Different geographic contexts have also spawned a number of contributions to the literature on youth entrepreneurship. For example, there have been a number of studies that have reported on the phenomenon of youth entrepreneurship in post-communist or post-socialist economies (e.g. Pals & Tuma, 2004). This includes work by Roberts and Tholen (1998) which examined the experiences of young entrepreneurs in seven former Communist countries; work by Grishaev and Nemirovskii (2000) and Tkachev and Kolvereid (1999) in the Russian context; and Machacek (1998) in East-Central Europe. In a study of 10 European countries, Karlsson (2001) reported a relatively high preference amongst young people for self-employment (though the rate of firm start-up for young people was lower than the average rate of self-employment). Wilson, Marlino and Kickul (2004) reported a similar trend (of a positive inclination towards self-employment entry) among the group of 1,971 American teenagers that they surveyed. Levenburg and Schwarz (2008) reported a positive orientation towards entrepreneurship from the 94 Indian university students they surveyed. In Australia, Douglas and Shepherd found that the strength of intention to become self-employed of their sample of 300 university alumni “was significantly related to the respondents’ tolerance for risk and their preference for independence” (2000, p.81). Research that has been undertaken on young entrepreneurs in New Zealand is scant but growing; see, for example, Lewis (2005 b & c; 2006; 2008) and Lewis and Massey (2001 & 2003).

It is important to recognise that research on the young as a group (in New Zealand, and in other countries), is often approached obliquely or as a by-product of a larger study on a broader topic. For example, there is a body of work on the Young Enterprise Scheme in New Zealand that demonstrates how information on youth self-employment has been gleaned through focussing on enterprise education² (Lewis, 2005a; Lewis & Massey, 2003a). Closely aligned with that approach to understanding the experience of young people and enterprise, have been the studies that have focused on the intentions, and/or attitudes, of young people towards being self-employed. Much of this work is typically reported on in the context of enterprise education (which is beyond the scope of this chapter). However, there are some studies which have focused on the topic outside of that arena.

² Being broadly defined as teaching school students the skills of enterprise.

In the global research on self-employment and young people there are clusters of work around some specific topics. These include the phenomenon of youth self-employment in terms of firm start-up and development (i.e. entry and growth), the barriers to business start-up facing the young, and the business assistance and policy infrastructure as it relates to the young self-employed as a group – and, it is these topics that form the basis of the next sections of this chapter.

2.1.1 Start-up and firm development

Within the growing literature relating to age and self-employment or entrepreneurship there has been a concerted effort to establish a link between age and propensity to start a firm. Researchers have sought to establish whether the desire to do so is more prevalent in younger people or older people, and whether younger or older people will be more successful. Much of the work is therefore comparative in nature. Or as Henry, Hill and Leitch put it:

There have been a number of attempts to establish a link between the entrepreneur's age and the performance of the particular venture in which he/she is involved. While one might justifiably hypothesise that a more mature entrepreneur will have significantly more experience and thus may be more likely to succeed, it has also been suggested that younger entrepreneurs are possibly more likely to take more risks in an attempt to grow their business (2003, p.53).

To date, studies addressing such questions have not reached a consensus as to the answers. Instead, as the next few paragraphs demonstrate, there have been contradictory findings. However, when considered on balance a greater number of pieces of work support the proposition that the probability of entry, and subsequent success of that venture, increases with age (e.g. Feldman & Bolino, 2000; Hammarstedt, 2001; OECD, 1992).

Using American data from the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics, Reynolds described participations trends in relation to age in this way:

activity peaks for those in their early 30s, is rather low for those in the late teens and early 20s, and drops off to almost nothing for those in their late

50s... Perhaps more significant, it would appear that those in their late 30s and early 40s are more successful in creating a new firm than those in their late 20s and early 30s (2004, p.6-7).

Using a similarly large quantitative data set (the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth), Van Praag (2003) carried out duration analysis of business survival on a sample of young people running small firms. Findings indicated that the older an individual was at start-up, the longer the firm subsequently survived (i.e. younger starters have lower survival probabilities than older starters). The optimal age for start-up was given as 32. Those younger entrants had better chances of success if they had experience in the same industry as their start-up, started their firm part-time while still working, and were not unemployed prior to start-up (Van Praag, 2003). In terms of exiting self-employment, the study found that the younger individuals were “more likely than the more mature ones to find (better) outside opportunities and thereby voluntarily exit” and were “more likely to fail due to a lack of leadership or ‘knowledge of the world’” (Van Praag, 2003, p.9).

Citing a number of American studies, Shane put forward the notion of a curvilinear relationship between age and entrepreneurship:

Age has a curvilinear relationship with the likelihood of opportunity exploitation because age incorporates the positive effect of experience, which increases with age, and the negative effects of opportunity costs and uncertainty premiums, both of which also increase with age. Initially, age increases the likelihood that people will exploit opportunities because people gather much of the information and skills necessary to exploit opportunities over their lives (2003, p.89).

Examining age in relation to self-employment in European Union (EU) states, Cowling (2000) described how the relationship between age and start-up was significant, but varied in strength and nature. “In eight countries age was found to significantly increase the probability of self-employment” (Cowling, 2000, p.788). The study involved a random sample of 1,000 workers from each of the 13 EU states.

Contrary to the findings of the work presented in the preceding paragraphs, a recent study by Levesque and Minniti found that “empirical evidence shows that younger

individuals are more likely to start a new firm than older ones” (2006, p.177). Age is identified as a triggering factor of entrepreneurship, and the authors suggested a negative relationship exists between entrepreneurial attitude and age. They presented a model that showed that:

for any individual, there exists a threshold age which is critical for the distribution of that individual working time between entrepreneurship and waged labor. Specifically, we show that, after this threshold age is reached, an individual willingness to invest time in starting new firms declines (Levesque & Minniti, 2006, p.178).

In other words, the age affect is such that as someone gets older the attractiveness of self-employment as an income generating activity lessens due to the proportionate benefits available from earning a wage or salary. In summary, the authors argued that:

when considering employment status choice, younger individuals are more likely to start a new firm than older individuals...this is the result of an age effect, which, everything else being the same, reduces the relative return to entrepreneurship as individuals become older (Levesque & Minniti, 2006, p.188).

Added to those studies that draw a conclusion about the impact of age on the propensity of individuals to start a firm (either in a positive or negative sense), there are also those pieces of work that could not draw a conclusion either way. For example, when they carried out a mail survey that compared the experiences of 82 young entrepreneurs with those of 146 older entrepreneurs Lorrain and Raymond (1991) could not identify any substantive differences between the two groups:

Both groups had the same motivation to start the business, had the same growth experience, adopted the same management style and encountered the same business problems. This research showed that young entrepreneurs should not be discriminated against by the business community on account of their age (Lorrain & Raymond, 1991, p.51).

Data collected via 30 in-depth cases by Freel (1998) (of individuals ranging in age from 20 to 52) also could not find any consistent patterns with regard to age. Rather than arguing that there is no link between age and accumulated human capital (which

influences the decision and ability to start-up), he advocated acknowledgement of the fact that it is a “superficial measure...liable to a remarkable degree of inconsistency. It is not the number of years which are relevant, it is the substance of those years” (Freel, 1998. p.25).

As well as examining probability of entry in relation to age, and subsequent success, a number of researchers have also investigated other dimensions of the decision to enter self-employment. For example, Blanchflower, Oswald and Stutzer (2001) reported how, although the probability of being self-employed increased with age, the probability of *preferring* to be self-employed strongly decreased with age. Similarly, Peiro, Garcia-Montalvo and Gracia (2002) described how age increased the probability of resisting self-employment.

Moving beyond the decision to enter, or the start-up phase, another facet of ‘firm development’ that has been investigated in relation to young entrepreneurs is growth, and more specifically the impact of age on growth intentions and capability. As Storey (1994) summarised, there are essentially two hypotheses in regard to younger firm founders and growth: The first (an essentially positive hypothesis) is that younger entrepreneurs will have the energy and commitment to the firm to enable growth to occur. The contrary argument (an essentially negative hypothesis) is that younger entrepreneurs lack the credibility and experience to enable firm growth, and are inadequately financed to pursue a growth strategy. Work by Gray (1993) indicated support for the positive hypothesis. Responses from his study suggested that younger firm owner-managers (aged 25-34) tended to demonstrate a higher growth orientation than their older counterparts. This finding illustrates the potential impact of the personal life-cycle of the owner-manager on the growth of the firm with there being:

a link between the age of respondent and the personal motivations for being in business. This strengthens the case for linking small business growth decisions to the personal life-cycles of the founders and managers rather than to more mechanistic models based on size (Gray, 1993, p.157).

Similarly, work by Barkham, Hart and Hanvey (1996) found a relationship between age of firm founder and the subsequent growth of that firm (though the impact of the relationship was described as small). However, it also appeared that any gains made in terms of skills and experience as the entrepreneur aged were negated in impact by

parallel declines in motivation and flexibility. Work by Davidsson (1991), Perren (2000), and Smallbone and Wyer (2000) also supported the notion that younger entrepreneurs are more growth-oriented than their older counterparts.

In summary, younger entrepreneurs are generally considered in the literature to be more oriented towards growth than their older counterparts, and are generally capable of achieving it. This general finding reinforces the importance of considering human capital variables (such as age) when investigating elements of firm development such as growth (Deakins & Freel, 2003).

2.1.2 Barriers faced

A number of global trends have, for some time, signalled the potential for an increase in the participation of young people in self-employment. These include the decline in what were perceived as traditional paths to employment, the changing nature of work and careers, and the consistent presence of high numbers of young unemployed people throughout the world (Henderson & Robertson, 2000). Changing work cultures and shifts in the structures of economies (in New Zealand, for example, the move away from the dominance of manufacturing and primary industries, as described by Dalziel & Lattimore, 1999), coupled with freedom of choice in terms of entering self-employment, have in many contexts exacerbated the impact of such factors. Despite this situation, young people, like any other group considered in relation to self-employment entry, face certain barriers in terms of business start-up. Whether these barriers are any different by virtue of the age of the individual is yet to be conclusively established in the literature. However, examples of the barriers attributed as burdensome for the young as a group include an inability to secure finance from lending institutions due to a lack of credibility, and a lack of life experience (which is often viewed as a surrogate for work experience) (Lorrain & Raymond, 1991). Indeed, the barriers the young face in terms of entering self-employment, or engaging in entrepreneurial behaviour, are frequently put forward as explanations for why participation rates remain low: “The comparatively low levels of self-employment among the younger age groups reflect the difficulty of establishing any enterprise without sufficient funds or experience” (Carter & Jones-Evans, 2000, p.16).

One of the dominant facets of start-up that appears to significantly impact on young entrepreneurs is a lack of capital, or access to it (Blanchflower and Oswald, 1990 & 1998). However, there is some work (such as that by Evans and Leighton, 1989, and more recently that of Papadaki, Patenaude, Roberge and Tompa, 2000) that stressed that all entrepreneurs face liquidity constraints (younger no more than older). The rationale for this finding is that while the young may face difficulties in raising capital (because their age makes it harder to establish credibility, Stevenson, 1987), older entrepreneurs may also face difficulties (because of other responsibilities they already have – e.g. dependents and home ownership). The message seems to be that while it is *age* itself that affects the young, it is *circumstances* that affect the older entrepreneur. The distinction points to the fact that individuals can modify their circumstances but not their age.

Other barriers for the young which are infrequently written about formally, but are common in anecdotal accounts, are the linked issues of ageism, negative perception, or stereotyping that occurs when young business people go about their day-to day work. In Canada, after carrying out 47 interviews with young nascent or current information technology business owners under the age of 30, Tam (2000) reported that a third of that group reported the impact of negative stereotypes. How they dressed (which was described as ‘youthful fashion’ or ‘casual appearance’ in the report) was described as impacting negatively upon how people treated them in the market place and in other business interactions. Recently work by Lewis (2006) in the New Zealand context also found that her 17 interviewees (who started firms under the age of 30) felt that they faced overt ageism from clients and other stakeholders. Many of this group of young entrepreneurs subsequently took actions to avoid such interactions occurring again (by either involving an older business partner, changing the way they dressed, deliberately acting or dressing in a manner that appeared more mature, or avoided meeting clients or other stakeholders in person).

2.1.3 Assistance and the policy infrastructure

Another perspective from which youth entrepreneurship has been written about is in terms of government policy and assistance. Typically these two elements are discussed congruently as, more often than not, it is governments, through policy initiatives, which are in the strongest position to offer business assistance programmes - though

there is a parallel discourse in the literature that is concerned with similar efforts by private providers. Characteristically there are two conceptualisations of youth entrepreneurship that are put forward within these discussions. The first is of youth entrepreneurship as a solution to youth unemployment or disadvantages faced by the young, while the second is of youth entrepreneurship as a phenomenon that is worthy of encouragement as part of the global drive towards an enterprise culture (as discussed in Chapter one). Both represent what Panayiotopoulos and Gerry (1997) described as the shift from the conventional (or welfare) approach to a new market-led orthodoxy.

Whether as a strategy of promotion or solution, youth entrepreneurship initiatives are underpinned by an implicit acceptance of the worth of such initiatives and their potential outcomes – it is illogical to think that public money would be invested if they were not. However, some recent contributions to the literature are presenting data that suggest there is another side to youth enterprise – for example, in their United Kingdom (UK) based discussion of enterprise as a path to social inclusion for the young, Blackburn and Ram (2006) identified that the outcomes of such initiatives may be far from positive. This study is indicative of the further work that needs to be done to better understand the impact of assistance initiatives on young people not just their firms.

A not inconsiderable number of youth entrepreneurship initiatives have been devised in response to rising levels of global youth unemployment (Fairlie, 2004; OECD, 2000 & 2001; Roberts & Machacek, 2001). These types of initiatives represent what can be described as the ‘broad’ approach to encouraging youth enterprise, i.e. an approach where ‘business start-ups’ are not the desired primary outcome of an initiative, nor the only measure for judging a programme’s success. Rouse (1998) concludes that such types of programmes assist young unemployed people to develop their ideas about themselves and work, as well as assisting them to move from unemployment into work, or self-employment.

Writing about youth unemployment initiatives that involve the encouragement of youth entrepreneurship is usually either in general terms (at a macro level) – these are often disseminated through international organizations such as the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) International Labour Organisation (ILO) which has an Action Programme on Youth Unemployment (Caroleo &

Mazzotta, 1999) - or specifically (at a micro level describing a particular programme or geographic context). An example of the former is a report by White and Kenyon (date unknown) which discussed good practice with regard to such initiatives, while two examples of the latter are work by Maxwell (2002) which examined self-employment as a strategy for alleviating poverty for West African youth - and by Mahinda (2004) which describes the activities of the Kenya Youth Business Trust.

As part of a concerted and integrated attempt to address high youth-unemployment in its country, the Italian Government has, over time, developed a set of policy measures that aim to address the problem, in part, through the promotion of self-employment. Initiatives include Law 591 (that was passed in 1996 in Southern Italy and has now expanded to cover other depressed regions of the country) which provides financial incentive and technical and training assistance to young people who are identified as having the potential to be self-employed (OECD, 1998). Another specific measure is the Tremonti Law (Law 357 passed in 1994) which provides tax allowances for young people who wish to be self-employed (Caroleo & Mazzotta, 1999).

In terms of business assistance targeted at the young who are engaging in nascent behaviour³, or who have already started a business, there is a small, but growing, body of literature. However, it is again frequented by pieces of work with an applied focus (i.e. report on or evaluate initiatives) rather than those that debate what might be seen as 'bigger picture' or theoretical issues (e.g. the merit of targeted assistance, do the young as a group have different needs?). Presently, as the field is clearly emerging, any contributions at all may be seen as furthering the field and must be drawn upon by any other piece of work that seeks to make a genuine contribution.

The underlying rationale that is common to all the work in this area, be it 'applied' or theoretical', is the assumption that business assistance is a critical part of an entrepreneur's environment – and the environment has the ability to influence the way in which an individual engages in the entrepreneurial process. As such the sources of assistance within the environment, and the assistance an entrepreneur receives, are both crucial parts of that process. The focus also acknowledges that entrepreneurship can be a context-dependent process. Recognising then that entrepreneurial potential

³ Nascent entrepreneurs can be defined as those "actively involved in attempting to start a new business" (Wennekers, van Stel, Thurik & Reynolds, 2005, p.294).

can be a function of the environment, a focus on the sources of assistance available to the young entrepreneurs in their environment is relevant.

In the context of ‘business assistance’, environmental factors that stimulate entrepreneurship have been the focus of considerable research. Bruno and Tyebjee (1982) specifically identified the importance of having supporting services available. Krueger and Brazeal (1994) concurred, and underlined the importance of the *visibility* of such services as well as their availability. Indeed, perceptions of the level of support within the environment are considered to be as important as the actual availability of those services (Naffziger, Hornsby & Kuratko, 1994). While the way in which young entrepreneurs perceive their environment has not yet been examined, it could be surmised that if young entrepreneurs do not see evidence of support for their aspirations in their environment, then their perception of the feasibility of entering entrepreneurship will diminish.

The heterogeneous nature of entrepreneurs as a group implies the inherent difficulty in designing assistance programmes that are effective for all within the group (OECD, 1992). Therefore, broad (i.e. generic) policy solutions may be viewed as being largely ineffective. Many countries appear to have recognised this difficulty with specific policy initiatives targeted at specific groups of entrepreneurs (e.g. targeting by gender and ethnicity). In some countries, youth are now also specifically targeted – either as entrepreneurs (i.e. business start-ups) or for their potential to establish a business (i.e. as nascent entrepreneurs – as defined in footnote one in this chapter). Clearly identifying a target population and accurately assessing the type of support they require is critical. This type of targeting is what Stevenson and Lundström (2001b) described as ‘niche’ entrepreneurship policy (targeted at specific groups of the population where opportunities to increase business ownership rates are deemed desirable). These niches can be devised on either demographic grounds or the level of potential inherent in a group (for example, youth). However, the OECD (2001) observed recently that no single policy model exists for the promotion of entrepreneurial activity among the young, and that as new programmes develop in different cultural and national settings they tend to show more rather than less variety in their content and delivery mechanisms.

According to a study of the policy environment in 10 countries (Stevenson and Lundström, 2001a), a number of countries have targeted youth policies. These include

Australia, Canada, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan and the United Kingdom. In Australia there has been the national programme 'Enterprise Education in Schools' as well as the federal initiative 'Promoting Young Entrepreneurs'. There are also state initiatives. In Canada the focus on entrepreneurship in the youth population is part of the government's Youth Employment Strategy. In Spain, high youth employment has seen the pursuit of youth entrepreneurship as a solution, with initiatives at a national and regional level. For example, the 'Young Enterprise Scheme' supports the creation and development of enterprises by people under 35, with help including subsidies and support. In Sweden, where according to research published in 2001 26% of new business starters in Sweden are under thirty, 'Open for Business' sites in four locations provide learning and advisory support for people under 30 who want to start their own business. Incubators for young entrepreneurs also exist in some Swedish cities. In Taiwan, the National Youth Commission was established in 1966 to explore the best ways to encourage the development of young entrepreneurs. It led to the establishment of 'Youth Industrial Parks' and the 'Youth Enterprise Loan Scheme'. More recently (1998), the Commission established a network of business Start-Up Coordinators to strengthen local counseling support for young entrepreneurs. In the United Kingdom, there are several national initiatives that aim to develop young entrepreneurs, including 'Shell Livewire' (a start-up support programme for those between 16 and 30) and the 'Prince's Youth Business Trust' (which helps unemployed and disadvantaged youth into self-employment by providing business advice, mentoring, loans and bursaries).

The Prince's Youth Business Trust was established 1986 and in 1999 merged into the Prince's Trust. "The mission of the Prince's Trust is to help disadvantaged young people participate more effectively in the labour market by helping them establish their own small businesses." (Shutt & Sutherland, 2003, p.99). The Trust is funded from both private (largely corporate sponsors) as well as public monies and provides grants and business support, in the form of counselling and mentoring, to enable young people to start their own firms. In 2003, Meager, Bates and Cowling reported on their study which used longitudinal data to evaluate the impact of the efforts of the Trust. Their analysis found no evidence that supported entry into self-employment had a positive impact on the subsequent employability or earning power of that individual. However, this study, as is the case with many studies, evaluated the impact of such programmes in quantitative terms and not in more qualitative, and largely intangible

and holistic terms, which seek to explore the impact on the people rather than simply on the labour market as a whole.

In quantitatively evaluating the Shell Livewire programme (using probit analysis and a sample of more than 1,000 entrepreneurs) Greene and Storey (2004) found that 'soft' assistance had little value in 'moving' young people towards entrepreneurship. They also found that the more likely the young people were to be engaged in entrepreneurial activity, the less likely they were to describe the services as valuable. Their finding indicates that those who are considered to be motivated towards entry are going to achieve entry irrespective of the nature of the assistance they receive. However, if they were to receive any assistance, 'hard' rather than soft would be more affective in facilitating their entry, if not their success.

The timing and duration of the support offered to young entrepreneurs is also an area that is worthy of further investigation. A study of youth self-employment in an area of virtual work collapse in England revealed that the young entrepreneurs felt they could access sufficient assistance during the start-up phase, but that ongoing support and help in developing their venture was lacking (MacDonald & Coffield, 1991). Kenyon and White (1996) made a similar point in an Australian context, describing how support programmes focus on establishing a business rather than providing continual support to a business in its formative stages. The OECD (2001) suggested that gaps in terms of ongoing assistance provision reflect the bias in some official programmes towards addressing short term labour policy issues. Moran and Sear (1999) argued that business support for young people needs to be more responsive, and occur past the period of start-up and initial survival. Tangible support mechanisms need to parallel the shift in policy that Fraser and Greene (2001) identified: namely that enterprise support policy has moved from a focus on enhancing the quantity of entrepreneurs in the 1980s, to attempts to improve the quality of businesses in the 1990s.

In Southern Italy, Capaldo (1997) observed that the creation of firms by young people with limited initial experience was on the increase. The study found that more investigation was needed into how the young facilitate contacts with external advisors, which again places emphasis on how the young self-employed establish assistance relationships. While acknowledging the exploratory nature of the work, Capaldo (1997) asserted that the phenomenon was present in other areas of Italy and Europe,

and stressed that it is the research attention that is recent not the phenomenon of youth entrepreneurship itself.

A mixed method Canadian study found that young people had high levels of awareness and usage of business assistance initiatives being provided by agencies such as the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (Corporate Research Associates, 2001). The study (which included interviews with 589 young entrepreneurs and 800 young non-entrepreneurs aged 15-29) concluded that knowledge of business start-up was generally poor among young people and that accessing start-up capital was still a major barrier to entry. In terms of policy responses, the report suggested that greater emphasis needed to be placed upon centralising sources of information, providing a 'one-stop-shop' facility for information gathering, and greater promotion of entrepreneurship within the school system.

The positive impact of networks, and role models, as forms of assistance for entrepreneurs is well established in the literature (Lorrain, Belley & Dussault, 1992; Matthews & Moser, 1996; Moran & Sear, 1999; Schiller & Crewson, 1995; Shaper, 1984; Tay, 1996; Walstad & Kourilsky, 1998). The number of contacts available to entrepreneurs has a direct bearing on their ability to solve business problems according to Cromie (1992). Blackburn (1997) signalled a movement by young entrepreneurs away from 'mass counseling' and attendance at courses towards searching for specific advice on an ad-hoc basis when problems or particular thresholds in the development of the business occurred. Moran and Sear (1999) describe mechanisms for 'experience exchange networks' as essential for enabling young people to learn from each other.

The importance of family within an entrepreneur's informal networks has also been noted, particularly for younger entrepreneurs (Kenyon & White, 1996; Moran & Sear, 1999; North, Blackburn & Curran, 1997; OECD, 1992; Rosa, 1993). Payne (1984) suggested that this assistance would consist of advice, support, and direct financial assistance; whereas Moran and Sear (1999) argued that it would typically not involve direct financial help. However, Matthews and Moser (1996) suggested that role models from outside the family structure might be more critical. Field, Goldfinch and Perry (1994) expanded on the importance of formal and informal networks, suggesting that an entrepreneur's ability to use them effectively was directly related to their personal characteristics. The characteristic of age could have an impact; however, whether age inhibits or encourages networking is not clear. Age could potentially

influence an individual's ability to both construct a network and use it effectively. In Australia, Kenyon and White (1996) found that networks for young self-employed were critical, but that their ability to establish such networks, formal or informal, was considered weak and diminished by their age. The availability of appropriate role models for the young self-employed as a group was also gauged as poor.

2.1.4 Typologies

In the literature on self-employed people, entrepreneurs and SME owner-managers there have been a variety of empirical and theoretical attempts to categorise individuals into 'types', using either characteristics of the firm, the person, or both. Included in these efforts are a small number of typologies that focus on the young as a group. Though the number of typologies is growing, the incomplete nature of this approach to understanding the experiences of young self-employed people is symptomatic both of the lack of empirical work in this area and the lack of development of specific theoretical frameworks to apply to the young.

Some examples of the typologies that have been put forward include, from the UK, and based on business characteristics, MacDonald (1991 & 1992) and MacDonald and Coffield's (1991) description of businesses of young entrepreneurs as either 'running', 'plodding' or 'falling'. This typology was based on a project that explored the experiences of youth enterprise for young adults in an economically depressed area of Britain called Cleveland. Data were gathered via 100 interviews with 18-25 year olds who had started up a small firm. 'Fallers' were described as those that didn't make it over initial hurdles; 'runners' as those that were commercially viable and had the capacity for some degree of expansion; and 'plodders' as those firms that were run on a 'shoestring' budget, were unlikely to grow and were, in fact, on the verge of failing.

Another typology from the UK, and based on business characteristics, used data from a study that examined the perceptions of young self-employed people towards the business training and advice that is available after start-up (Blackburn, 1997). The project was a survey of business owners aged 18-30 from Essex and the North-East of England who had been in business for at least two years. As well as finding that this group of young self-employed made extensive use of a variety of sources of start-up, an outcome of the work was the development of a typology (based on firm

characteristics). It comprised 4 categories of firms: 1) 'high flyers' - growth businesses – those who displayed past growth and are actively seeking further expansion; 2) 'stable businesses' – experienced some growth but expansion not sought; 3) 'transition businesses' – could expand or close in the near future; and 4) 'drifter businesses' – the existence of the firm is extremely precarious. Blackburn (1997) was not seeking generalisability as an outcome of this work; he instead described the typology as an attempt to aid understanding with regard to the support needs of this particular group of self-employed people (Blackburn, 1997).

Also in the UK, but using characteristics of the individuals (c.f the firm), Rouse (1998) put forward a series of worker identities (e.g., the artist's identity), based on the nature of the young person's start-up experiences as an identity project. Similarly, the Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership (Slaughter, 1996) in the United States devised three categories of young entrepreneurs: 1) 'aspiring' (those who desire and plan to create a new venture but have not yet become self-employed); 2) 'lifestyle' (those whose motivation for entering self-employment is/was to earn an income for themselves and their family); and 3) 'high growth' (those who enter/entered self-employment with the intention of growing their firm quickly). Shutt, Sutherland and Koutsoukus's (2001) typology of successful young people in business consists of 'the graduates' (who are highly qualified in terms of educational background and who are inclined towards entrepreneurialism); 'the replicators' (those who were employed in a related sector before entering self-employment); 'the excluded' (those who come from a highly disadvantaged background); and 'the lifestylers' (those whose entry into self-employment was opportunity driven).

2.2 Entrepreneurship as a career

The progression of the 'phenomenon' of entrepreneurship is such that it has been become an 'acceptable' activity that is no longer considered to be peripheral to the labour market. Indeed entrepreneurship has reached a point where it is not only recognised as a discipline, but as a career identity (Thornton, 1999; Welsch & Liao, 2003).

This section of the chapter examines what has been written about self-employment and/or 'being an entrepreneur' as a career. It was necessary to first briefly look (in the

broadest of terms) at the general way in which the study of careers ('career theory') has developed, and then focus on the applicable models and individual pieces of work that have examined 'the career' in the context of self-employment and/or entrepreneurship.

2.2.1 Brief overview of career theory

The study of careers has been around for over 100 years and a number of writers have attempted to categorise that large body of work in order to demonstrate how progression within the field has occurred. Sonnenfeld and Kotter (1982) described their four 'traditions' as follows: 1) the first tradition began at the end of the 19th century (paralleling the emergence of sociology as a discipline) and focussed on occupational mobility; 2) the second tradition was linked to psychology and explored links between traits and occupations; 3) the third tradition involved vocational and organisational psychologists exploring occupational choice and development; and 4) the final tradition explored career development in relation to the life-course.

Hall and Mirvis (1995) took a similar approach, in that they also attempted to group the work that comprises the body of knowledge surrounding careers. Unlike Sonnenfeld and Kotter (1982), they approached this task on topics of interest rather than the chronological development of the field (though the overlap between both approaches is self-evident). Hall and Mirvis's (1995) summary included some of the following points: that the earliest work centred on the prediction of career choice by understanding how knowledge and aptitude influenced those outcomes; that the focus then shifted to understanding how external factors (e.g. economics and education) affected entry flows to occupations; examination of the fit between person and job (i.e. job choice and self-selection) then followed, which led to the analysis of jobs and the development of selection and placement instruments; and finally there came work on career stages, life-cycles and career progression models.

In another attempt to 'summarise the field', Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989) focused on the contributions of each discipline that has focused its attention on the notion of 'the career'. The examples they cite include: psychology – which views career as vocation and a component of an individual's life structure; sociology – which explores the relationship between career and social roles and mobility; anthropology – which

conceptualises careers as status passages; and, economics – which investigates links between employment opportunities and human capital.

These three examples of approaches to describing the field of career theory (Sonnenfeld & Kotter, 1982, Hall & Mirvis, 1995 and Arthur, Hall & Lawrence, 1989) have demonstrated its inter-disciplinary nature, and how it comprises studies that have at their root both theoretical and applied objectives. This inherently multi-disciplinary underpinning has been criticised by some writing in the area. For example, Collin and Young describe career theory as “a hybrid without organizing principles” (1986, p.838). However, while this point may have merit, it is also important to recognise that the term ‘career’ (like that of ‘entrepreneur’) has so many meanings and subtleties that it is unsurprising that the study of it spawns such a variety of approaches and methods. The fact, therefore, that “unlike many social science concepts, the concept of the career is not the property of any one theoretical or disciplinary view” (Arthur, Hall & Lawrence, 1989, p.7) can be seen as a strength (as it has come to be viewed in the entrepreneurship field).

How a career is defined is one variable that underpins the nature of the knowledge that comprises the field. While any definition in a field as complex as this is necessarily imperfect, attempts must be made to do so in order to facilitate research and encourage the evolution of the field. The American, Douglas Hall is one of the leading writers on career theory and has been for some four decades. It is therefore appropriate to draw on his work in order to define the term career. Back in 1976, in his seminal work, Hall identified that the term career suffered from a surplus of meanings and set out four distinct ways in which the term can be used and interpreted. These, in some form, still underpin attempts to define career today:

1. Career as advancement (which is inextricably linked to the notion of directionality);
2. Career as profession (to this way of thinking some occupations represent careers and others do not);
3. Career as a sequence of jobs during a lifetime (i.e. if you have a job history you have a career);
4. Career as a lifelong sequence of role-related experiences.

Hall went on to continue making contributions to the discourse surrounding the meaning of the term 'career' and in 2002 defined it as "the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of a person's life" (Hall, 2002, p.12). While others have contributed to this discourse, they characteristically also draw upon the work of Hall in this regard, so it is appropriate to present only his efforts in this chapter.

At the heart of any definition of career is the individual, and as the descriptions of the field presented earlier show, this emphasis on the individual has remained throughout – despite a swing back to emphasise the role of the organisation in, what could be called, the middle of the life of the field (Baruch, 2004). This focus on the individual, rather than the external factors that may influence that individual, is demonstrated no better within this field than in the discourse surrounding the separation between the 'objective' and 'subjective' career.

This distinction was made by Barley who described 'the career' as a "Janus-like concept that oriented attention simultaneously in two directions" (1989, p.49). The objective career is the "publicly observable, and marked by such symbols as occupation, qualifications, job title, status, salary, position in the structure and c.v. details" (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle, 1999, p.6-7) – whereas, the 'subjective' career is concerned with the construct of career from the actor's perspective, rather than the observer (i.e. an internal focus) (Collin & Young, 1986; Hall, 1987).

General consensus has the objective career as the dominant focus within the body of knowledge. It is widely considered that this is the aspect of the career that is most easily identified with (comparatively) and so facilitates the achievement of cumulative knowledge. For example, Arthur, Inkson and Pringle write of how the "publicly understood aspect of the career, of course, gives a shared platform of comparison, and allows for collective interpretation of people's career situations" (1999, p.6-7). As is always the case, the focus on one aspect of a phenomenon comes at the expense of attention directed at others. In this instance that is the subjective, or more personal connotations, of the career construct. However, if modern career theory is considered as a whole, there appears to be a swing towards reframing the importance of the subjective. This shift is congruent with those writers in the field who advocate the need for a consideration of both 'parts' of a career rather than positioning them at either end of a continuum (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

2.2.2 Emerging conceptualisations of the career

As with any field, the study of careers has evolved. Part of the evolution of career theory has been the acknowledgment of the inability of some models and frameworks to capture many of the characteristics of the modern labour market and workplace. As such it is appropriate to discuss the creation of conceptualisations of career which are more relevant to the 21st century context. In describing this shift to the post-bureaucratic era, Adamson, Doherty and Viney (1998) stressed the importance of holding paramount the premise that the modern day career fundamentally belongs to the individual (i.e. not an organisation).

The boundaryless career is one of the 'new' models of career that appears to have currency within the recent discourse. It is seen as an antidote to prior conceptualisations of career which are, at their heart, grounded in orderly progressions through the hierarchy of large organisations (i.e. bounded careers). Instead the "boundaryless career does not characterize any single career form, but, rather, a range of possible forms that defies traditional employment assumptions" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p.3). Jackson usefully provided examples of ways in which careers could be called boundaryless:

Some people can be considered to have boundaryless careers because of the short-term nature of their employment contracts; others because their primary allegiance is not to an employer but rather to their profession. A key element is the independence of the career from traditional organizational career principles, such as job security, promotion, loyalty, and so on (1996, p.618).

So, those in boundaryless careers are generally viewed as moving, within their lifetime, between occupations, organisations, localities and work tasks. To use Watson's (2003) terms, this movement constitutes the use of 'career capital' (in the form of networks), rather than the creation of a situation of 'career anarchy'. The notion of a boundaryless career is also presented as a way of acknowledging that the boundaries of work and non-work, and paid and non-paid work are permeable (Cohen & Mallon, 1999).

It is rare that a new idea is not contentious to some factions, and the boundaryless career is no exception. Some quarters have argued that a boundaryless career is, in

practice, just another example of an 'ideal type' (or indeed perpetuates the myth of binary oppositions), and that careers remain, in essence, 'bounded' (rather than boundaryless) (King, Burke & Pemberton, 2005). The same authors go on, describing "the choice of the term 'boundaryless' to describe independence from a single employer was unfortunate, as it has subsequently been interpreted in terms of liberation and freedom from constraints" (King, Burke & Pemberton, 2005, p.999). Similar points were made by Sullivan who describes the term boundaryless as a:

misnomer as systems need boundaries in order to define themselves and to separate themselves from the environment. Therefore, in a real sense, careers are not boundaryless. Instead, the literature on boundaryless careers focuses on how boundaries have become more permeable (1999, p.477).

Sullivan (1999) went on to explicate the relationship between boundaries and careers as being inherently linked to organisations because it is the organisations themselves that have the boundaries. Therefore, when the 'unit of analysis', or perspective, is that of the individual, a better modern conceptualisation of the career is the Protean career. So, Sullivan advocates that the term boundaryless is more appropriate for discussing careers in relation to organizations and the Protean model for situations when the individual is the central focus:

when examining these new career patterns from the view point of the individual careerist, it may make more sense to use the term 'protean career' to emphasize the individual's adaptability and self-direction, and to use the term 'boundaryless' when examining careers from an organizational perspective (1999, p.477).

The term protean (derived from the name of the Greek God Proteus who could change form at will) represents a career where the individual is central and seen as responsible for managing the career in a proactive fashion (Hall & Mirvis, 1995). It was defined by Hall as "a process which the person, not the organization, is managing. It consists of all the person's varied experiences in education, training, work in several organizations, changes in occupational field, and so forth. The protean career is *not* what happens to the person in any one organization" (1976, p.210). While emerging first in 1976, within Hall's writings, the model is still emerging, in that its applicability

to modern day life is seen as high, and therefore, new work examining its relevance and operationalisation is occurring.

Manifestations of a protean career include the decoupling of the career from its tie to any one organisation. Mirvis & Hall (1994) suggested that under the auspices of this 'model', there are new ways to think about the relationship of work to life (and vice versa) as well as that between employer and employee:

There is a tendency to associate a career with paid work and draw sharp distinctions between people's work and nonwork lives. A more elastic concept, however, acknowledges that work and nonwork roles overlap and shape jointly a person's identity and sense of self (Mirvis & Hall, 1994, p.369).

In pursuing a protean career (i.e. "a career that is self-determined, driven by personal values rather than organizational rewards, and serving the whole person, family and 'life purpose'", Hall, 2004, p.2) there are two meta-competencies that are described in the literature as being critical: adaptability and identity (or self-awareness) (Hall & Mirvis, 1996). Some authors suggest that it would be unlikely that an individual could pursue a protean career without sufficient self-awareness:

A strong sense of identity is a prerequisite for pursuing a successful protean career. If the person is not clear on his or her needs and motivations, abilities, values, interests, and other important personal elements of self-definition, it would be very difficult to know where to head in life (Hall, 2002, p.172).

2.2.3 Running a business as a 'career'

The literature that examines career theory specifically in relation to self-employment (or entrepreneurial activities) is small. Indeed some writers have asserted that 'the field' has scarcely addressed self-employment or entrepreneurship as "a distinct career option" (Scanlan, 1980, p.163) or that self-employment is outside the bounds of traditional career models (Sullivan, 1999). Historically any efforts in this area have focused on structural factors that affect entry to self-employment and the role of psychological traits and/or demographic factors in the decision to enter (Bowen & Hisrich, 1986; Feldman & Bolino, 2000). In recent times, as the apparent popularity of

the preference of entrepreneurship as a 'career' has grown globally, and as career models have evolved, self-employment has merited closer attention. Often this attention has been in relation to specific dimensions of career or as a context for exploring a particular career framework. For example, work by Sullivan (1999) argued that self-employment and entrepreneurship were rich areas in which to further understanding of boundaryless career patterns, and the model of entrepreneurial careers put forward by Dyer (1994) focused on the subjective dimensions of entrepreneurial careers as being especially salient.

Typically, pieces of work focusing solely on elements of self-employment in relation to the career construct have been carried out only in the last two to three decades. Characteristically these studies are interested in factors surrounding the decision to enter and comparisons between the choice to be an employee against the choice to be self-employed. An example of the focus of the former set of studies is work by Carroll and Mosakowski (1987) which used retrospective life-history data from 2,172 West German respondents to model the process by which individuals move into and out of periods of self-employment. They found self-employment for their respondents to be episodic in nature and concluded that "self-employment may both affect and be affected by more conventional career processes. Those who engage in self-employment build up a unique kind of human capital that may be valuable in later self-employment and in other settings as well" (Carroll & Mosakowski, 1987, p.574). In terms of the latter topic, work by Peel and Inkson (2004) examined career theory in relation to the choice between organisational employment and self-employed contracting and a study by Kolvereid (1996) developed a classification scheme of reasons given by owner-managers for preferring self-employment to organisational employment.

The influence of psychological traits, or variables, on the choice to become self-employed is a facet of self-employment experience that appears to fascinate those concerned with the relationship between career theory and self-employment. For example, when they explored the relationship between personality and entrepreneurial career preference, Scherer, Brodzinski and Wiebe (1991) found that one of the most influential factors were individuals' perceptions of how successful their parents (who were entrepreneurs) had been. In another piece of work of this type, Katz (1992) put

forward a model of employment status (self employed vs. wage-or-salary employed) that was based on psychological and sociological cognitive variables.

As it often the case in an emerging topic area that sits within an established field, there is a tendency to draw upon established theories and apply them to the new context, or phenomenon, in order to ‘test’ their appropriateness. The sub-topic of self-employment within the field of career theory is no exception. For example, in 1994, Katz drew upon Schein’s (1978) typology in order to carry out a longitudinal project that resulted in the presentation of a model of career progression that permits the inclusion of the analysis of self-employed people (as well as employees). Also using Schein’s typology, Feldman and Bolino (2000) used the three anchors they considered to be most relevant (entrepreneurial creativity; autonomy and independence; and security and stability) to explore the link between the career motivations of the self-employed to their career outcomes. They found that not all self-employed people derived satisfaction from their chosen career path, and that the trade-off for high levels of autonomy was relative social isolation.

2.3 Entrepreneurship and identity

The positing of a link between personal identity and ‘occupational’, ‘career’, or ‘work’ identity is not new, as the statement of Hall’s attests: “In Western society the development of one’s personal sense of identity is closely tied to the establishment of one’s occupational identity” (1976, p.134). However, the conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity is most definitely a modern day construct. Before examining the nature of the work that has occurred on entrepreneurial identity in the recent past I cover sufficient historical background on the link between work and identity so as to understand why such an approach is both new and critical to furthering understanding of entrepreneurship as a socially constructed phenomenon.

2.3.1 Identity and work

“As a fundamental human category, work is represented not only as a livelihood, but also as a stable, consistent source of self-identity” says du Gay (1996, p.9). The consensus among the relevant literature is that during the course of progression through a series of jobs, or contained within the subsequent development of a ‘career’,

a person's sense of personal identity will be influenced by these activities (Adamson, Doherty & Viney, 1998; Allen Collinson, 2004; Evans & Poole, 1991; Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Or, as Hall wrote,

the career sub-identity may be defined as that aspect of the person's identity which is engaged in working in a given career area, and the career role as his perception of the behaviors and attributes which are associated with his career work (1971, p.57).

As this quotation demonstrates, there is no assumption that work is the dominant contribution to an individual's identity - far from it. Instead 'work identity' can be classed as a partial or sub-set of a person's overall sense of personal identity that is grounded in how they experience themselves as a 'working individual' (Illeris, 2004).

Logically, the majority of empirical explorations of work identity have occurred within a specific context (e.g. industry, occupation, or demographic). Typically they have also been from the perspective of employees, and those working in large organisations. An example of one such study is that of Lang and Lee (2005), which examined the potential link between job stress, self-efficacy and work identity. In terms of specific studies, the information technology (Loogma, Umarik & Vilu, 2004), nursing (Kirpal, 2004a) and telecommunications (Dif (2004) sectors are just some examples of particular industries that have had explorations of worker identity situated within them.

As a work identity is a combination of influences between structural conditions and individual dispositions, it is inevitable that there will be influence, evolution, change and possibly tension (Kirpal, 2004b). Indeed, the choice of work (which in turn can lead to a career) not only contributes to individuals' senses of 'who they are' (i.e. personal identity), but also affects how they perceive that work, its role in their life, and their motivation for continuing to engage in it (i.e. what could in a broader sense be labelled their orientation to work) (Watson, 1994).

The notion that there is a distinction between 'work' and the other spheres of a person's life is now considered a largely defunct conceptualisation. Instead, in the modern era, boundaries between work and home, work and leisure etc. are viewed as permeable, if not in some instances non-existent (Billington, Hockey & Strawbridge,

1998). This tussle with how work and 'life' interact in the modern era is manifested nowhere more tangibly than in the current preoccupation (of society at large) with the neologism 'work-life-balance'. It is not relevant to the topic under discussion in this thesis to debate the philosophical and ideological arguments that underpin the struggle between the relativity of work and 'life' to one another. Instead it is sufficient to say that the perceived separation of the two, that was once the norm, has been surpassed by a more holistic interpretation that, some would argue, is both more realistic, and more worthy of study.

2.3.2 Entrepreneurial identity

The topic of entrepreneurial identity is not one that has concerned those contributing to what could be called mainstream entrepreneurship research – therefore, there was a limited literature upon which to draw. However, the absence of studies investigating subjective, socio-cognitive elements of the entrepreneurial process has recently been addressed by the emergence of an increasing number of studies investigating the construct of entrepreneurial identity (Hoang & Gimeno, 2005). Hytti (2000) described the pursuit of an understanding of entrepreneurial identity as a shift away from identifying common traits of entrepreneurs (or the things that make them different from one another). Instead, valuing an alternate way of understanding the interactions of an individual entrepreneur and his or her environment, and how he or she makes sense of themselves as an entrepreneur.

Some examples of work that have begun to address such issues include that of: Pitt (1998) which consisted of interviews with 25 small firm owner-entrepreneurs and resulted in the creation of a typology of entrepreneurial identities which included 'prime movers' and the 'prompted entrepreneur' (this is also an example of how work concerned with typologies can be related to entrepreneurial identity); Pecoud (2004) which investigated the link between entrepreneurship and identity in the case of Turkish entrepreneurs who were immigrants in Berlin; and, also that of MacNabb, McCoy, Northover and Weinreich (1992) which used identity structure analysis to investigate the identity profiles of small business founder/owners at various stages of the life-cycle. Two pieces of research have also looked at the nature of entrepreneurial identity in particular sectors: the private care sector (Nadin, 2007) and the agricultural sector (Vesala, Peura & McElwee, 2007).

Hoang and Gimeno defined entrepreneurial identity as encompassing “how a person defines the entrepreneurial role and whether he or she identifies with that role” (2005, p.87). They also listed four dimensions that characterise entrepreneurial identity:

1. The set of attributes or traits used to describe the person’s role (these can be experiential or ‘ideal’);
2. Perceptions of what constitutes entrepreneurial activity (and how they fit that perception);
3. Identity centrality (the importance of identifying as an entrepreneur to that person’s self-definition and whether they enact that identity in other settings);
4. Identity regard (perceptions of whether identifying as an entrepreneur is viewed positively or negatively).

This work by Hoang and Gimeno (2005) is one of the only pieces that has focused on defining entrepreneurial identity. The authors urged that considerably more research is needed in order to further understanding about how entrepreneurial identities begin and are developed, especially into how social relationships anchored in previous identities can hinder the development of an entrepreneurial identity (e.g. former colleagues being critical of a transition to self-employment).

The notion of ‘transitions’ in relation to entrepreneurial identity has been the subject of a number of pieces of work. For example, Snyder (2004) examined the routes into the informal economy of a group of self-employed people in a New York neighbourhood. He found that individual identity motivation was a crucial spur to people transitioning into self-employment: “Most workers are drawn to this economic niche as a way to explore a new work identity” (Snyder, 2004, p.215). This path to a ‘true work identity’ demonstrated how identity was not conceived of as a single thing by this group. Instead, identities were described as existing in a hierarchy, and participating in the non-formal economy was one way of ensuring the primacy of the ‘career identity’ that they found most essential to defining who they were (Snyder, 2004).

Another significant piece of work that examined a transition (from being an employee to being a self-employed person) in relation to entrepreneurial identity was the

doctoral thesis of Cohen (1997) – elements of which have also been published elsewhere (Cohen, 1997; Cohen & Musson, 2000). She carried out an in-depth investigation of 24 women in the UK who forwent positions as employees in order to start their own firm. The objective of the research was to understand the extent to which these women identified as entrepreneurs and what factors helped or hindered such identification. She found that this group “appropriated aspects of the enterprise discourse, while simultaneously rejecting the concept of ‘the entrepreneur’ as an occupational identity” (Cohen, 1997, p.151). Instead the women defined themselves as being entrepreneurial. The use of this adjective was seen as allowing them to “tap into those aspects of the discourse which they see as useful, and to leave those which they see as offensive, or irrelevant” (Cohen, 1997, p.151). It was also described as being a more ‘flexible’ term to apply than the label ‘entrepreneur’ and therefore applicable to a greater variety of situational contexts. The occupational identity tensions for these women, which were inherent in the transition from being an employee to being a self-employed person, were communicated strongly in this work. In order to address these tensions the women reportedly drew upon elements of the enterprise discourse that were meaningful to them in their particular circumstance – rather than accepting all elements of it in order to be able to label themselves a true entrepreneur. This often created paradoxical situations for the women who were, on the one hand, rejecting the discourse, and on the other, using its elements to describe their endeavours.

Similar, in its attention to the negotiation of occupational identity with regard to a career transition, is work by Warren (2004) which concluded that:

the women do not initially characterize themselves as entrepreneurs, but are constituted as such by a discourse that becomes increasingly powerful as they engage with different social networks while undertaking a range of new activities over a period of time... Thus, identity is constructed and reconstructed through negotiation during a reflexive journey from one mode of work to another (p.26).

Instead of identifying as entrepreneurs the women in this study adopted ‘professionalism’ as an alternative career ‘motif’ or label.

Aside from work exploring the ‘evolution’ of identity during a transition to self-employment (from employment), there have been three main writers who have

dominated the contributions to the small, but growing, section of the literature that focuses on entrepreneurial identity. Coincidentally all these researchers have carried out their empirical work in the UK, but all with a slightly different lens, all during the early years of the 21st century, and their primary piece of work in this area has also constituted their doctoral thesis: David Rae explored the link between learning and identity for entrepreneurs; Simon Down carried out an in-depth study into how two male entrepreneurs constructed, maintained and communicated their identities in the context of a small firm; and finally Julia Rouse, who characterised the business start-up process for the young as an 'identity project'.

Using narratives, Rae's (2003) work comprised three in-depth case studies of the founders of firms in the 'cultural media' industry in England – findings from the study have also been published in related articles (e.g. Rae, 2004b; Rae, 2005). The essence of his approach to exploring identity was to perceive it not as "the possession of any implicit 'qualities', 'traits', or indeed a fixed identity"; instead, he conceptualised entrepreneurial behaviour as "a matter of degree rather than 'being' or 'not being'" (Rae, 2003, p.12). Therefore, his focus was on learning how the people chosen for his cases engaged in learning about who they were as people, and how, or if, they constructed an identity within an entrepreneurial community (Rae, 2003). While reporting all the findings is not possible, and not especially relevant given the focus on learning, I note that Rae did find that for the entrepreneurs whose stories he heard "their belief that they are 'becoming' the new business is a vital factor in both the personal transition and the creation of the venture" (2003, p.215). In expressing the stories of their businesses (and ultimately themselves) the individuals used an emotional language that Rae described as signalling "a quality of engagement and emotional energy being expressed in the stories of these businesses which goes beyond rationality...for people are expressing themselves, their identities and their creative abilities, through the business" (2003, p.229).

In an article subsequently published from the thesis, Rae described the creation of an entrepreneurial identity as "an outcome of a process of personal and social emergence" (2004a, p.494). The elements of this process included the narrative construction of an identity (negotiated through self-perceptions and the perceptions of others); identity as practice (demonstrating the significance of activities, practices and roles); and tensions between current and future identities.

Down's (2002) thesis - findings from which subsequently formed the basis of several articles (Down & Reveley, 2004; Down & Warren, 2008) and a book (Down, 2006) - comprised an ethnographic study of a small English firm started up by two male entrepreneurs, and was grounded in the definition of entrepreneurial identity as being how the owner-managers would see and talk of themselves as being entrepreneurs. In his work, Down emphasised how the entrepreneurs crafted their self-identities through "their ability to make narratives of the events and experiences of their lives and transform them into those episodic and themed narratives" (2002, p.9). The use of entrepreneurial clichés and talk, and generational encounters, were described as ways of maintaining the identities the two entrepreneurs had created. They:

used encounters with older managers to define themselves as entrepreneurs, through an oppositional strategy of setting themselves against the 'older generation'. These encounters, in turn, were influenced by Paul and John's interaction with younger engineer-managers in the wider industry – with whom they developed a sense of affiliation (Down & Reveley, 2004, p.197).

The development of an entrepreneurial identity by the two men was described as having two dominant effects:

first, it acted as a catalyst for the decision to embark on entrepreneurial careers by setting up a new venture...Second, the identity sustained them in the transformation from securely employed professionals to risk-taking creators of a new entrant firm (Down & Reveley, 2004, p.185).

Rouse's (2004) doctoral thesis comprised a longitudinal study of the experiences of 19 young English people who could be described as being 'disadvantaged', and who were being supported in starting up a firm by a Youth Enterprise Programme (YEP). It asked "what sort of identities 'disadvantaged' young people hoped to actualise through youth enterprise, how identities are influenced by a YEP, and how identities develop through the process of planning, launching, trading in and, often, failing in business" (Rouse, 2004, p.i). The primary outcome of the work was the conceptualisation of her 'Relational Identity Development Model', which "conceptualises identity as emergent from biographical experience and as in relationship with discursive and material structures" (Rouse, 2004, p.i). As well as this new theoretical contribution, the thesis also contributed a new way of linking the business and the life of the individual who is

its 'owner-manager'. For example, Rouse (2004) described business plans as a form of 'life-plan' and was careful to highlight the meaning of enterprise as being a process that included both elements of individual biography and external environment. Thus, the development of an entrepreneurial identity (with business start-up as a proxy for this) is, in this work, presented as being more than a fixed motivation rooted in either structure or personality (Rouse, 2004). In summary, Rouse found that "youth enterprise participants use enterprise to resolve a *tension* between the working lives to which they aspire *and* the constraints they face in practising that kind of work due to social and cultural barriers" (2004, p.6).

In subsequently publishing from the thesis, Rouse and Kitching (2004) focused on specifically examining how business trading and childcare were reconciled during the business planning process. The conclusion was that six identities were actualised by this group when starting a business: being a working parent was the focus of this particular paper, while the "other five identifications were with being better off, benefit dependent, resistant to employment/authority, a creative worker and in business" (Rouse & Kitching, 2004, p.4).

While these works (i.e. those of Down, Rae and Rouse) have commonalities, they have their differences also. For example, the methodologies of all three contributors make extensive use of narratives as a tool by which to explore entrepreneurial identity - for example, Rae, (2003) used narrative as way of understanding the stories the entrepreneurs were telling about themselves, and therefore understanding their identities. However, each took a different approach in contextualising their study in relation to the literature. What is of specific significance was the way in which the vast, and therefore often unmanageable, literature in relation to identity was treated - for example, Rae (2003) situated his work on entrepreneurship and learning in the context of social identity - i.e. not entrepreneurial identity directly.

2.4 Chapter closing

This chapter drew together elements of three bodies of literature in order to background the research questions that are driving this study. A reader should now have a picture of how literature on youth entrepreneurship, running a business as a

‘career’, and material on entrepreneurial identity have informed the design of the questions, and the relevance of those questions to the current state of knowledge in the respective areas.

It is also appropriate to comment on the nature of the literature that has been reviewed. Something the constructs of entrepreneurship, career, and identity appear to have in common is their slipperiness (or fuzziness), their characteristic multi-disciplinary application, and their ability to allow peripheral topics to be brought to the centre of research interest. Weaving these three strands together in the context of this study has been possible because there is a precedent for doing so, in terms of the constructs being studied, and because of the emerging nature of these particular dimensions of enquiry.

The drive to study the specifics of some of these peripheral topics (e.g. youth entrepreneurship) in the context of the broader bodies of work has resulted in a fragmented, more than cohesive, approach – and one that can result in contradictory findings. However, contributing research to such a topic area can be rewarding, and there is the opportunity to ask ‘blue sky’ questions. The next chapter of the thesis describes how the pursuit of those sorts of questions was translated into an effective research design.

Chapter 3: Worldview, strategy and method _____

In the preceding chapters, the research context and question were described, and the relevant dimensions of existing literature reviewed. The grounding of a research question in a certain social and cultural milieu, and in a corresponding body of existing knowledge, requires a researcher to make certain choices about the perspectives and positions that will be ‘applied’ to the process of addressing that question. In many ways the fact that a question does not ‘exist’ in isolation has both advantages and disadvantages. The former ensures that there are some precedents on which to draw, and the latter means that the fact that such precedents can prohibit the use of ‘pioneering’ or innovative approaches – that is, encourage a sort of ideological or methodological hegemony. The prefacing of a research design chapter in a thesis by an introduction and a literature review are in part a way of redressing such a risk – and of demonstrating that ‘methodology’ is a “border territory between the realm of ideas and the world of events” (Ackroyd, 1996, p.439).

Chapter two of the thesis stimulated the crafting of a research question (which was presented in chapter one), and the purpose of this third chapter is to outline the pursuit of answers to those questions (i.e. to describe my quest). The beginning point of this journey is the overarching question which lies at the root of the research design:

What meaning do young New Zealand entrepreneurs attach to being in business?

As outlined in the first chapter, to facilitate the achievement of an answer to this question, it was practicable to further refine it into three sub-questions:

-
1. **According to young New Zealand entrepreneurs, what links are there between self and firm?**

2. Do young New Zealand entrepreneurs think of entrepreneurship as a form of work?
 3. Do young New Zealanders who run businesses identify as entrepreneurs?
-

This chapter addresses the four questions outlined by Crotty (1998) as being essential to the achievement of a coherent research design:

1. What methods do I propose to use?
2. What methodology governs my choice and use of methods?
3. What theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology I choose?
4. What epistemology informs this theoretical perspective?

Section 3.1 of the chapter addresses questions three and four of Crotty's (1998) list and outlines where I stand as a researcher and 'how' and 'what' I question in terms of research. Section 3.2 draws the reader's attention to the research strategy that will be used to 'operationalise' my worldview (Crotty's second question), and the following section of the chapter (3.3.) describes how I translated the research strategy into a research engagement (focusing on Crotty's first question). The way in which the outcomes of the data collection process are analysed is outlined in section 3.4. The final section of the chapter (3.5) deals with the issue of the integrity of the research process, and section 3.6 is the chapter closing.

3.1 Worldview: Framing the question

At the root of decisions regarding research design are issues of ontology – i.e. an individual's worldview or social reality (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2002; Higgs, 2001; Mason, 2002b) - and epistemology – i.e. “the relationship of the knower to the known (or the knowable)” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.83). At the heart of decisions regarding research design are the research question and a researcher's

personal worldview. As implied, there must be congruence between all elements for the research journey to be effective and of integrity.

The match between question and underpinning theoretical framework is the essence of such congruence. That is, the choice of epistemological rationale must be grounded in an acknowledgment of the characteristics of the question, and in the ontological assumptions the individual researcher brings to the process of investigating it. To question our assumptions about reality, and their relevance to our research, is to give consideration to one's theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998).

The questions this thesis is centred upon (focusing on the meaning and perceptions of experiences of entrepreneurship for young business owners), coupled with the assumptions I brought to bear on the process (that individuals play an active role in the 'construction' of knowledge and that that knowledge consists of multiple realities), therefore implied the utilisation of certain frameworks in order to enact the researcher's theoretical perspective.

The result is an inductive, interpretive research journey (Higgs, 2001), framed by the tenets of constructivism. This choice acknowledges that the ontological reality that sits at the core of this thesis is that "reality is subjective and multiple as seen by participants in a study" (Collis & Hussey, 2003, p.49). This type of ontological relativity "holds that all tenable statements about existence depend on a worldview, and no worldview is uniquely determined by empirical or sense data about the world" (Patton, 2002, p.97) – i.e. these "multiple realities are ungoverned by natural laws, causal or otherwise" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.86).

This ontological standpoint creates the situation where the separation between ontological and epistemological is effectively eliminated. It becomes:

impossible to separate the inquirer from the inquired into. It is precisely their interaction that creates the data that will emerge from the inquiry...For if what-there-is-that-can-be-known does not exist independently but only in connection with an inquiry process (which need not be formalized, of course), then it is not possible to ask the questions, 'what is there that can be known?' and 'what is the relationship of the knower and the known?' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.88).

The embracing of the co-creation of knowledge between individuals in an interaction (in a research context or otherwise) embodies the heart of constructivism:

human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience (Schwandt, 2000, p.197).

Whilst constructivism and constructionism (along with its allied strand *social* constructionism, Burr, 1995 & 2003) are terms that are often used interchangeably, there are differences (Kidd, 2004). The critical distinction that is adhered to in this study is that put forward by Crotty (1998) who distinguished one from the other in the following way: “It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term constructivism for the epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the ‘meaning making of the individual mind’ and to use constructionism where the focus includes ‘the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (p.58). A similar distinction was put forward by Bujold (2004), and by Young and Collin (2004) who described constructivism as focusing on “meaning making and the constructing of the social and psychological worlds through individual, cognitive processes”, while constructionism emphasises “that the social and psychological worlds are made real (constructed) through social processes and interaction” (p.375). It seemed appropriate to follow the constructivist path given the focus of the research questions on the perceptions of the individual participants, rather than their perceptions of how their inter-relationships with others and society created those perceptions.

Taking the constructivist perspective of situating the source of knowledge within the individual’s frame of reference (Collis & Hussey, 2003), or acknowledging it as epistemologically subjective (to use Guba and Lincoln’s, 1989, vocabulary), dictated the use of a qualitative strategy for data collection (or construction/creation). It also necessitated the choice of a strategy that would accommodate the assumptions guiding the study: that there are multiple realities, and that individuals actively engage in a sense-making process about their world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The following section describes the data collection strategy that was adopted.

3.2 Strategy: Enacting the worldview

Taking a constructivist perspective to the study was entirely congruent with my objective of capturing the constructed multiple realities of the experience of business ownership for young New Zealand entrepreneurs. It also facilitated coming to some understanding “of the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others” (Patton, 2002, p.96). This acknowledgement - that meanings of entrepreneurial experiences for the research participants could not be discovered but would be constructed (Crotty, 1998) - meant that in-depth interviewing was chosen as the most effective data collection strategy, and the one that was most congruent with the worldview described in the preceding section of this chapter.

However, there are many variants of interviewing available to a researcher and not all of those are as explicitly underpinned by theoretical considerations as they might be. Re-examining the research questions driving the data collection strategy led to consideration of what it was that I would be asking participants to do by framing my thesis around the questions I had chosen. My sub-questions used the words ‘what links’, ‘think of’, and ‘identify as’ – therefore it was descriptions, perceptions and meanings of entrepreneurial and/or business ownership experiences that I was seeking to explore – i.e. I was not designing a study that sought to count occurrences of events, attribute causality, or justify choices of behaviour. The implication of that distinction was that I would be listening for the meanings and essential experiences of the described links, perceptions and identifications of the young New Zealand entrepreneurs in question – the perceptions of individuals of the manifestation of a phenomenon (entrepreneurship) in their lives. This reflection led to the realisation that there was an identifiable phenomenological element to the nature of the research questions that I was posing.⁴ As Moustakas (1994) emphasised, a phenomenological approach constitutes a focus on “meanings and essences of experience rather than measurements and explanations” (p.21).

Having earlier presented my argument as to the appropriateness of constructivism for the topic under study, it now became critical to understand if phenomenology, or a phenomenological approach, had superseded constructivism as the appropriate

⁴ Phenomenology literally being the study or description of phenomena as experienced by people (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991).

paradigmatic imperative. Or, indeed, if elements of the two could be usefully brought to bear on the research questions under investigation (especially as the two could sit comfortably together under the broad heading of interpretivism). Patton (2002) addressed the dilemma when he identified that it is possible to conduct a study with either a phenomenological focus or a phenomenological perspective. He argued that the former is aimed at capturing the essence of the experience of a phenomenon, and the latter (a general phenomenological perspective) aims to “elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people’s experience of the world” (Patton, 2002, p.107). Therefore, it became clear that for this study it was possible, and appropriate, to introduce a phenomenological perspective at the research strategy stage that was entirely congruent with the constructivist choices made (and earlier described) in the worldview phase of research design deliberations. This constituted a choice that meant a commitment to “undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is, they have ‘lived experience’ as opposed to secondhand experience” (Patton, 2002, p.104). It was also an acknowledgment that the questions I was posing were essentially those of meaning and significance (of the experiences of entrepreneurship and firm ownership for young New Zealanders), and that meant they were in part phenomenologically driven: “Phenomenological questions are meaning questions. They ask for the meaning and significance of certain phenomena” (van Manen, 1990, p.23).

Within the literature on in-depth interviewing, Seidman (1998) described a phenomenological approach that comprises a series of three interviews (a method originally designed by Dolbeare and Schuman, and described in Schuman, 1982). This was the model chosen and applied as a data collection strategy, or method, for the fieldwork comprising this study. The intent at the heart of this approach to interviewing is to explore the experiences of research participants of a certain phenomenon (in this instance, entrepreneurship and firm ownership) through the use of open-ended questions during a series of interviews. It involves three interviews with each individual participant so as to adequately contextualise the experiences of the participants within their lives as a whole (Seidman, 1998). The following section of the chapter outlines how the chosen research strategy was enacted and the data were collected.

3.3 Method: The research engagement

A phenomenological approach to in-depth interviewing results in there being only one legitimate source of data: “the views and experiences of the participants themselves” (Goulding, 2002, p.23). Therefore, sampling must be purposive to ensure the research participants have experienced the phenomena that are the focus of the research enquiry (Patton, 1990). In New Zealand, there are no databases that collect age at business start-up in parallel with other business demographic information. Therefore, it was impossible to utilise a database of any sort to identify participants to potentially recruit to the study. Due to the philosophical approach of the study, it was also not necessary to obtain a random or generalisable sample. Instead, publicly available information (e.g. newspaper and magazine articles and web-based information) was used to identify ten young New Zealand entrepreneurs to invite to participate in the study. This approach constitutes the combined use of intensity sampling – the selection of “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely but not extremely” (Creswell, 1998, p.119) – and criterion sampling. The criteria in this case were: that the individual started a firm in New Zealand when under the age of 30; that they had been operating the same firm for at least three years and were still involved in a day-to-day role; and, that they started up the firm themselves as a limited liability company (i.e. did not purchase a going concern or franchise, or inherit a business). Seventeen invitations were issued by letter in order to recruit ten for the study. The letters were then followed up with e-mails and/or telephone calls to deal with logistics regarding interviews etc.

The interview series was designed according to the model elaborated by Seidman (1998) and each interview was approximately 60-90 minutes. The ‘topic’ of the first interview, according to Seidman (1998), should establish “the context of the participants’ experience”. It was intended that the second should allow the participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. The third encourages the participants to “reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them” (p.11). Technically the first interview with the chosen entrepreneurs should therefore have been focused on their experiences as an individual regarding self-employment entry, business start-up, entrepreneurial experience etc. However, conscious as I was of the importance of establishing rapport (Ostrander, 1993)

(especially given the relatively lengthy research engagement that was going to be necessary), the topic chosen for the first interview was ‘the firm’, rather than ‘the individual’.

Discussing the nature, history and future of the firm was seen as a more ‘neutral’ starting point for establishing a research relationship with the participants – particularly given that contact up to that point had been by letter and e-mail only. The second interview, therefore, focused on their experiences as an individual in the context under study – rather than just their experiences specifically in their role as entrepreneur or firm owner-manager. The third, and final, interview focused on the reflections of the participants with regard to the meanings of their experiences to them. Seidman (1998) describes the nature of the third and final interview in this way:

Making sense or making meaning requires that the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. It also requires that they look at their present experience in detail and within the context in which it occurs. The combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now, and describing the concrete details of their present experience, establishes conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives (p.12).

Given the phenomenological assumptions underpinning the interview process, and the epistemological framework adopted, it was appropriate that the interviews themselves were relatively unstructured. As Charmaz (2006) emphasised, intensive interviewing as a ‘method’ is, in its purest form, “open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted” (p.28). In reality this method involved the use of what Spradley (1979) termed ‘the grand tour question’ around which the interview was centred. It was seen as an appropriate way of letting each participant’s ‘voice’, ‘vocabulary’ and ‘perceptions’ dominate – and for the data to emerge in the form that conveyed its significance for the participant (cf. the researcher). Such ‘grand tour’ questions were also appropriate for a research design strategy that depended upon the inter-connectedness of each interview in the series, and where subsequent phases of data collection were guided by earlier ones (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Therefore, the grand tour ‘questions’ (or topics) that guided each interview were:

Interview 1: Tell me the story of your business.

Interview 2: Tell me the story of how you came to be self-employed.

Interview 3: Do you identify as being an entrepreneur?

Before journeying too much further down the path of interview protocols, it became important to conceptualise how the interviews fitted with the epistemological underpinnings outlined earlier in the chapter. To that end, I gave considerable thought to issues that have absorbed those interested in what might be termed ‘post-modern’ trends in interviewing. That is, concern with the boundaries and roles that involve the two ‘parties’ concerned, and the ways in which traditional relationships and power-based interactions have occurred (Fontana, 2002). Considering these issues occurred in parallel with the attention being given to the way the actual data are collected (to use the traditional term) - or co-created (to use the post-modern, or constructivist descriptor).

The interviews were conceived of as being active (to use the terminology of Holstein and Gubrium, 1995 & 2004). This ‘active stance’ “invites a heightened awareness about how meaning and reality are created through the interactions that are embedded in the social occasion of an interview” (Marvasti, 2004, p.30). The implication of this perspective (viewing interviewing as an active process within a constructivist framework) “is that the interview is actually an interpretive process, the aim of which is to jointly, and actively, construct meaning” (Cassell, 2005, p.176). Bearing this in mind, it became important to conceptualise how I would be ‘positioned’ within the interview and how much of the interview could be expected to be pre-scripted as questions, while still retaining the congruence and integrity of the underpinning philosophical approach (Cassell, 2005). The metaphor put forward by Kvale (1996), of the interviewer as a ‘traveller’ (cf. ‘collector’) seemed an appropriately constructivist viewpoint by which to operationalise the practical elements of interview structure.

In effect, this understanding meant that a pre-prepared interview schedule was not going to be appropriate or congruent with the philosophical intent of the research

design – especially as the acknowledged interactive nature of the interviews meant that the researcher’s next question was going to be determined by the participant’s response, rather than a pre-determined protocol (Maxwell, 1996). Therefore, as an alternative to a series of sub-questions (to supplement the grand tour questions guiding each interview outlined above), a list of ‘trigger sentences’ or ‘key words’ was devised for each interview. The first set was devised prior to entering the field, and the second and third sets were devised after the completion of the preceding interview. This process was entirely consistent with my intent to execute the interviews as exercises in “the art of construction rather than excavation”, and my response to addressing the task of working out “how to organize the asking and the listening so as to create the best conditions for the construction of meaningful knowledge” (Mason, 2002a, p.227).

Examples of these trigger sentences and key words are:

Interview 1 Trigger sentences:

Tell me about the milestones in the life of the business; Tell me about the high points, or low points, of the business; What does the future of the business look like?

Interview 1 Key words:

Business demographics (e.g. location, number of employees, turnover, start-up year), goals, motivation, key people, crises, success.

Interview 2 Trigger sentences:

What does the best day doing this feel like? What were the reactions of people in your life to your decision? What in your past do you think influenced your decision?

Interview 2 Key words:

Work history, education, work goals, self-employment exposure, demographics (age, ethnicity, marital status etc.), role models, growing up.

Interview 3 Trigger sentences:

Are you a small business owner-manager? Has starting a business changed you? How important is your business to you?

Interview 3 Key words:

Career, meaning, role, clichés, labels, wok persona, priorities, values, attitudes, self-esteem, pride, boundaries.

The purpose of this tactic (having pre-prepared trigger sentences and key words) was twofold: to assist me in capturing the necessary breadth of data; and to use the sentences or words to aid the participant in conveying the totality of their experience. i.e. to allow them to ‘deviate’ from their ‘narrative’ to communicate sub-plots, stories and reminiscences without losing the thread, or the sense of where they were going with their ‘story’. The congruence between the grand tour question and the list of trigger sentences and key words was such that often the latter was redundant as interviewees were covering those topics anyhow. However, with interviews where it was more difficult to get a ‘flow’ going, or an independent recounting of a participant’s story, they proved useful in a relatively non-intrusive manner. The aim was to make the experience more like a dialogue, rather than the posing of question and the expectation of answers (i.e. the implication that there was a ‘right’, ‘true’, or ‘best’ answer to the question). It seemed to me that this aim was achieved, with many participants making comments like “oh, that wasn’t like an interview” or “I’m sorry I’m talking so much you can’t ask any questions”.

The use of trigger sentences and key words also superseded the use for probes (an interview tool apparently heavily relied upon in qualitative interviews – e.g. see Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2002; Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This attempt to explore, rather than probe, relates to Seidman’s (1998) description of the word probe as implying both “a sharp instrument pressing on soft flesh” and the “sense of the powerful interviewer treating the participant as an object...I am more comfortable with the notion of exploring with the participant than with probing into what the participant says” (p.68).

In terms of timing of the interviews, the process devised by Dolbeare and Schuman (described in Seidman, 1998) stipulated that “the three-interview structure works best... when the researcher can space each interview from 3 days to a week

apart...This allows time for the participant to mull over the preceding interview but not enough time to lose the connection between the two” (p.14-15). This chronological standard was possible for the first and second of the three interviews: Interview 1 for each ten participants was carried out near the beginning of June 2005 and the second before the end of June 2005. There was no more than a week between each interview but the exact dates of each pairing differed. It was less possible to achieve a similar timeframe between the second and third interview. The realities of time pressures for both me (obligations of a full time job – e.g. teaching during the semester) and the participants (committing so much time so close together) meant that the third interview occurred 4-5 weeks after the second (i.e. at the beginning of August 2005). This spacing accommodated the timing issues of both parties, the need to arrange travel, and so forth, and my need to have engaged with the data sufficiently to have designed the next interview ‘protocol’.

The settings for the 30 interviews varied, but in all instances the choice of location was made by the participant. Twenty-one of the 30 interviews occurred at the various firms owned by the participants, which allowed me to get some sense of the characteristics of the various workplaces. Three interviews (all for the same participant) occurred at home and for another participant the three interviews took place at Massey University. Three interviews were also carried out in public spaces (e.g. cafe, hotel). In terms of context, only 13 of the 30 interviews had just me and the participant present. The other 17 interviews took place in a shared space, typically because the work configurations were open-plan, and sometimes this did result in interruptions to the interview. However, the alternative was to have the interviews conducted somewhere which was totally quiet but where the participant did not feel as comfortable as they would in their own space. The outcomes of the interviews, and their analysis, are discussed in the next section of the chapter.

3.4 Analytical approach

The outputs from the data collection process were twofold: digital recordings and, subsequently, typed transcripts of those recordings. This treating of the data as existing in two distinct forms is deliberate, and is consistent with Kvale’s (1996) assertion that not to do so is a failure to acknowledge that a transcript:

“is a bastard, it is a hybrid between an oral discourse unfolding over time, face to face, in a lived situation – where what is said is addressed to a specific listener present – and a written text created for a general distant public” (p.182).

To make the distinction between the two forms is to acknowledge that the data needs to be absorbed and interpreted in both a written and aural form – and that choices regarding data analysis mechanisms should reflect that duality.

As Jones (1985) wrote:

The analysis of qualitative data is a highly personal activity. It involves processes of interpretation and creativity that are difficult and perhaps somewhat threatening to make explicit. As with depth interviewing there are no definitive rules to be followed by rote and by which, for example, two researchers can ensure that they reach identical conclusions about a set of data (p.56).

As is often the way with any endeavour, the characteristics which make it appealing, may also make it more difficult in some respects – qualitative research as an endeavour is no different. The very ‘freedom’ that qualitative research analysis can facilitate is often the very reason it is most often criticised – as is the potential for a similarly qualified researcher to reach different conclusions based on the same set of data. As the next section of the chapter (3.5) explains, the integrity of this research was never going to lie in pseudo-positivist measures of ‘validity’, but instead in the integrity and transparency with which the study itself was executed, and the coherence of the research design. As such, this section of the chapter outlines the choices made about data analysis and describes the way in which these decisions were congruent with the elements of research design presented earlier in this chapter.

The phenomenological approach to interviewing, and the way in which it was grounded in a constructivist framework, meant there were certain approaches to data analysis that were immediately discounted, by way of their inappropriateness. However, this still left a plethora of approaches that remained congruent with the overall research design. The choices to be made at this point relied upon consideration of the ‘givens’ of the research process represented in decisions already made, and the

nature of the data that were being collected as the research progressed. In itself this consideration further discounted the application of some approaches, for example the creation of a grounded theory in the purest sense. Similarly, consideration of my role as researcher in the data analysis process immediately enabled the discounting of other approaches. For example, to take a pure phenomenological approach to analysing the data was deemed unachievable given the caveat in the relevant literature that a researcher must approach the process of reduction and search for 'essences' (Patton, 2002) from a presuppositionless state (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Given my previous work in this topic area, and the accumulation of knowledge over a period of years that this represented, it seemed insincere, and contrary to the purpose of the completion of a doctoral thesis, to abstain from using knowledge already obtained.

Similarly the choice of constructivism lent itself to consideration of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) as an analysis framework. But again in order to 'comply' with the very clear parameters of this approach meant introducing elements to the research journey that were not entirely congruent with either what had already been decided, or with the way the journey itself was emerging. However, the opportunities that this thinking about analysis choices were presenting were those to do with confluence and the possibility of creating a hybrid of approaches that represented *essentials* of the dominant guiding interpretive frameworks the research had been conceptualised within (i.e. constructivism and a phenomenological approach to in-depth interviewing). In reality, this approach meant adopting the most appropriate elements of data analysis mechanisms to honour the intent of the research, and the achievement of the research questions, as opposed to going back and re-crafting the journey in a post-hoc fashion in order to fit perfectly within one particular analysis framework. In tangible terms, it meant the utilisation of elements of a constructivist grounded theory *analysis* (rather than the pursuit of a pure grounded theory itself - especially as the research questions being answered aimed to result in knowledge around perceptions and meanings) with relevant facets of other qualitative analysis tools (e.g. specific approaches to coding and thematic analysis).

Despite consistent attacks on the validity of her approach (e.g. Glaser, 2003) Charmaz has published a significant, and growing, body of work (e.g. 1990; 1997; 2000; 2006) that seeks to explain the nature of her constructivist alternative to what she calls

objectivist grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). She defined a constructivist approach to grounded theory as reaffirming the need to study people in their natural settings, and that grounded theory strategies can be adopted “without embracing positivist leanings of earlier proponents of grounded theory” (Charmaz, 2000, p.510). She goes on to emphasise that a constructivist approach is part of the interpretive tradition and “places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants” (Charmaz, 2006, p.130).

Charmaz (2006) argued that is entirely appropriate to ‘mine’ the flexibility of a grounded theory approach, and argues that “researchers can draw on the flexibility of grounded theory without transforming it into rigid prescriptions concerning data collection, analysis, theoretical leanings, and epistemological positions” (p.178). Elements of her constructivist approach to grounded theory analysis that immediately signalled its appropriateness for application to data collected for this study were: her view of the grounded theory process as “fluid, interactive and open-ended”; her belief that the “research problem informs initial methodological choices for data collection”; and that “researchers are part of what they study, not separate from it” (p.178).

The primary way that the choice of elements of a constructivist grounded theory *analysis* manifested itself was in the useful approaches to coding data Charmaz (1990 & 2006) put forward – and their appropriateness given the chosen underpinning paradigmatic rationale. The primary consideration given to the first reading of the transcripts was for codes that “reflect emerging ideas rather than merely describing topics” (Charmaz, 1990, p.1167). Therefore, during the initial readings (or initial coding phases), priority was given to remaining “open to all possible theoretical directions indicated” (Charmaz, 2006, p.46). Subsequently, focused or selective coding was engaged in (based on the initial codes) in order to synthesise and integrate larger and larger amounts of data (Charmaz, 2006). This cycling back and forth between data and codes enabled the widening, and then focusing, of codes (or conceptual categories) into more useful units of analysis, and their subsequent communication.

This coding process enabled the accomplishment of a number of functions to enable the progression from analysis to communication of findings. Firstly, the process allowed the fracturing of data into manageable elements (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Secondly, it allowed those data to be rejoined, in different ways, in order to represent new categories and emerging ideas. Subsequently this fracturing and rejoining process was reiterated to facilitate the formation of cohesive patterns and trends, and to enable concepts to begin to emerge - i.e. it is the linkages that emerged and the subsequent further analysis of those relationships that extended the analysis beyond the more rudimentary coding aspects of analysis. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) effectively described this process as a:

mixture of data reduction and data complication. Coding generally is used to break up and segment the data into simpler, general categories *and* is used to expand and tease out the data, in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation (p.30).

This complication of data is what is implicitly represented in the variety of 'hierarchies' that have evolved to describe how coding progresses from the simple to the generation of theory, or theoretical concepts. An example of one such hierarchy referred to in the course of analysis for this study was that of Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). They referred to the progression as: moving from the selection of relevant text; to identifying repeating ideas; to grouping or evolving these ideas into themes; and then subsequently theoretical constructs and narratives.

After engaging in the coding processes outlined in the preceding paragraphs, I considered what 'thinking units' (to use Lofland and Lofland's (1984) vocabulary) would be most useful in terms of more detailed analysis, and subsequent communication of that analysis. It became evident that the most logical choice, and the one most effective in interpreting the data in relation to the research questions, was theme. The choice of themes as an analytic, organisational, and communication mechanism was also entirely suitable in terms of incorporating the multiple realities of a constructivist study, and the focus on meaning and essence dictated by the choice of a phenomenological approach to in-depth interviewing.

van Manen (1990) described themes as a way of "identifying the structures of experience" (p.86) and as "a form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand" (p.87). Following van Manen (1990) three approaches were taken to translating the data into themes: 1) a holistic interpretation that attempted to distil key passages or themes into a phrase that reflected its essence; 2) a more selective

interpretation that involved the highlighting of key elements of sentences that seem especially revealing; and, 3) a detailed interpretation that focused even more closely on minute clusters of words or sentences that revealed meaning.

Practically, this translation of codes, text, and ideas into themes happened in two steps (after the grounded theory analysis process outlined on previous page): 1) individual codes, ideas and passages of text were examined in relation to one another, and consideration was given to possible inter-relationships; and, 2) when, or if, linkages between codes, ideas or text were identified an overarching theme was given that coherently fitted the group. For example, in chapter five, an overarching theme is ‘my relationship to my work’ and sub-themes, or topics, are ‘work-life balance’ and ‘personal authenticity’. Specifically, the overarching themes are those that have been used by me to reflect the inter-relationships I saw between the evolving ideas, and the sub-themes are those that emerged from the data itself. Subsequently, it is by theme that the chapters describing findings from the data collection process are presented (i.e. chapters four, five, and six) – with some overarching themes in the chapters having sub-themes and others not. The themes were arranged in the chapters purposively so they most effectively addressed the research sub-questions (presented in chapter one and chapter three). For example, chapter four, entitled ‘Conceptualising my work’, relates to the research sub-question ‘Do young New Zealand entrepreneurs think of entrepreneurship as a form of work’.

In reference to Kvale’s (1996) assertion (noted at the beginning of this chapter) - that transcripts cannot be isolated from the recordings of the interviews themselves the two analytic processes that have been described (coding and theme distillation) were carried out with the separate forms of the same data - i.e. the typed transcripts had the coding procedures applied to them and then subsequently the recordings were listened to in order to enact van Manen’s (1990) framework for thematic analysis (with a phenomenological slant). Executing these two cycles of analysis in parallel was a means of correlating the two representations of the data, enhancing the breadth and depth of the interpretations (e.g. listening to the voices reminded me of nuances or pauses not captured in the typed transcripts), and as a way of identifying the differences thrown up between the transcripts and the recordings themselves. It also, in all probability, enhanced the integrity of the data analysis process itself.

The next section of the chapter makes the link between the research design, its enactment, and its outcomes - and outlines what efforts I made to ensure the study was executed with as much research integrity as possible. This section has sought to make the process of data analysis transparent in order for it to be defended as appropriate and rigorous in the next, and final, section of the chapter. As Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) described:

for your data analysis to be justifiable it must be transparent. This means that other researchers can know the steps by which you arrived at your interpretation. It does not mean that other researchers need to agree with your interpretation; only that they know how you arrived at it (p.84).

3.5 Research integrity

The acknowledgement of my worldview, chosen research strategy, and method have implications for the vocabulary utilised to describe the ‘robustness’ or what might previously, and erroneously, been described as the ‘validity’ of this piece of qualitative research. Fortunately, the evolution of qualitative research as an approach has also been matched by an equivalent commitment by empiricists to develop a new lexicon by which to describe efforts to ensure, what I describe in this thesis as research integrity, is the outcome.

The worldview and research strategy within which this study was conceptualised are such that the pursuit of an objective truth, and therefore an assessment of the relative merit or reliability of that truth, is incongruent with the research design – and the spirit of the research process that was enacted. As Patton (2002) emphasised, research undertaken within the parameters of constructivism involves the study of “the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others” (p.96) - i.e. we, as researchers (and with the participants in the context of this thesis) are constructing knowledge about their reality rather than ‘reconstructing’ the reality itself. Or, to quote Rubin and Rubin (2005), constructivists expect “people to see somewhat different things, examine them through distinct lenses, and come to somewhat different conclusions. In this sense, multiple

and even conflicting versions of the same event or object can be true at the same time” (p.27).

Patton (2002) went on to specify that therefore “any notion of ‘truth’, then, becomes a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with an objective reality” (p.96) – or what Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) described as the justifiability of the interpretations. Similarly, Crotty (1998) suggested that in acknowledging the absence of a true or valid interpretation it instead becomes essential to ensure that “there are useful interpretations...and these stand over against interpretations that appear to serve no useful purpose” (p.47).

Given the implications of worldview and research design for the integrity of the study, and resulting elimination of the pursuit of some typically utilised assessment criteria (e.g. validity or ‘truth’), it became important to substitute these with other notions to assist in the maintenance, and achievement, of the so-called, and desired, research integrity. The concepts of research authenticity (Higgs, 2001) and quality of research craftsmanship (Kvale, 1996) were selected as the most suitable post-modern ‘tools’ to assist in this endeavour. Whilst there are others that have been put forward under the guise of achieving robustness in qualitative research, some of these parallel notions from the positivist paradigm to such a degree, and so explicitly ⁵, that I felt the aforementioned choices of authenticity and quality of research craftsmanship were more consistent with the intent (and heart) of the research design.

Higgs (2001) described research authenticity as a depth of understanding of the chosen research paradigm and the resulting implications of this choice for the execution of the research process - i.e. how best to execute the research in the way that most authentically mimics the tenets of the chosen paradigm. This desire for authenticity involves an appreciation of the dual perspectives (both mine and those of the participants) that impact on the research process (Higgs, 2001), and relates closely to the concept of ethical research (in the broadest sense). To Higgs (2001):

research ethics is not limited to a rather clinical view of ‘doing no harm’; it also needs to be reflected in the closeness of fit (the congruence) between the

⁵ For example, Guba & Lincoln’s (1989) ‘transferability’ to parallel external validity, or ‘generalisability’ and ‘dependability’ to parallel reliability.

researcher's espoused theory/philosophy and the theory or research strategy in action, hence authenticity (p.62).

As a result, ethics in the sense of this study were considered at the more philosophical (or holistic) level put forward by Higgs (2001), as well as what Guillemin (2004) described as the procedural or micro-ethics level. In practice this meant spending time considering the practical issues that would most concern the interviewees (e.g. confidentiality, anonymity of responses, and consent to be recorded during the interview). These issues were covered off with some attention to detail and issues of process, and these tactics were legitimised through the approval for the data collection granted by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (according to its criteria the study was judged to be low risk). In terms of process, the provision of an information sheet and consent form (attached as Appendices A & B) met the obligations I felt towards participants in terms of safeguarding their privacy and dignity. These documents reiterated their rights in the research process (e.g. the right to withdraw at any time, to not answer any question they did not want to, and to have their identity concealed) and provided me with permission to progress the research through its various stages.

In terms of the second measure of the integrity of the chosen research process, the ideal outcome of high quality research craftsmanship, put forward by Kvale (1996), is this:

knowledge claims that are so powerful and convincing in their own right that they, so to say, carry the validation with them, like a strong piece of art. In such cases, the research procedures would be transparent and the results evident, and the conclusions of a study intrinsically convincing as true, beautiful and good. Appeals to external certification, or official validity stamps of approval, then become secondary. Valid research would in this sense be research that makes questions of validity superfluous (p.252).

Kvale (1996) also, and specifically in the context of interviews, put forward a useful reconceptualisation of the notion of validity. i.e. instead of dismissing it entirely he attempts to redefine it in a way that is more congruent with the modern approaches embodied by current qualitative approaches. For him validity become "validation as investigation" (Kvale, 1996, p.242) and the associated actions become: validating as

checking; validating as questioning; and validating as theorising. Therefore, taking into account that Kvale (1983) understands qualitative research (in the guise of in-depth interviews) as consisting of ambiguities and change, and that it is dependent (to some degree) on the sensitivity of the interviewer, and the quality of the interpersonal interaction – “validity means whether one has in fact investigated what one wished to investigate” (p.191).

In this ‘alternative’ approach to considering issues of research integrity, Kvale (1983) outlined the importance of the quality of the interpersonal interaction that constitutes the interview. Traditionally, or certainly in work utilising paradigms other than constructivism or phenomenology, the notion of becoming close to interviewees during the interview process was tantamount to interviewer bias, or leading the interviewee. While there are still legitimate concerns “about interviewers imposing their own reference frame on the interviewees, both when the questions are asked and when the answers are interpreted” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2002, p.93) – there is today far greater appreciation for the potential benefits of the establishment of a ‘relationship’ between the researcher and participant, as against the pursuit of an artificial distance to ensure, so-called, objectivity.

In the context of the chosen strategy for the interviews in this study (i.e. a phenomenological approach), it would have been grossly incongruent, to assume a forced detachment from participants. Given my passion for the topic that was the subject of the ‘conversations’, it would also have been unethical and disingenuous to pretend to have no interest, engagement, or investment in the interviews, the research process, or the study itself. Indeed, as Collis and Hussey (2003) asserted, it is the objective of the phenomenologically inclined researcher to interact with their participant (in this instance) and to “attempt to minimise the distance between the researcher and what is being researched” (p.48). Therefore, what becomes an essential part of authentic research, or quality craftsmanship, is to acknowledge where appropriate (i.e. in reporting data analysis) that “meaning is, to some degree, a function of the participant’s interaction with the interviewer” (Seidman, 1998).

Seidman (1998), when outlining the three-interview method approach described earlier in this chapter, made specific reference to the strength of that approach in improving, or validating to use his chosen terminology, the authenticity of the material collected. These points included the ability to contextualise responses and observe overlap,

contradiction or consistency between interviews. He concluded that the goal of the process is to understand how our participants understand and make meaning of their experience” and that if “the interview structure works to allow them [the interviewees] to make sense to themselves as well as to the interviewer, then it has gone a long way toward validity” (p.17).

One of the ways that authenticity, ethical standards and this notion of sense-making for both parties was achieved was by the sharing of transcripts and recordings of the interviews. Forbat and Henderson (2005) examined the epistemological considerations of sharing transcripts with research participants – and specifically the bearing of such an approach on a project grounded philosophically in the canon of constructivism - i.e. the potential for the assumption that by checking the transcript some indication or approval of a ‘truth’ was being obtained. Therefore, while it was never a realistic, or comfortable, notion not to share the outcomes of the research dialogues with participants, it was important that this sharing was framed in a way that was congruent with the research design - and, that it was not portrayed in a way that made interviewees feel like they had to check what they had said was ‘up to scratch’ or ‘truthful’.

Another concern was that many of the participants had shared thoughts that might look very stark on paper and make them feel vulnerable at the thought that those very personal reflections were going to be used ‘publicly’. Forbat and Henderson (2005) referred to this type of situation as one where the provision of transcripts can have an opposite affect to the one intended - i.e. instead of feeling empowered interviewees feel intellectually threatened or alternatively they begin to “critique themselves as to whether they gave a good interview” (p.1121) – particularly if transcription quality is poor and they are represented on paper ungrammatically or in a way that is unflattering (e.g. the recording of ‘ah’ or ‘um’ every time it is spoken).

In the context of the interviews executed for this study, and to address these potential negatives, it was useful to be able to refer participants back to their research rights (as contained in the ethics documents provided to them), and remind them that at no point would their names be used or quotations linked in any way to material that would identify them or their business. As a result of consideration of all these issues both ‘hard copy’ transcripts and copies of the actual voice recordings themselves were

provided to participants and their options regarding what to do with this material were outlined.

The purpose of this section of chapter three was to demonstrate the standard of research authenticity and integrity that this study was designed to achieve. To conclude the section it is appropriate to reiterate Crotty's (1998) point that a well considered research design (i.e. one that incorporates contemplation of methods, methodology, theoretical perspective and epistemology) goes a long way towards achieving authentic qualitative research: "setting forth our research process in terms of these four elements enables us to do this, for it constitutes a penetrating analysis of the process and points up the theoretical assumptions that underpin it and determine the status of its findings" (p.6). Add to that the purpose of a 'methodology' chapter such as this one (i.e. to explicate what was done, when and how), and the resulting transparency of process goes a long way to convincing all relevant audiences as to the authenticity and integrity of the research process – or what Burr (2003) calls the adequacy of the work.

3.6 Chapter closing

"Research methods are plans used in the pursuit of knowledge. They are outlines of investigative journeys" Polkinghorne (1989, p.41). This chapter described the research design that underpins this study. The consistency of the chosen methods with my worldview, and understanding of how knowledge comes to be created, has been justified. The appropriateness of an interpretive approach (utilising principles of constructivism) and phenomenologically oriented in-depth interviews has also been explained. The ways in which data analysis will be approached, and the integrity of the entire study maintained, have also been described. The next chapter is the first of three that will present findings that emerged from the research engagement.

Chapter 4: The connections between self and firm

Every man's work is always a portrait of himself.

Samuel Butler

1835-1902, English novelist

The earlier chapters of this thesis have presented the rationale for the research that the next three chapters (four, five and six) report on. In chapter one the rationale was presented in terms of the contemporary context, in chapter two in terms of existing theory and literature, and in chapter three in terms of research design. In effect chapters four, five and six are the culmination of those preceding it – they represent the enactment of the rationale. They bring to life the research design by presenting the outcomes of the research (giving voice to the experiences of the research participants), and linking these outcomes to current thinking. In terms of a traditional thesis structure, the results and discussion sections of the thesis are combined within these three chapters.

As discussed in chapter three, ‘theme’ was chosen as the organisational and communication mechanism most suitable for capturing and presenting the meanings and essences that emerged from the interviews, and for representing the multiple realities these constituted. At the conclusion of the data analysis process, three dominant themes emerged, and those themes have therefore been used to structure the next three chapters – with each theme (and its sub-themes) comprising an individual chapter. The three themes are:

The connections between self and firm

Conceptualising my ‘work’

Labelling entrepreneurship

Wherever possible, quotations from the ten interview participants are the primary way their descriptions and perceptions are communicated to the reader. These quotations highlight messages from the interviews that are especially revealing, and use the descriptions (often innovative) applied by the participants to their own experiences (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 1998). The quotations are easily identifiable by the use of a different font and by their indentation in the text.

The quotations are accompanied by my ‘translations’ of other elements of the interviews (van Manen, 1990). These ‘translations’ constitute the distillation of key messages into text (in my voice as researcher) and reflect the essence of those interview elements in a way that is more accessible than the inclusion of large and unwieldy sections of interview transcript. They also combine what Mason (2002a) describes as literal and interpretive approaches to listening to the interviews, with a degree of reflexivity.

The next section (4.1) – in the first of the three results/discussion chapters - introduces the research participants. Then findings related to the first of the three themes listed above will be presented and discussed under the two sub-themes: ‘my relationship to my business’ and ‘what my business means to me’ – further sub-headings are used where appropriate.

4.1 Whose voices? Describing the research participants

At the beginning of the presentation of the findings of the research process (chapters four, five and six) it is useful that the people behind the voices presented in these chapters are ‘introduced’ to the reader. This introduction involves the communication of a variety of facts and descriptors about the individuals and their firms, and will be accomplished by the presentation of brief descriptive vignettes about each of the entrepreneurs. Each descriptive vignette has been read and approved by the person it describes. None reveals the identity of the entrepreneurs or their firms. Further, no identifiers are attached to the quotations used in chapters four, five and six to link them to these vignettes. A guarantee of such anonymity was negotiated with participants to safeguard their privacy (in case their identity was guessed by a reader), and to ensure their voice was heard, rather than revised in terms of what others might think.

4.1.1 Descriptive vignettes

The following are the descriptive vignettes of the ten research participants:

American by birth, this university qualified business owner founded his limited liability company in the food industry in 1998 at the age of 27. Based in Wellington, the business has approximately 95 staff on the payroll (not all full-time workers), and an annual turnover of around \$3.5 million. At the time of the interview he was 35, married with three small children, and managing an expanding business that had grown to comprise four stores.

With a corporate background, a Bachelor of Arts and a teaching qualification this young New Zealander began working for himself in 1998 at the age of 27. The food industry business he started (founded with a friend-business partner) has experienced massive growth, and in 2002 the concept became a franchise system. There are now 39 stores throughout New Zealand, and the firm has an annual turnover of \$38-40 million. Starting out in Wellington, head office for the firm shifted to Auckland and employs the skills of seven staff. The son of a self-employed father, he was 33 at the time of the interview and had been married since he was 25.

This young New Zealander transitioned straight from secondary school to being self-employed at age 18. In 1999, he worked with two similarly aged friends-business partners to launch a Wellington based company in the ICT industry. The firm now employs seven staff and turns over approximately \$500,000 annually. At the time of the interview he was 23 and studying for an MBA while managing a company growth spurt.

The beginning of this hospitality industry based company was in Wellington in 1999. Starting her firm at age 28, with a similarly aged friend-business partner, the founder had previously worked for a considerable period in her family's business. The company employs eight staff and turns over approximately \$800,000 annually. Married and the mother of two young children, she was 35 at the time of the interview.

The founder of this firm in the ICT industry has seen it double in size each year since its beginning in 1997. At age 20 he founded the company in Auckland and has progressed from employing no staff to now having 55 on the payroll. The business has an annual turnover of \$12 million and is on a strong growth trajectory. At the time of the interview he was 28 and engaged to be married.

This MBA qualified business founder launched her enterprise in 2000 in a Wellington incubator. At the time, she was 28 and still working full-time as an employee. As a social entrepreneurship partnership the company turns over approximately \$350,000 and employs two staff in New Zealand and one overseas. Married, at the time of the interview she was 33 years old.

Graduating with a double degree in marketing and economics this business founder ditched the beginnings of a successful corporate career to follow his dream to run his own firm. The son of self-employed parents, he launched the venture he was running at the time of this interview when he was 24. Located in Christchurch the firm delivers a variety of training and development based initiatives, employs 5 full-time staff and turns over \$1.2 million annually. At the time of the interview he was 33 and in a de facto relationship.

With two similarly aged friends-business partners, this tertiary qualified business founder launched a company in the sex industry in 2000 at the age of 27. With a head office in Wellington and three stores in New Zealand and one in Australia, the company turns over \$1.8 million annually and employs 20 staff (the majority as contractors). In a de-facto relationship, she was 32 at the time of the interview.

In 2000, at the age of 29, this business founder walked away from a successful middle management role in the corporate world to launch a retail venture in Auckland. The company turns over approximately \$500,000 and employs two staff. Married with a young son, she was 34 at the time of the interview.

With a friend-business partner this business founder started a company in the professional services industry in 2003 at the age of 26. Dutch by birth, and with a Bachelor and Masterate of Arts, this was his second foray into self-employment. The company is based in Auckland, employs 2 full-time contractors and turns over approximately \$500,000. Married and with a baby on the way, he was 28 at the time of the interview.

4.2 My relationship to my business

The relationship between the individuals who start a business and their firms is generally considered to be a complex one. Arguments in the literature surrounding the relationship between founder and firm that are most relevant to this study are those that have focused on the link as it is experienced for small firm owner-managers (e.g. Culkin & Smith, 2000; Gray, 2002). The discourse on the topic to date has tended to focus on boundaries, or lack thereof, between the individual and the firm. Variouslly,

the boundaries have been described as being permeable, changeable and in many instances, non-existent (Johnson, 1995). Other dynamics that the individual is part of have also been described as affecting the 'relationship' of the individual to the firm (e.g. the dynamics of the family unit in relation to family businesses, Davis & Stern, 1988; Hollander & Elman, 1988). The implications of the differing nature of boundaries have also tended to centre on certain issues, such as work-life balance (e.g. Dex & Scheibl, 2001).

4.2.1 The heart of the relationship

Perhaps logically then, in telling the stories associated with their life as an entrepreneur a theme that emerged from participants related to the way in which they described or conceptualised their 'relationship' with and/or to their firm. The surfacing of the idea of a 'relationship' existing between the individuals and their firms was a consistent element of all the narratives, and reflects a number of things. Firstly, that a firm is not merely conceptualised as a physical manifestation of an entrepreneurial act to the participants - it symbolises a great deal more for the majority of them. Secondly, the relationship is not static or impervious to influence. And, finally that the existence of a relationship provokes thought and reflection by the entrepreneurs who constitute a part of it.

The 'outcomes' of this relationship between the individual and the firm are various (as the content of this chapter attests to). But, at the heart of all the relationships appears the ability of firm creation to change an individual, and the willingness of that individual to be changed (or not). The entrepreneurs in this study appeared to have demonstrated through their narratives the way in which they were willing and able to change as a result of being a business owner – and that this development, or evolution, was a desired part of the process. Indeed, it epitomises Hall's description of identity development as a meta-competency that comprises the "ability to seek and take in feedback information about one's self" and demonstrate "self-awareness, the extent to which one has a clear understanding of one's own values, needs, interests, goals, abilities and purpose. Thus, identity growth is not just about knowing yourself but also about knowing how to learn more about yourself" (2002, p.33).

It is not to say that working as an employee does not facilitate such personal development, but that, instead, creating a business has such an effect in a unique, and perhaps more profound, fashion. The profundity of the experience appears potentially to be intensified by the individual's emotional attachment to the firm - something that is not always a facet of an employer-employee relationship - as well as their choice to pursue such a working 'style' (and its dominance within their life). i.e. the crossing of boundaries, or making the notion of a separation of work and life redundant.

What was common to all the young entrepreneurs was the way they described how they related to their firms in language similar to that used to describe an emotional attachment. To them their firms were more than manifestations of the pursuit of an entrepreneurial opportunity, or of business acumen, or of financial success. They were described as vehicles for personal expression, development and fulfilment. Emotion as a facet of the entrepreneurial experience has been largely neglected in the literature (Goss, 2008), bar attention to it in the context of health and well-being (e.g. in terms of stress, Akande, 1994; Buttner, 1992; Jamal, 1997; Johnson, 1995; Rahim, 1996; Vasumati, Govindarajalu, Anuratha & Amudha, 2003) and work-life balance (e.g. Chay, 1993; de Bruin & Dupuis, 2004; Dex & Scheibl, 2001).

As relevant literature has established, a firm is frequently considered to be an extension of the founder, or engenders a strong identification at a personal level (Gray, 2002; Van Praag, 2003). In the case of firms that are small, this identification is seen as more prevalent given the relative lack of boundaries between the firm and the rest of what constitutes that founder's life (Culkin & Smith, 2000). Johnson (1995) went as far as to describe a firm as a 'psychological child' of its founders, and that the intensity of the associated emotions can be exacerbated by the difficulty in distinguishing between the individual and their firm.

4.2.2 Entrepreneurship and self-worth

The dominant way in which business formation was described as being emotionally fulfilling was in terms of the enhancement of self-esteem and feelings of self-worth. This link was primarily described as being enacted as a relationship between the perceived success of the business (in the mind of the entrepreneur) and the subsequent effect of that perception on their self-esteem. Johnson has also commented on such a

link, and, further, that the volatility of a small firm environment (often the first business domain of the young entrepreneur) can lead to a “volatile self-concept significantly affected by the day-to-day fortunes of the business” (1995, p.15). The statement of one participant reflected the opinions of all the rest when she categorically stated that ‘business success and personal self-esteem is the same thing’.

In the beginning we all three of us sacrificed everything so I felt like I had no life except for the business and that all of my intimacy and my feelings of self worth and everything was really tied in with the business... it really did take a few years before we sat down and went man, this is not good - we have to find some sort of balance here.

... they are one and the same. If the business is doing badly you feel like shit.

Many participants could see the benefit of this symbiotic relationship, and its inevitability given the intensity of their commitment to, and involvement in, their firms.

... what you do in your life is... going to be intertwined in your character and how you feel about yourself... I think that the sheer fact that we have made something that we're all so proud of is going to make us feel good about ourselves.

The disadvantages of such a close entanglement between business success and feeling of self-worth were also described. A number of participants described a lack of pride in the close association between the two constructs, but that their awareness of the link was at least a step towards resolving the issue – or at least dealing with its potential consequences.

A hard one to do is to not attach your how you feel to what your bank account is looking like and I've definitely done that... it's a real challenge to detach from that. To not care... and to be honest I haven't figured it out really.

I don't think technically there should be [a link between business success and self-esteem]... but for me there is a direct link... and I know that it's not healthy... I know I am not my business. I am who I am and the business is something that I do but I haven't learnt yet how to unravel that.

A number of participants expressed the opinion that this intertwining of business success and self-esteem was at its most intense in the early stages of the business, and that becoming aware of it triggered a desire in them to establish some distinction between the ways in which they judged their own worth from that of their business. One participant described the shift in thinking in the following way:

My whole self esteem isn't tied up in it and now it's a challenge rather than who I am...so I'm able to separate myself enough to enjoy working on it and enjoy some of the fruits of the success of the business.

One interpretation of this statement is that the intensity of the relationship between perceived self-worth and business performance was not diminished per se, but that instead it was reframed so as to be a stimulus rather than a burden - and therefore ultimately contribute to the overall sustainability of the firm and the endeavours of the entrepreneur.

4.2.3 The seamlessness of self and firm

The awareness of the nature of the relationship, and its impact, was reflected most in the caveats, or explanations, or justifications of the participants about how they had taken steps to address the negative dimensions of the intertwining of life and firm. However, it appears that this all occurred after the fact (i.e. they had no idea pre start-up as to the all-consuming nature of the endeavour they were embarking upon). Some participants also described how the untwining began to happen as the life-cycle of the firm evolved. That is, as the firm survived, or became sustainable, or began to draw upon the resources of individuals other than the founder, the disentanglement of founder and firm could begin.

...about three years ago the business was so closely interwoven with my personality that it would be impossible to separate the two...but in the last few years I've been able to separate myself from the business a lot more, and I've actually focussed on doing that because as I alluded to earlier, your health suffers if you are too involved...everything suffers, your relationships suffer too.

However, for others the entwining of ego and firm performance appeared to be accepted as an inevitability and stimulated no conscious change of thought pattern or action.

I think one of the problems that people have in business is that their ego is so entwined with their business...that they think, they believe, that it will fall apart without them being there, that only they can do the work, that they are the best at doing it.

Further, it was considered that to attempt such a detachment would be impossible. In many instances the deep involvement of the young entrepreneur was described as being essential to the survival (cf. success) of the firm.

It has to just be the dominating thing...I don't really have much of a personal life. I just don't have time.

It is not that the business is my life, but definitely at the moment it would be close to impossible for the business to work without me in it. It is an aspiration to move beyond that though.

The relationship between the young entrepreneurs and their firms were in all instances strong and in essence boundaryless. That is, there was no apparent separation between the conceptualisation of work and personal life – it was just their life, in totality. For many participants this manifested as the inclusion of personal goals either explicitly in their business plan, or implicitly in the way they structured their work life.

I could go to Melbourne and have a much bigger business overnight ...the reason I didn't do it is because when I wrote my business plan the first thing I put at the top was my personal goals. Number one at the top I want to be a good wife and mother...but at the same time I want financial independence.

It was clear that while this seamlessness was intended, its desirability as a continuing state was less clear from their responses. But some described separation from such a tie as a goal. While the nature of the data is such that comparisons or generalisations are neither possible, nor appropriate, it is interesting to note that it was the six males in the group who explicitly spoke of a desire for a severing of the emotional tie to the business, or to limit their involvement in terms of depth of attachment or involvement. This is not to say that they wished to diminish their commitment to, or passion for, their firm. Instead they felt they could replace that with another dimension in their life (i.e. derive satisfaction from elsewhere), or that doing so would allow them to commit more time and emotional energy to other elements of their life (e.g. partners and families). So, for all the entrepreneurs who were interviewed, firm ownership could facilitate the enlarging of a priority, or area of emphasis, whilst at other times it could see a reduction. Overall, it would seem that they felt that the happier they were the more they were able to give to the firm, and that the nature of this giving needed to change over time from the excessive, almost obsessive, link to the firm that was often described as being required early on in its life.

For some participants their attachment to their firm afforded them opportunities to behave in ways that fulfilled them as individuals in a manner that they felt being an employee would not. This strongly resonated with Cornwall and Naughton's (2003) description of the way in which entrepreneurship is a way of realising self through the choices made about work - self-transformation through labour. These behaviours were various in nature, but shared the characteristic of personal fulfilment as their objective and/or outcome. For a number of participants, firm start-up enabled them to be leaders (of not just their firm but their life), and to lead well for the benefit of their employees. For some it was a means to feeling useful, serving a purpose beyond that of self-satisfaction or capitalist reward. A number also spoke of a desire to leave a legacy and that a firm was such a contribution. For one individual, it satisfied his need to prioritise work in a way that may be considered maverick. His choice was not to place it first (despite its importance to him) and for that to be acceptable, and not judged by others as a measure of a lack of ambition, dedication or excellence.

4.2.4 The language of attachment

For nearly all the ten young entrepreneurs the firm was conceptualised as such, as an extension of them – of their self, their identity, their personality, their essence. It was both more important to them because of this, and more risky for this to be so. That is, the coupling of self and firm had to be, to some extent, unravelled (at least figuratively if not in reality) so as to ensure that the fate of both were not entwined to the point of inextricability, or damage to either entity. How they chose to work through the nature of this relationship for themselves varied. For some it involved a process of ongoing reflection and change; for others it involved the engagement of a business partner to temper the isolation and excessive commitment. For others, it was acknowledged and accepted, and was therefore not something to solve as such.

The language with which the relationship between self and firm was described emerged from the narratives as being potentially indicative of the way in which the link was conceptualised by the participant. Consistently, narratives of passion, commitment, energy and vitality emerged that buoyed the teller in the recounting and obviously sustained them in periods of doubt or hardship. The history of how they came to be entrepreneurs was something they appeared to draw upon on a day-to-day basis to sustain them in a variety of ways. For the female entrepreneurs who were interviewed there were certain commonalities in the use of language that made their discourse on this facet of the topic distinct from their male counterparts. It was characterised by adjectives that reflected their emphasis (consciously or subconsciously) on the emotional dimension of the connection – either as an imperative or as the way in which they chose to make sense of meaning of the inter-relationship. The nature of the bond was variously described as providing emotional fulfilment and succour, as enhancing their perceptions of self-worth, and, as adding a dimension to their identity that helped them surpass the expectations and/or assumptions of others. For the male entrepreneurs who were interviewed, the stories they told did not lack passion or engagement but were characterised by language that suggested either a deliberate tempering of the emotional side of the self-business relationship, or a conceptualisation that was not characterised by an emotional imperative. They tended to talk about the link in terms of prioritisation, or hierarchy, or strategy, or efficacy – particularly in terms of figuring out where the relationship fitted and would be most effective. This points to the ways in which the attachment of individual to firm, and how that is conceptualised and enacted, may differ according to a variety of factors – including gender, and not just age.

4.3 What my business means to me

Ultimately starting a business involves a decision, and that decision can be grounded in a set of circumstances that are positive or negative. This results in what have been described as opportunity or necessity based entrepreneurs (Reynolds, Camp, Bygrave, Autio & Hay, 2001). The former make a decision based on pull factors (i.e. the positives of self-employment), whereas the latter are driven by push factors (i.e. the negatives of a situation, or particular set of circumstances, influence their decision). All ten research participants described their path to entry in positive terms. However, that was not to say that dissatisfaction did not play a role; instead the narrative the participants shared focused on their ownership of the decision (i.e. that it was not forced upon them).

Two participants started their firms without having worked 'seriously' for anyone else (i.e. one straight from school and one straight from university). But, of the ten participants, the majority (seven) left what could be described as 'the corporate world' in order to start their own business. The rationales for this differed, but included: the inability to be themselves at work; the lack of satisfaction with the lifestyle that type of work afforded them; the influence of the rigidity and routine of work patterns on the rest of their life; the potential impact of people they had little respect for (e.g. bad bosses) on their careers and work life; and, the feeling most typically phrased as 'there has to be more to life than this'. For example, one participant described her antecedent realisation in these terms:

...it was actually around this time that I realised that, in a blinding flash really, that I could go from organisation to organisation, but unless I was at the top of that organisation I was always going to be at the mercy of a bad manager or a bad Chief Executive Officer, or something that was outside of my control, something that could create a really horrible working environment for me or for other people.

In describing how they started a business, and some of the antecedents to the decision, the participants began to articulate what their business meant to them. For some participants it was clearly something they had reflected on as part of the process they had gone through, whereas for others it appeared more like they were 'working

through' their feelings as they talked during the interview. All the participants spoke in terms that indicated that their firms were intertwined, to a greater or lesser extent, with them as a person – with their life, with their identity, with their wellbeing. The impact of that inter-relationship was described variously, but always (as described in the preceding section of this chapter) with complexity, emotion and awareness.

4.3.1 Entrepreneurship as a path to creativity & freedom

Two descriptors of the meaning of the firm used by the participants dominated their narratives on this aspect of their life: creativity and freedom. Starting a firm was seen as a mechanism for achieving these (and a myriad of other complex, and other emotionally driven, qualities) – as outlined earlier in this chapter. The essence of this message from participants about the firm being a mechanism for achieving other things is that the desired state (or qualities) were infrequently described as those traditionally associated with business priorities (e.g. profit, growth etc). Instead the descriptions of what the 'mechanism' could achieve were couched in terms more associated with life-style choices. However, this is not to say that the participants could, or should, be described as life-style entrepreneurs (that is those that pursue lifestyle related objectives in preference to increased profit and/or growth) (Bridge, O'Neill & Cromie, 2003; Deakins & Freel, 2003; McMahan, 2001).

The firm was also described as being an opportunity for creativity by over half the participants. Creativity was variously described as a process, an activity, a calling, or an imperative. But, in all instances this was underpinned by the assertion that creativity was a means of self-expression, and that therefore, those who created firms did so to further their opportunities for creativity and to express themselves in a fashion consistent with that creative imperative.

...being able to create, to be able to have the freedom to create something that we know will work and is going to be amazing and be paid for it, that's our dream job.

It's personal growth... the ability to create income through not being told to do something but to create it myself...and it's fulfilment, personal fulfilment....It's the creativeness, being able to create things that we want...business is a mechanism for that.

...for me it's not being rich and famous. It's comfortable and something that supports my family, and also that it supports people who want to work in that sort of environment.... We want people to feel the inspiration and the creativity and feel I want to make something or do something.

The pursuit of freedom (via the creation of a firm) was often described as occurring in parallel with the achievement of a degree of security (typically described as being of a financial nature).

I think it creates opportunity. It gives you freedom to do what you really want to and it gives security for sure and...choices to get whatever you want in your life.

The possibility of conceiving of freedom and security as being incongruous, if only to a degree, creates an interesting framework in which to consider the achievement of both these by the young entrepreneurs - and how they saw starting their own firm as the best way to achieve both. Interestingly, it would seem that they were not seeking to prioritise the pursuit of one over the other, but rather the opportunity to create a situation where one would facilitate the other without the need for precedence. For example, being an employee (which the majority of participants were prior to firm start-up) was described as largely impossible to achieve freedom, but easy to reach a position of security. The opposite is often said of self-employment (that is it is easy to reach a level of occupational or freedom, but difficult to reach a level of security). However, it would seem that the majority of this group of young entrepreneurs conceptualise the two as not being mutually exclusive, and further, explicitly set out to ensure one brings about the other. They did so either by using their free will to choose to work the number of hours it will take to ensure security, or to achieve security and then exercise their freedom to reduce the hours they spend in the venture, or participate in other forms of entrepreneurial endeavour. One participant explicitly told of the irony he felt at the thought of himself being described as 'his own boss', describing how he now had more 'bosses' than he had ever had before (i.e. he felt the obligation to his staff, clients etc. as an equal, if not greater, responsibility):

...the whole sort of be your own boss thing, well that's a bit of a joke...because you're never your own boss. When you work for someone else you've got one boss, when you run the business you've got 30 different bosses.

4.3.2 Personal autonomy as a driver

Business start-up was also described as facilitating the pursuit, and/or achievement, of personal autonomy - a concept well established in the entrepreneurship literature as being an influential driver in terms of business start-up (e.g. Feldman & Bolino, 2000; Kolvereid, 1996; Kuratko, Hornsby & Naffziger, 1997; Shane, Kolvereid & Westhead, 1991; van Gelderen, Jansen & Jonges, 2003). At its simplest, literature in this area puts forward the rationale of independence and personal control as the primary motivator for a great number of people to start their own businesses.

One participant described the antecedent relating to autonomy that stimulated her decision to start up:

I think it was the ability to influence my own success or failure really...having had a bad experience with a manager and making the realisation that it didn't have to be that way.

Four of the ten participants used the phrase 'designing their life' in relation to the link between business start-up and personal autonomy.

...the easy aspect is having money so you can have stuff that you want...you can do whatever you want whenever you want....So that's definitely one part of it, one motivator, the other part is autonomy...being your own boss...being able to call the shots. Do whatever you want. Design your life how you want it to be.

That is, creating a firm (rather than working in somebody else's) allowed them control over all aspects of their life – not just the occupational sphere. So, the element of design at work (in relation to work structure, content, context and quality) facilitated the design of how other dimensions of life interacted, or complemented, that activity (or vice versa). This inter-relationship – or inter-dependence – was described as critical. The participants stressed that which dictated to the other could

vary according to the individuality of the situation, the person, or the firm itself. This concept of 'life design' also ensured (for those participants) that their work could fulfil multiple functions, or satisfy them beyond a purely occupational sense. Namely, their work could serve a purpose beyond merely work. They articulated this other purpose as either fulfilling a personal vision, or ensuring they felt they were making a difference with their life or in the lives of others (through the creation of their firm).

There is nothing to say that the desire for personal autonomy was a strong driver for business start-up for the group of young entrepreneurs who were interviewed for this study. However, it seems (on the basis of the narratives that they recounted) that there is some merit in attempting to add some nuance and appreciation of subtlety and/or diversity, in relation to the intent of this construct in terms of its manifestation. That is, what might comprise, or be labelled, personal autonomy by one person might mean something quite contrary to another. Whilst it is not possible from a study such as this to contribute a generalisable new meaning, it is possible to draw from the stories from this group some new experiences – and these may stimulate an extension to the defining of personal autonomy as a driver for business start-up, or preclude its continued use a general tag to describe a variety of experiences that have far more richness than that to offer. The implications of this study are twofold: we could gain a clearer understanding of the experience of entrepreneurship from the perspective of the entrepreneur, and we could have an insight into an experience, that whilst subjective in nature, is expected to be one in which external interventions are expected to improve chances of success. Irrespective of whether those implementing the initiatives have any awareness and/or appreciation of the import or personal history, identity, and intention.

4.3.3 Meaning beyond money

These descriptions of work (in the guise of firm creation and/or being an entrepreneur) having the ability to fulfil the participants beyond traditional occupational measures was a thread throughout all the narratives.

I suppose it's my escape now... As well as that it facilitates our life. That's its role....It certainly gives me a sense of achievement which I definitely

need....My business is a big thing...it comes up in conversation before anything else, usually.

The importance of achievement beyond financial success to all the participants cannot be overstated. Not that they did not want financial success, but that it was never all that they wanted, or only wanted. Instead they described it as a by-product of the attainment of other states of 'success' or happiness or satisfaction – or as the achievement of goals that served both business and personal objectives. Nearly all the participants used the phrases personal fulfilment, personal growth, personal journey, or personal challenge to describe how the experience of firm creation contributed to their development as a person, as well as an entrepreneur. Examples of the way participants described these developments included the following:

Overall I'm...much happier and more fulfilled....I'm basically the same person – I'm just being true to myself...I'm no longer...feeling like I'm denying myself in some way.

It took me a long time to get the courage to do it. I didn't even know what it was but I've always had this need to do this thing but been way too shy to take any action on it...just very low confidence which was really at odds with this inner need to do it. I just got to the stage where I just absolutely had to. You don't get another chance at life you've just got to do it.

... then a big part of it [starting and running your own business] is also who you've become as a person in making that happen....It implies change, it implies improvement...I will have really sorted a whole lot of crap out for myself you know...It's as much a personal growth journey as it is a financial journey.

I suppose one of the reasons I wanted to have a business is I wanted to leave a bit of a legacy. I think with the way the economy is going and the way the world is going the most effective vehicle for doing that is to have a business.

... basically this is the purpose of my life....I've always believed I'm here to make a difference in some way... to do something, create something.

To me it's a hugely exciting amazing thing...an incredible thing...it's totally fulfilling and will be totally fulfilling... it's just a great big adventure.

... it's a mission, a life's mission.

The strength of these feelings varied from participant to participant, but some were extremely passionate about their feelings and used language that would evoke the strength of these emotions. For example, one participant described the creation of her firm as the 'purpose of her life', and as the 'antidote' to the feeling that she was wasting her life. When she thought about what it would mean to her to lose the business she described that prospect as the shattering of a dream, and questioned what her life would mean.

The consequence of business creation being a proxy, or catalyst, for personal development for the participants was the emotional consequences – described variously as positive or negative. The term rollercoaster, used by one participant, seems an accurate analogy to use to express the variance of emotional experience, and ultimately impact described by participants. However, for all the recounting of negative emotional effects, participants ultimately focused on articulating the way in which negative emotions had resulted in a positive experience, or learning of a lesson for the future. This can be interpreted in one of two ways by an outsider (e.g. researcher or reader): that participants were presenting a glowing picture to an outsider who might judge their 'success', or alternatively that they had sufficient commitment to their firm to reflect on all aspects of the entrepreneurial experience, and desire to learn from both the positives, and the negatives. As one participant described it: I want to emotionally feel it [the experience of starting and running his firm]. As the nature of the research design of the study relies upon the essence of experience, it is the latter interpretation I chose to focus on.

The way in which three of the female entrepreneurs described their emotional entwinement with, and therefore the meaning of, their firm was made more complex for them by the inclusion of what they described as 'the motherhood dynamic'. For one of the women, the time and emotional energy she committed to her firm created feelings of guilt in relation to her role as a mother. She describes overcoming these feelings, or learning to deal with them, by intellectually processing the issues that had driven her to be both mother and entrepreneur simultaneously. The conclusion she

described reaching was that each helped her be better in the other role. So, when she was investing more time in one role (at the perceived expense of the other), she rationalised that, in the end, it would be of greater benefit to both her children, family and her business partners to have done so. This one example illustrates how the notion of women working for themselves in order to make a maternal role easier is overly simplistic, as is the notion that the roles need to be, or in fact are, in conflict. For some women it appears that it can take more time than they may ever put into their business to mentally reconcile how the two fit together. Raising the issues of how, or if, it is possible, desirable, or necessary to do so? For the three women participants who were fulfilling these dual roles, they persisted in working at achieving such role reconciliation because they wanted to realise that synergy.

I thought how you do this with a child? And how do you be a good mother? And how do you be a good employee without feeling like you're compromising both of them? So what I thought was I need to have my own business so I've got my own satisfaction but I've also got control of my life.

Another woman facing the same role-related issues described her situation in quite a different way. Her business life was described as part of her (as opposed to being just a job) and as giving her a sense of personal success and financial freedom. She also described how the identity of business owner or entrepreneur (a theme which will be discussed in detail in chapter six) empowered her with the sense of feeling different, and enabled her to rise above the subsuming of her personal identity within the role of mother. Or, as she described it, allowed her 'to be not just a mother' and give her 'a sense of being who I always was'.

I mean for me I suppose I get a feeling of status from the fact that I have got this business... you know I'm at a stage of my life where lots of women are struggling to figure out what their identity is, so I'm very lucky...I'm surrounded by mothers who have had good careers who cannot continue....It definitely gives me a sense of self worth....I mean I'm making a significant contribution to our family...it means I've still got my independence....

It gives me a sense of being a little different... To not be just a mother and God help me if you say that in front of someone who's just a

mother... Certainly for me I think, probably more than ever now that I'm a mother, I feel a sense of success with the business because I've got this mixture of motherhood and working... I think for me it gives me a much stronger sense of being who I always was you know. I feel like I've had to change and I don't have to justify my existence.

At its essence her narrative communicates that this woman appeared to lose an element of her identity (of a successful professional woman working in the corporate world at a management level) when she became a mother, and that starting a firm (and assuming the corresponding identity of entrepreneur) gave her back something she felt she had lost. The meaning of her firm to her therefore went beyond what might be naturally assumed - that is, the means for a working mother to achieve a balance between income-generating activity and child rearing. Instead it ascribed a sense of identity, and of status (in her own mind), at a time in which she described many mothers struggling with issues of self-worth. For this participant, her firm gave her that and contributed to her new identity as entrepreneur-mother.

4.4 Chapter closing

At the beginning of this chapter the ten young entrepreneurs who participated in the study were described using short vignettes. Findings related to the connections between the young entrepreneurs and their firms were then discussed in the remainder of the chapter. Two main themes emerged. These were: the nature of the relationship between the individual entrepreneur and their firm, and what the business therefore meant to them. The nature of the relationship was that of a strong attachment grounded in emotion. The intertwining of the life of the business with the life of the young entrepreneur was a consistent message, and this was couched in positive terms. The outcome of the relationship, or of being entrepreneurial in the context of a firm, was frequently described as personal development and enhanced feelings of self-worth. The meaning of the firm to the young entrepreneur was therefore quite logically significant, and characteristic of the relationship between the two. The meanings went beyond businesses as mechanisms for achieving monetary wealth, they were also perceived to be tools for achieving other ambitions: for example, autonomy, freedom, creativity, and identity.

Chapter 5: Conceptualising my 'work' _____

Work is much more fun than fun.

Noel Coward

1899-1973, English playwright

This chapter, the second of the results/discussion chapters is centred on two main sub-themes: how the young entrepreneurs relate to their 'work', and, how the way they work is a reflection of them as a person.

5.1 My relationship to my work

As the previous chapter outlined, the ways in which the young entrepreneurs connected with their firms encapsulated a deep, ongoing, emotional attachment. Therefore, it seems plausible that the perhaps atypical way they conceptualise this link may have some influence on the way in which they think about the way they 'work', and indeed whether they make sense of what they do by thinking of it as work, or not. Within the ways the interviewees described what it was that they did to 'earn a living', and the origins of their firm, they used a vocabulary and narrative to communicate, what was in essence, the relationship they have to their 'work'. As this section of the chapter will demonstrate, elements of these narratives overwhelmingly indicated that starting, running and growing a business is not simply work to these this group of young New Zealand entrepreneurs – it is more, much more.

Nearly all the participants told stories of the huge amounts of time they commit to their firms. Many told how these enormous hours were characteristic of the early periods of the firm's existence, but a similar number also reported that excessively long weeks were still a pattern in their working life.

Lots of hours...basically for three years we didn't have a life...we didn't pay ourselves for three years either.

For the first three years it was 7 days a week, blood, sweat and tears, 16 hours a day. I had a bed under my desk... or I slept on the floor quite often.

I was working about 120 hours a week initially... it was quite exhausting... it was physical... But I had a good brand, knew I had a really good product.

What was identical about these accounts (beyond the long hours they described) was the spirit with which they were offered: not as complaint, but as testament - testament to their commitment to their firm, to their way of life, and ultimately their choice of a way to work.

In parallel with these impassioned tales of commitment, was the offering up of rationales for the amount of time that the individual was giving to their firm. It appeared to me that these were offered as an attempt to offset any negative conclusions that the participants felt might be made by me, or others, about the amount of their life they were committing to enacting entrepreneurship in their life. Whilst at the time I felt like offering up a disclaimer that no judgment was being made of the stories they were telling, I began to consider instead why they were taking that approach: that is, to essentially deviate from the telling of their story to add caveats in their own defence. My conclusion is therefore that they were prompted by a discourse that is currently prevalent within societies about how much work is too much work. When I examined the transcripts more closely, this interpretation was substantiated, if only in part, by the proximity to these justifications in the narratives of opinions expressed in relation to the concept of work-life-balance (WLB) - the current neologism being used to encapsulate the ideal state that all New Zealand workers should be striving towards (whatever it is that they do).

5.1.1 Work-life balance

Whilst currently popular, the concept of WLB is in no way considered as received wisdom by those who run their own firms. Indeed, there is a segment within the relevant literature that challenges its relevance to those who run small businesses (e.g. Harris, Lewis & Massey, 2005). Often the even more vociferous opponents to the concept of WLB are the owner-managers of these enterprises themselves (e.g.

Department of Labour, 2004). They consider the concept to have been ill-conceived and without due consideration of the realities of life as the owner-manager of a small enterprise. The views expressed by the young entrepreneurs in my study supported this assertion, and went some way to contributing an alternative way of understanding the concept, or demonstrating why it is possibly outmoded or irrelevant to entrepreneurship as a form of work, and/or to young entrepreneurs specifically.

So, while the participants recounted huge hours, they also declared that they were not unhappy with that situation. Some accepted it as a reality, while others embraced it as a manifestation of their commitment to their firm. Most added that they were not unhappy with the number of hours invested because they were happy doing what they were doing. For some this meant they worked as long as they wanted as opposed to counting hours, whilst others described how the idea of a working week was not a relevant way of conceptualising how they worked, or what mediated the way they chose to work. So, their passion for, and enjoyment of, what they were doing superseded the accepted norm of a standard working week, and in fact meant that they routinely gave more time than that to their firm willingly. Therefore, long work hours and happiness at work were not seen as two opposing states. For many it seemed that starting a firm was a mechanism for achieving a state of happiness at work that they had not previously experienced, and one which bore no relation to the number of hours they did or did not spend there. As a result the objective of any attempt at implementing WLB strategies for these young entrepreneurs was not about working less (or spending less time on the business) in order to achieve either a happier state, or some sense of the idealised state of balance.

The opinions the participants offered in relation to WLB appeared firmly held and demonstrated that they felt there was little merit in striving for such a state – if it was indeed achievable or, more importantly, desirable.

...well I think work-life-balance is a bit of a dumb saying...I've always thought that...I mean it's a dumb saying for me because I'm the sort of person that would never have the concept of work as being unpleasant... Work is not a torturous thing....I mean if I wasn't working I'd be bored.

What this, and other narratives, signaled to me was the possibility that work was not conceptualised as such by the participants. Instead they made sense of what they do to ‘earn a living’ in a different way – an idea that is focused on subsequent sub-sections of this chapter.

I find that I don't actually like work that much. When I think of work, I don't like it, and I wouldn't want to do it too much. But building a business to me is not... work. If something seems like work then I don't want to do it, and that is one of the reasons that I dropped out of university... Basically if you are excited or passionate about something, and you can see there is potential and you like what you are doing then ... time flies and everything is easier.

Many of the ways that the time involved in being in business was described by the participants indicated that they were not interested in using objective, externally imposed measures of achievement – or perceived societal norms in regard to work – as a means of judging the way in which they enacted their working life. For example, the number of hours worked per week was not seen by most as relevant or important. Neither, as the following chapter (six) will demonstrate, was the notion of profit as a proxy for success.

These apparent refusals to accept traditional work performance measures signal an independence that could perhaps be described as typical of an individual who chooses to work for themselves. However, in this group it seems to manifest as an extreme desire not to be boxed in, to be judged, or to be evaluated by what could be called conservative, or traditional, ways of thinking about work. Instead they seem to take extreme pride in what others might see as the maverick way in which they organise their life – both work and its other constituents. It is this non-standard way of organising their time that they value, cling to, as perhaps one of the best things about being in business for themselves. Nowhere is this imperative for the enactment of individual freedom in regard to the managing of work and life more apparent than in the narrative of this one entrepreneur:

There's a whole lot of things about balancing your work and life which doesn't mean necessarily reducing your hours but it can mean working

when it's convenient for you to work...my wife is a doctor and she was doing odd hours governed by her shifts and weekend work... so if I could be more plastic in the way I arranged my blocks of work in my calendar I could fit around her free time better...meditation is a big part of my life and I like to do it in the morning and I don't like to wake up at 5 in the morning or whatever so being able to stroll into work at 9:30 (or 10 even) makes a really big difference to my life and...I come to work kind of clear headed and relaxed... that's work life blending as well.

The personal autonomy in relation to a working life is prized, as is the independence of choice and action that allows them to integrate other parts of their life into their working life, or vice versa, in a way that is most efficacious for them – rather than according to what ‘others’ might judge to be appropriate. The opportunity to buck what is standard seems in part a strong motivator as to why they committed to this form of work in the first instance.

Indeed, while advocating the appropriateness of non-standard work for them, the participants did not hesitate to reveal the ways in which they compromised aspects of their life in order to ensure the survival, if not success, of their venture. For some this meant ignoring maintaining good health and wellbeing, while for others it entailed neglecting people or activities other than work in their life – for example, friends and/or hobbies.

I think I'd be healthier if I wasn't self employed. But, I'm getting better at balancing it because over time I've learned when you're really physically run down you don't perform as well in life.

To be honest it [running my business] has probably made other stuff that I do smaller...forced into a smaller space...things like having friends or having hobbies....my life is not worse because of that, it's just the business is a bigger part of my life than it might be of other peoples'.

Whilst the concept of WLB was largely dismissed by the participants, there was dialogue from them about the need to balance elements of their life, but that it was not

helpful, or relevant, for them to dichotomise them into 'work' and the 'rest of life'. Instead they were interested in pursuing a blending, of the people, activities or domains of their life that enabled the optimal resource allocation, productivity and enjoyment possible. Where work came in terms of this prioritisation was consistently high. But, most of the participants spoke of the need to be flexible, or 'plastic' as one entrepreneur termed it, in order to achieve maximum satisfaction from this merging of life domains and roles – that is, to alter the emphasis placed on the variety of elements according to where the need was greatest, or the derivation of satisfaction most important.

One activity that was described by a number of the participants as deserving precedence in terms of the way they organised their time was thinking. A number described ways in which they deliberately factored in opportunities to spend time within a 'work day' (or outside) in order to think specifically about their firm, their role in it, and its future.

I guess it's a balance of everything...of business and ideas...I like a lot of thinking time.

Since I've had the company no matter what I'm doing I'm always thinking about the company and that is something that's enjoyable...like I could be on a beach in Fiji doing that and all that happens is my thoughts are more productive and my goals get bigger. Whereas if I'm not on holiday and I'm really stressed out working 16 hours a day what tends to happen is my thinking is on business but it's all about the small minutiae of what needs fixing and that kind of thing...So what happens is when I go on holiday I can start expanding my thinking but it's still about the business...I went into holiday in January and I came up with about 6 new ideas for business...There is no boundary for me between my business and personal life.

This is one example of how the pursuit of more time, was not to use such temporal slack for leisure but for business related activity (in this instance, thinking). The participants who described this desire for, and achievement of, periods of thinking time spoke of this as being linked to their love of ideas – both coming up with their

own and contemplating how those of others fitted with those. One participant described how he used 'long showers' and 'lying in' to achieve this brain space. Another talked about 'uninterrupted' time with his laptop, and another about the chance to have time writing in his notebook.

WLB cannot therefore be described as an issue for the participants in this study. Whilst it emerged in their narratives, it was in the context of assuring me why it wasn't an issue, or to demonstrate how they had addressed it, or questioned its relevance at all.

I don't feel like I need to switch off at all because it [running my business] doesn't sort of stress me. It's just exciting.

More than that, their stories revealed that they sought control over their life, and the blend of activities and people of their choosing, rather than the pursuit of an idealised notion of a balance between separate work and home domains. This was variously described by the participants, but perhaps most eloquently as the quest for 'job-life equilibrium' or to use my own terminology: work-life blending – i.e. synthesis, not balance.

Often, the boundaries between the 'work' and 'personal' lives of participants are described as permeable, malleable, if not (in some instances) non-existent. What the experiences of the participants reveal are differences, and some subtleties, in terms of the reasons for the lack of demarcation. The particular characteristic that sets them apart is the deliberate choice on the part of the participants to establish parameters that way, as opposed to the demands of the firm over-running their personal life and the lack of boundary therefore being a consequence of being an entrepreneur, rather than a choice stemming from that particular occupational decision. This is in part due to their strong identification with their firm as a way of living, rather than just a choice about working - a theme that is a thread running through all three of the results/discussion chapters.

Another characteristic common to the way in which the work experiences of the entrepreneurs who were interviewed were described was happiness. That they were

happy at the prospect of going to work, contented at being there, and anticipating their return the next day – or thinking about ‘work’ outside ‘working hours’.

We love what we do firstly, we love the environment that we've created so we're happy coming to work every day...It's erratic hours but we are totally flexible now, we can come and go from here as we please so but the problem is we love it so much that we just keep coming back and if there's something big on there's no way we'd miss it.

I've never worked harder, never been so worn out - but also never been so happy. Before I was feeling like I was wasting my life away and every day I came home from work and the only thing I'd gained is money. To me it was a complete waste and I didn't like the people and the culture of where I worked. It wasn't genuine.

This happiness with their working life (or in enacting their role as a young entrepreneur in New Zealand) was attributed to a number of things - most of which have been elaborated upon in this, and the previous chapter. But, primarily to the way they organised their life and the role of their firm in it, and the fact that this translated into the building, or creation, of a particular culture and/or working environment.

It appears from the accounts from this group of young entrepreneurs that the design and implementation of a particular working environment (and within that a ‘work’ culture) was as important to them as the opportunity to design their life, and, in the first instance, to create a firm. This demonstrates that the pursuit of a particular culture within their firms was important to the participants because it represented their commitment to integrating the various dimensions of their life. This holistic approach to life and work design has superseded, for them, any willingness, or desire, to compartmentalise their life according to how they spend their time, when, and with whom. To conceptualise this as a spilling over of their work into the rest of their life is simplistic, and does not do justice to the strength of the intent behind the ways in which this culture has been thought through, implemented, guarded, and held up as one of the best things about the firm – for the entrepreneur (or employer) and those who work there (or employees). This is a commitment to not only making their own

life more synchronous but also to making a better working life for the people who work with them in their firms.

The types of cultures and working environments that were described were various (for example, by one entrepreneur as ‘an ideas culture’, and by another as ‘a creative and expressive culture’). This is logical given the different core business activities of the various firms, and the individuality of each young entrepreneur.

I guess it’s an enthusiastically geeky culture, one where ideas are fun to chuck around...where you’re allowed to disagree with each other.

However, the vocabulary used to describe these two cultures in particular - and the motivations and goals behind the design - revealed some similarities between all the descriptions that could be distilled down to some essential elements (or drivers): the honouring of self (or personal authenticity), the expression of creativity, and the personal prioritisation of life choices (both for themselves and the people who work with them).

Within the narratives relating to this idea (of creating a particular type of working environment and/or culture) was the very strong sense that how this was achieved was less important than the fact that it was an explicit objective driven by sincere intentions. This was confirmed, in a sense, by the fact that (proportionally) there was more text transcribed from the interviews concerning the motivations behind these actions (i.e. the intentions), than descriptors of the actual strategies or implementation pathways themselves. It could be construed that this meant the entrepreneurs felt the emphasis should be on valuing the intention rather than prescribing the solution - and that the desire in itself to create such a working environment and/or culture was in itself to be valued. The ways in which that was achieved were of less concern and considered creative because of the fact that the creation was driven by an individual (and their values, attitudes, and intentions), rather than by any generic standards of good or better practice. This reveals a willingness on the part of the entrepreneurs (as business owners) to experiment and express themselves as employers, as well as entrepreneurs, and to be willing to deviate from the perceived norm in order to create what they felt was effective for them, their people, and their firm.

5.1.2 Personal authenticity

The need for what I have labelled personal authenticity was described by a number of the participants. From their words, and in the simplest sense, to them it means the opportunity to be the same person at home as at work. Indeed, for some their success at achieving this personal authenticity is such that they described how the distinctions between different facets of their life were false, if not totally redundant, and that this was achievable because they were able to be the same person all the time. By the same person they seem to mean not having to adopt a persona whilst they are within a work environment in order to satisfy a norm, standard of appropriateness, or objective measure of effective performance.

...it's about being yourself at work and home. So you don't have a work mode and a life mode and that definitely helps if you're the boss... but also encouraging other people to be like that...we also find it's quite a successful thing with clients...clients come and respond to the idea of coming into an office and you're just engaging in a relaxed way... why not be relaxed and productive at work and relaxed and productive at home.

I used to put on a suit and tie and it felt like putting on a suit man uniform to go out and fight the business world, but it wasn't me.

... imagine a situation like this where someone is actually asking you point blank what is important to you and you have to lie or dissemble....It's a real big deal for me to not be different at work if possible. It goes back to one of the reasons I wanted to start a company was that knowledge that I had to be different or dissemble...one of the women who works here said that in her last job what she did was she had her headphones on right up to the minute that she got to the door and that was her freedom, and then she took them off and then it was work and then she was a different person. She said that she doesn't have to do that here and that she doesn't mind thinking about work when she is at home. That is a real sign of success for us is that it's not just us as owners who can be like that. We're trying to create a space where other people can be like that.

I think the thing I worked out is the main difference of being in this environment is that in a smaller firm everything you do has a consequence. Whether it's a good consequence or a bad one...it has an impact...so you can't be anything but yourself and be a real honest person. I think that's the main difference and that's one thing I didn't really like when I was working in a large firm. People would make decisions like it wasn't a person making that decision it was that role, that important title making that decision, whereas if they were being themselves they'd probably think twice about it.

Every single day I've got a priority more important than work. That is tough if that is not the culture. Even I were to rise to the point where I was in charge of a division or something like that it would still be counter cultural for me not to be role modelling that thing for the troops or whatever.

This desire for personal authenticity appeared a particularly strong driver within the narratives of those seven participants who could be described as transitioning to firm ownership from a corporate and/or large firm background. They specifically described how they felt forced to adopt another identity whilst in those former places of work, and how they found this experience to be stifling, disheartening, and disingenuous. Whilst to a reader the need to assume a work persona may seem a natural, and acceptable, occurrence, for these participants it became a trigger for beginning to consider other ways to work. When they created those new ways and places of working they ensured they were creating an environment where that falseness of character was not demanded of them, or the others that work in the same setting.

Two other ways in which those same participants built an environment where they could be true to themselves, was through the choices they made about who they worked with, and the nature of their 'business' priorities. A number of the entrepreneurs spoke about the way in which they incorporate people who are meaningful in their life into their firm. This was achieved in a variety of ways, from spouses who were vital as sounding boards, through to those who deliberately chose to work with (or employ) friends in their firm. This was seen not only as being congruent with the cultures the participants were fostering, but also a way of

alleviating the isolation that was cited as being a by-product of the compromises they had made regarding their personal lives in order to further the fortunes of the firm (and, therefore their own life). That isolation was described by Feldman and Bolino (2000) as the trade off for self-employed individuals for higher levels of personal autonomy they gained. It seems that this group were not willing to tolerate that trade off and have enacted strategies to address that very issue.

Well initially you don't really have that much of a personal life...I drew a lot of people who are important me into the business...your business becomes your social life because...you live and breathe your business... everything is about it.

The emotional connection that has been demonstrated as existing between entrepreneur and firm means that this type of strategy is unsurprising, perhaps even logical given the centrality of 'the firm' in the lives of these young entrepreneurs. This drawing in of important people reinforces the notion of the firm being much more than a business domain to this group of young entrepreneurs.

The way in which the participants prioritised their life choices in relation to their business choices was also insightful. They were not described as being prioritised in terms of one over the other, or for the achievement of one set to occur at the expense of the other. Rather, the priorities were integrated in such a way that the attainment of one meant the attainment of the other. This is demonstrated especially well within this narrative from one of the entrepreneurs:

... my 50/50 partner in the business and I... went for a walk on the beach and we said let's write down what we want from the business and what we want from ourselves and we listed these things out...It's probably under-inspirational from an entrepreneurial point of view but we wanted to have lots of room for family...so one of the things we said was let's create an environment that will mean we can be great dads.

... these guys work so hard in here, and last week people were here after midnight, but you can do that and still not think that work is the most important thing. You can say decency is more important and our life is more

important and our family is more important but isn't this a great work environment we've got...without being authoritarian about the supremacy of work, you can still be quite efficient and I guess that's something really neat to have learned.

In many instances business priorities were subsumed within the larger picture of the life of the entrepreneur as a whole. Others described how personal goals or priorities were incorporated into business plans, and preceded the laying out of the objectives for firm performance in order to demonstrate their importance - and to remind the entrepreneur that they did not want the cost of business success to be failing to achieve those personal goals.

5.2 How I work is about who I am

A dominant feature of the narratives that emerged from participants as they told the stories of their businesses was facets of what could be described as 'business ethics'. This was not ethics in the sense of an abstract, or idealistic, framework about how a business should be run – instead, it concerned what could be called 'personal fundamentals' or a 'personal code'. It was not just the awareness of such 'issues' that emerged strongly from the interviews but the way in which participants articulated their 'moral code' or 'business values' in both micro and macro terms – that is, in terms of both them as an individual and their everyday business life, as well as their firm in the context of a wider business 'community'. This demonstrated a willingness, and ability, to reflect on their role (and the impact of it) as a business owner far beyond that of one small firm in one small community in one small country. It also reflected the propensity of the majority to prioritise ethical performance drivers ahead of financial ones: 'we had such strong ethical drivers that the financial drivers were almost not as important'. Some interviewees also described a willingness to achieve both:

I guess there is the cliché of entrepreneurs being wealth takers rather than wealth creators and that is a cliché that a lot of people have...I would like to, but I am probably not at the stage where I can, devote a lot of my time to saving the environment or saving the world...I think the best thing is when

a business can look after the environment and actually make money at the same time...that is the best sort of environmentalism because you know you are going to be passionate about it, and you are going to want to do it.

The notion of ethics, or ethical practice, in the broadest sense emerged from the stories of each of the ten young entrepreneurs. How they related to it differed but as an overarching, and ultimately motivating concept, its importance was universal. For a number of participants being ethical in business related to sustainability or the environmental element of business practice – whilst in some instances it drove the choice of business itself. For others, its importance related to people – how people were treated within the firm and how those individuals then related to stakeholders external to the firm. Finally, for some it was seen as a bottom line – a moderator of business practice to ensure ‘no harm was done’. These narratives were centred on the description of ethics as a reminder that profit, or growth, or success, should not be the outcome without due consideration of the costs – i.e. there was not an ‘at any cost’ attitude.

I think a lot of my ideas were based around sort of growing a business... But doing it in an ethical way...I don't feel I necessarily brought a whole lot of ethics to the business but they sort of evolve along the way when you see things that you don't like...It helps you set your own boundaries...I think people need to be completely upfront and honest.

5.2.1 A personal code

The acknowledgment of ethics as a bottom line – or non-negotiable – revealed the unwillingness of participants to compromise this ‘personal code’ for the pursuit of what might be labelled objective, or external, measures of success (e.g. profit, growth etc.). These reflected both a strong sense of certainty about the choices they made about ‘how’ to be in business, and an unwillingness to compromise this for the sake of outside perceptions of success. This appears to indicate that the satisfaction the participants felt in regard to committing to ethical practice was situated within their own self (or frame of reference), rather than in perceived societal expectations or

norms. In essence, ethical practice is a means of honouring self and acknowledging that how they choose to work is about who they are, rather than who they should be.

In terms of ethical dimensions of the decision to start-up a firm, a number of participants spoke about using their firm as a means of ‘making a difference’. The nature of this difference varied, but appeared rooted in a desire to have an impact that reflected not only their business skills, but the elements of their identity that were most important to them.

I’ve always wanted to make a difference in some way, really strongly to make a difference.

I care about people and actually about making a difference. I couldn’t be in a business that was unethical...you know, the whole tobacco, gambling, whatever... things like that.

The motivating ability of ethics in terms of business ‘practice’ appears to be driven by varying elements of the participants’ lives and or personality – but all stemmed from their ability to identify what the driver was and articulate why it was important to them. For one participant, spirituality, or the presence of a faith, was described as being the touchstone upon which all decisions about good, or honourable, business practice were based – without it he described a situation where neither his life, or that of his business, would have clarity. This framework of faith is the reference point for his life, and so it is congruent to him that all decisions regarding his firm stem from that worldview. For others, their driver for ethical conduct sprang from what could be described as their commitment or responsibility to others. A number of participants expressed their obligation or commitment to the people with whom they started their firm – that what they had, and ultimately did, impacted beyond their own life. A similarly high number expressed a dedication to treating staff in a particular way – or to devoting effort to ensure that their work life was as enjoyable as for the entrepreneur themselves. This reveals that participants felt that they could have a role in ‘bettering’ the work lives of others. For many this could be described as a reaction to a historical dissatisfaction with work, which in some instances had been the antecedent factor that had prompted their original entry into business. This ability to influence the work lives of others was described as occurring variously in practice –

but, in all instances reflected the loyalty of the entrepreneur to his or her staff, and their conceptualisation of them as a person rather than just a worker.

I am so into their life. Their life being a good life, not just mine. That's one of the things I believe in and I apply to my whole business.

Something that I believe now is that you don't necessarily have to work for the Foundation for the Blind to feel like you're doing things for people...You naturally come across people in your life and you can do good just by being good to them... things like trying to be a good boss are really important to me because that's another way of doing good as well.

It is a way to make a living and it's a way to feel useful... the concept of duty makes quite a lot of sense... like I have obligations to these guys in the office and being a good manager feels like a worthwhile thing to do. On a small scale you create a nice environment for people.

Certain traits emerged that reflected their sense of what morals or values underpinned ethical practice in their firm. The concepts of trust, fairness, honesty, and respect were those that were most frequently described. For example, the participant who described the narrative of her business as 'a story of truth' in which 'respect is the fundamental underlying philosophy' – and another who spoke of honesty as: '...you're not like an evil bastard thinking to yourself honesty might be successful – you're actually a believer in honesty'. The following tells the story of the role of trust and honesty in another participant's firm:

... our role is a lot about building faith with a client and we really mean that. We don't mean getting them to think that we're doing a good job. We actually want there to be a real trust based thing... Initially it was just a value we had - we called it being the honest mechanic...you know the mechanic that says 'oh actually all I need to do is twiddle that valve so it's no charge' kind of thing. We wanted to be that company just because there are so many companies that are the opposite....That's turned out to be very successful as a referral mechanism...you know the way, if you find the honest mechanic you tell all of your friends, go to this guy....I'm the honest

mechanic and I often have to make promises...the low points are where you're not able to live up to your promises...I think that for me is the worst experience.

Another participant recounted this narrative about the centrality of respect in her firm:

The biggest thing that I think underlies everything is respect...We have respect for our customers. We have respect for their intelligence. We respect their need to have a good quality product...respect for the staff to be in an environment that is supportive and where possible fun, but one that gives them satisfaction in their job and gives them as much money as we're able to give them...respect for the law...and respect for each other. I know that's kind of a bit quaint and a little bit pat but it means something here.

...respect is something that's very important to me. Not just that I receive it, but that I give it as well.

Definitely fairness is what we bring to business...I always had this thing where I say you build up fairness in the bank with people. So I build up fairness, like in a relationship, so I build it up with you and then you build it up with me. But if I have got nothing in the bank with you, then you have got nothing to trust me on...So I always do that with people...I don't actually have that much in the bank with people at the moment so maybe I have to go out there and actually work on that.

One participant summed up his attitudes towards the significance of morals and values in his business practices, and day-to-day entrepreneurial life, as the importance of character over competency. He felt that (what he described as) 'competencies' could be learned. However, he felt that character was what was most important in his business 'world', and he made decisions about business relationships and the hiring of staff in accordance with his own assessment of their character (as opposed to the consideration of competence in isolation).

The link between character, work ethic and entrepreneurial propensity was also discussed by a number of participants. For example:

We both have a really strong work ethic, we work our nuts off...like I mean we had times where we've worked months and months and months on end doing 5:30 in the morning until 11 at night without having one day off...Just so we could pay off the entire business and not owe anybody a cent.

From a really young age I've had an ethic of if you want something you work for it.

One explicitly described the link (e.g. “with hard work and good people around you you can build character”), while others talked about the importance of a sound work ethic in terms of their firms, and the way in which they worked. Often it was described as a rationale for the importance of running a business as a form of work to them – i.e. it was the way in which they could actualise this commitment in a way that was consistent with not only how they wanted to work, but who they wanted to be. It was also important to them that they were the judge of the success of their work, of the quality of the work they did, and that they had the control over how long, and in what form, their work occurred. This control appeared to go beyond traditionally postulated advantages of ‘working for yourself’ - for example, flexibility. The irony of this actualisation of their work ethic is that in many instances they were choosing to input more time into their firm than might have been considered optimal or desirable by others. The presence of the aforementioned work ethic in participants was attributed to a variety of factors (but most typically parental influence) but in all instances was described as having been present from an early age.

The ability, and desire, of participants to express the importance of what could be called the intangibles of business reflects their acknowledgment (tacit or not) of the role of emotion (or emotional intelligence) in how they run their firms. For example, one participant described a small firm ‘as a very emotional environment’. Indeed, often their choices about the priorities they place on elements of ‘how we do things around here’ reflect the importance they place on how they feel, as well as how they think.

... the issue with small businesses is that the environment is very emotional and you cannot have someone, even one person, in there who disrupts it because it's too small. Whereas in a big company you can cope if there's one

bad egg in a bunch because you've got others you can vent it to, you can cope... but in a small business it's just too little.

For about half the participants this involved the discussion of the notion of intuition or 'gut feel' – or participating in the unwritten, or unspoken, 'rules' of business. Rather than explaining it away as a form of inferior thinking, or using it as an excuse for being unable to articulate the rationale for a particular decision, it was held up as a central method of processing information and reaching conclusions about choices or situations, people or relationships. Or as one entrepreneur described it: 'weighing up the moral options' and another as the combination of an analytic mind with gut feel:

... my analytic brain follows behind my gut feel really fast. So once I've had a gut feel about something and I do it, I will do the forensics on why it did or didn't work... I think it has been right more than 99% of the time... In order to be able to communicate that to other people you need to sort of have a framework or a theory of why you value it... it's hard to develop that framework if you're in someone else's paradigm you know what I mean? If you work for yourself you can say things like 'one of my gut feels is about the importance of the relationship before the project'. So I can then walk into a room with the client and know it's much more important to develop rapport with them, be honest with them, and be on the level with them than it is to solve their problems. Once you've done that obviously you engage with their problem and you get the real data and start to work on a solution.... Now we've done it this way for so long if new people come in I can say this is the way we do things here.

It was my gut and I am a big believer in gut and I have made a lot of decisions in my work life and all sorts of areas that way.

I suppose it's a little bit of trusting your gut - no matter how desperately you need to get cash or accept the job.

5.2.2 Reciprocity

A word that emerged in dialogues with half the participants when they described how they do business was reciprocity. Although described, or operationalised in different guises, it reflected the need for the entrepreneurs to: be engaged in interactions with mutual benefits for those involved; feel that they were giving back in order to offset what they feel they had received; add value to the community or alliances of which they were part (i.e. rather than merely prospering from them) – engaging in what were described by a number of interviewees as win-win relationships.

The companies that we work with, they're the ones who are making our dreams possible and so I look at all our relationships and I think because of them...because they believed me...this all happened and without them it wouldn't be here to the same extent...So there's a whole reciprocity of those relationships that's important to me... you treat them like gold and it's a genuine thing.

The importance of the notion of reciprocity was described by those participants who made reference to it as being imperative due to the characteristics of the business population of New Zealand, and scale of the country in geographic terms - i.e. a small country made up of small firms meant to the participants that engaging in mutually beneficial ways, or giving back, needed to be even more of a priority. It was also (by some) described as being easier to achieve by virtue of those same reasons, and because in many instances the firms of participants were described as being 'in communities' – this descriptor was used irrespective of the fact that all the interviewees had firms in cities. It instead appeared to reflect that fact that they had chosen to conceptualise their firm as existing within this type of social and business network for a variety of reasons. Not all of these reasons were articulated, but it was possible to surmise that the following might be relevant: that in order for the firm to give back it had to have links to a community in which to do so; there was a need in the community which the firm and/or participant could help meet, or a problem to alleviate; that the conceptualising of a firm as being part of a community or neighbourhood helping alleviate feelings of isolation related to the scale of the firm, the perceptions of being situated on the periphery of a market, or the labour market itself, or of engaging in non-standard work. One participant summed up his feelings towards these types of relationships, or responsibilities, as 'community consciousness'.

...we try to be as community conscious as possible...So like you know the Tauranga floods, we fed all the people at the community centres for free and we fed all the rescue crew as well for free and the same happened in Palmerston and we fed all of them. It's just that whole get into the community thing. It's wicked. I've got a friend of mine who runs a centre for intellectually handicapped kids and uses music therapy the year through, so we fed the whole entire centre and all the kids and everything last week...Just because it feels good to do it and it feels good to give something back. You know we're taking a lot of money these days so it's important to give some back.

Another told how having a small firm (as opposed to a large one) means that every action you take has consequences, typically visible, and that therefore, you can't be anything other than honest about yourself and your firm. Another described her view of community contribution like this:

I'd like to be able to give something back later on...I'd like to be well respected within the community...that this company is looked upon as a good New Zealand company and it helps the community with jobs and that sort of thing.

We've really gone into marketing in the local community. I don't spend any money in mainstream advertising. I just put that money into things like schools and soccer and cricket and just the local communities. It's the only way to go.

...it's like a great big fat legacy. I think a lot of people feel that way as well but there are different ways that people can see that happening. It's like do you go into Ethiopia and feed children? Or to do it in a more capitalistic sense I suppose you give money. Do you try and build a company to understand how the economy is run and then sort of give that back.

5.3 Do I have a career or a job?

Within the narratives around work and its nature, it was possible to analyse the transcripts and spoken words of the participants to look explicitly at the notion of

career – and also to see what their choice of language and descriptors implied. Part of that understanding involved teasing out the distinctions they were making between their use of the terms ‘job’ and ‘career’.

Starting and running your own business was overwhelmingly not considered to be just a job by the young entrepreneurs who were interviewed. To them a job was just a matter of ‘turning up’ and ‘not thinking about it [work] when you leave’. A job didn’t represent a challenge to them and the majority emphatically stated that having a job implied being an employee (one stating that “I have not given myself a job”). Many of the words that the entrepreneurs used to describe the nature of a job (as opposed to running their own firm) were emotive in a very negative sense: a job to them has ‘no heart’, is ‘bland’, represents ‘apathy’ and ‘disengagement’. Though the proviso was offered that the difference between a career and a job was not grounded in a monetary criterion, it was an issue of commitment or how the work was personally conceived by that individual.

I certainly don't think of it as a job. To me a job is a bland thing that you don't give a shit about.

A job is when you turn up and you leave and you don't think about it at other times...I don't think it's monetary...you know there are certain people that would work at a lower level of income and place a huge importance on what they do, think about it when they go home etc...I think instead it's actually how you see it and how it fits in your head.

These descriptors clearly represent to the entrepreneurs the polar opposite of the way they work, and are some degree a judgment/comment on what they regard is bad about being an employee and good about being your own boss.

While not amounting to a job, only three of the ten participants judged running a business to be a career either.

I think it's a career in that I am getting better all the time at what I do, and I'm definitely learning new things.

See being an entrepreneur as a career? Yeah absolutely...my thought process of what's next for me is not who do I work for but what's the next thing?...So if I ever decided that I didn't want to do this anymore I would either have someone run it for me fully or sell it and what I would look to do would be start another business...That's what I would do. I'm happiest doing this. I have not once been pissed off with my choice. I absolutely love what I do.

I think a career is when you aspire to improve...to get more value out of it [work] and give more.

Common to these three participants was their occupational background - prior to starting their own firm they had all worked for large corporates. They had previously been exposed to a model of working that may make them more inclined to conceptualise 'what they do' as a career, and/or attempt to replicate elements of that model within their new chosen working environment - either in terms of how they work or how they choose to manage their firm. That is to say that they may feel more willing, and indeed comfortable, applying the label career to describe their endeavours because they have historically done so – albeit in a different context.

The three 'career entrepreneurs' justified their description with the following qualifiers: what they did represented a career because: they were 'learning all the time'; 'continually aspiring to improve'; 'were not content with the status quo'; and, were prepared to disengage with this firm in order to pursue another opportunity. Therefore, to these three individuals, a career involves some type of progression and achievement orientation (traditionally this meant a move up a hierarchy within a large organisation). They clearly felt that this concept translates to the work they are doing within their own firms - though the progression is not perhaps identifiable with the same level of clarity as if there was some promotion through ranks of other staff. However, the application of this descriptor may also relate, as discussed earlier, to their occupational backgrounds and the way in which they judge occupational success. This assertion that what they do is a career does not imply a lack of emotional connection with the firm on the part of these entrepreneurs (indeed one participant described a career as 'having a heart'). But, it does emphasise the potential

influence of work history on how an entrepreneurial career or endeavour is conceptualised as work. Indeed, for one female participant the description of her entrepreneurial endeavours as a career was one way of circumventing the criticism she received for turning her back on a successful corporate career – or as she put it: addressing the ‘stigma of questions like what happened to your career?’

When arguing against running a business as a career, the participants offered various reasons. A number drew the conclusion that having a career implied a lack of emotional commitment and represented only ‘job success’. Some also felt that a career implied something that was all planned out (i.e. linear in nature) – or as one entrepreneur put it ‘a career is just a map and if you follow it you miss opportunities’. A career also seemed to be viewed by these seven ‘non-career’ entrepreneurs as just a naturally occurring progression upwards through a series of milestones. This view is consistent with the majority of definitions of career which encapsulate advancement as a key component of career and inextricably link it to the concept of directionality (Hall, 1976). Contrary to this the participants asserted that they were not ‘just’ moving upwards, and if they were (via some achieving a proxy of this type of advancement) it certainly didn’t happen without a huge effort and investment of resources. A career was also conceived of as a construct that either necessitated or drew external approval from others – moreover this approval either gained from others in terms of career choice (e.g. parents), or offered from others as an objective judgement of perceived success. It was also viewed by this group as having a distinct beginning and end (i.e. an implied temporal dimension).

I think a career has a beginning and an end whereas something entrepreneurial doesn't have an end.

5.3.1 More than a career or a job

Seven of the participants were of the opinion that running a business was neither a job nor a career – that it was ‘something more’.

I don't think I would call it a career, well I mean what is a career?...A career is working for somebody else... I'm not working for anybody else except the tax man and the bank manager...I have freedom and I think that's the

difference. It's not a job because I have freedom and I have deliberately not given myself a job as such, I do work ... I do work but I don't have a job.

I don't think it's a career. I would never see it as a job...I would see it as a lifestyle...I don't want to get up in the morning and think I have to go to work....I think...I've got to meet this person today... and I really want to get on top of this today...and I kind of line up my whole day with all the things that I want to do. I don't have to do them.

It's... fulfilling my dreams...and you know I created this, so it's really that whole creating thing as well.

It's just my way of life really...I guess I associate career with a profession...or working your way through the corporate ladder kind of thing.

For me a job implies to me that I would be hired to do something. But I am my own boss, so technically I pay myself but I am not hired to do something. I am doing it because it's my decision...when I think of career I sort of think of maybe a succession of jobs building up to some pinnacle... I guess job and career implies that it's all about you the person, whereas what I am doing is all about the company. It's all about making my company bigger. So I am assisting to shape and build something that is separate from me.

What comprised this 'something more' was as varied as the participants themselves. However, there were some common threads. The belief that starting and running their business was intrinsically linked to their life purpose was an imperative that pervaded the narratives of the entrepreneurs. This was coupled with narratives that were characterised by a focus on the level of attachment between the entrepreneur and the firm. This was described as strong and ongoing, and that it would not be voluntarily severed (like a job or a career). A number of the participants described how their firm would take precedence over both a job and a career as constructs.

These types of narratives emphasise the fact that even modern elements of career theory, and indeed those that have been frequently applied in the context of self-employment and/or entrepreneurship, are incongruent with the stories being told by

these entrepreneurs. For example, the notion of a boundaryless career may seem relevant, however at its definitional core is the assertion that boundaryless careers are not tied to any one organisation. Contrary to that notion, these entrepreneurs show an attachment to their firm that surpasses mere loyalty and instead constitutes a deep, ongoing, emotional commitment. The notion of a Protean career (Hall & Mirvis, 1995), with its focus on the individual as the driver of career progress, might at first glance also seem applicable. However, it too seems limited in its ability to capture the totality of the 'career' experiences of these entrepreneurs, particularly given Hall's (1976) contention that a Protean career is not about what happens to an individual within any one organisation. Perhaps the type of career commitment Kupferberg (1998) writes of is more relevant, certainly more than the mere entrepreneurial career logic described by Kanter (1989) - the former having the potential to do more justice to the strength of the relationship between firm and founder than the latter. This is evidence of the career theory evolution Arthur, Hall and Lawrence call for when "individuals conclude that current theory routinely in use will not explain the phenomena they are observing" (1989, p.15).

The participants also took an extremely holistic interpretation of the role of business formation in their life and attributed to it a great deal, including asserting that it relates to their life, not just their 'work'. The notion of business formation as an ongoing challenge (which was embraced and desired) was a common story. Several of the seven who maintained that running a business was something more than a career or a job, contended that the formation of their firm was their life's work, and several described it as their 'life's mission'. This was congruent with the opinions of several others who described business formation as a pursuit: of an opportunity; of a dream; of a way of life. Often this journey was conceptualised as a type of personal transformation – for example, one entrepreneur expressed it as being a 'chance to morph' himself.

5.4 Chapter closing

This chapter discussed findings related to how the young entrepreneurs conceptualised their work. The chapter was organised around three key ideas: how they related to their work; how their work reflects who they are; and, consideration of

whether what they do represents a career, a job, or neither. The relationship between the young entrepreneurs and their work is an intense one – which is logical given the emotional attachment to their firms they were described as having in chapter four. They are not concerned with the issue of balancing their work and their life. Rather, they are content to have the two blended in a manner of their choosing. They were largely satisfied with the ways they were managing their lives and did not find it useful to impose a demarcation between ‘work life’ and other. Consistent with this was their drive for personal authenticity. That is, the desire to be their true self in whatever sphere, and to enact practices and behaviours consistent with that spirit. Another way in which their working lives reflected their essences as people was in the ethical imperatives they chose to operate in line with. Ideas of respect, reciprocity, and a personal moral code were critical. With this much meaning embodied in what they do for ‘work’, it seemed natural that being an entrepreneur to them was less about career (and even less about a job) and more about fulfilling needs of a higher order – for example, satisfying a calling (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997).

Chapter 6: Labelling entrepreneurship

But when I call upon my dashing being,
out comes the same old lazy self,
and so I never know just who I am,
nor how many I am, now who we will be being.
I would like to be able to touch a bell
and call upon my real self, the truly me,
because if I really need my proper self,
I must not allow myself to disappear.

Pablo Neruda

1904-1973, Chilean poet

This chapter, the third (and final) of the results/discussion chapters, is centred on two main sub-themes: how the young entrepreneurs define success for themselves, and whether they identify with the term entrepreneur.

6.1 What success means

Frequently representations of success are imposed upon entrepreneurs with little, or no, accounting for personal context and the individuality of ambition. Cornwall and Naughton affirmed this, describing the absence of research in which entrepreneurs themselves are asked “what success means *to them*” (2003, p.62). Such a subjective understanding is viewed as being critical by career theorists, who argue that in the modern age (and for example, when comparing traditional with boundaryless careers) success is measured in terms of psychologically meaningful work, instead of other more conventional measures (Sullivan, 1999). Notions of success, and its meaning to the group of young entrepreneurs interviewed for this study, emerged strongly in the dialogues with them – as this section of the chapter evidences.

A consistent thread through the firm success narratives of most of the participants was the significant scale of their ambitions. Most appeared unhappy with settling for the creation of a firm that had an impact only within New Zealand. The majority used a specific vocabulary to describe the future of their firm and these words richly illustrate the scope of their ambition: 'worldwide brand'; 'household name'; 'world domination'; 'taking on the big guys'; 'building an empire'; and, 'biggest' and 'best'.

I wanted to create a worldwide brand, a household name.

I want to dominate...I want to be big. I want to take on the big guys.

World domination of course!...I suppose my ultimate dream for whether it's this company or the next is, hopefully during my lifetime, to build something which genuinely leaves the world in a better place and reaches millions and millions of people.

In parallel, a number of the participants used what could be described as the rhetoric of business success. That is, the lexicon of 'brand building', 'store sales', 'increased profit and turnover', and 'employing more staff'. Typically this was the language of the male interviewees, or those running firms which were medium in size, or with more than one business site.

Nearly all the participants mentioned growth in relation to success for their firm - i.e. they made the distinction between success for *self* and success for *firm*. But, despite these growth intentions, the entrepreneurs were quick to emphasise that this growth was not to be pursued at 'any cost', and that it was not all that represented success. They were intent on unbundling the notion of success to demonstrate that 'success for self' could be described (if not pursued) separately than 'success for firm'.

It was primarily the male entrepreneurs who raised the link between growth and financial success as being significant when they engaged in dialogue about the nature of success – a reminder of the role that gender can play in terms of influencing perceived career satisfiers (Eddleston & Powell, 2008).

It kind of seemed to me pretty common sense. You know, start a business, get growth, become rich, and do what you want...I figure if I can double

the size of the business every single year then in twenty years I'll be the richest person in the world. Pretty much every year I've done it...There was one year when we did sort of 70% or something but then the next year I did 200% to make up for it... I mean ultimately the goal is to be the top of the pile pretty much, the world's biggest, best, business person.

My ultimate goal is getting to \$100 million net worth... not that I need a \$100 million, but I'm in for a challenge.

Most participants were confident that profit would follow as a consequence of firm growth (i.e. growth ranked ahead of profit as 'the performance goal'), and ultimately, as the interviewees termed it, of survival.

... there's always the profit thing. In business we have to survive and lately because we've been working on two really large markets both at once a huge amount of money has gone out the door... so sales are kind of a big thing. But my primary motivation is to build this brand... building the brand will achieve the other two things.

... open more stores, just keep on growing... I would like to create a large business... I have visions of a big company... it's respected everywhere.

It would be simplistic to interpret from the data that profit was not a factor driving the entrepreneurs who were interviewed – or that it only motivated those who were explicit about its importance. However, similarly it would be overly simplistic to convey this dichotomously – that is, that there were those who were interested in profit and those who were not. By doing that, the trap of classing firm owners as being profit-growth oriented or 'lifestyle' entrepreneurs (defined in chapter four) is perpetuated and no further, richer and/or more detailed, understanding can be achieved.

Instead, it is important to acknowledge that the participants revealed (as they had in relation to other facets of firm ownership in the preceding chapters) that the priority was choice: the control to influence not only how much profit they made (by what

resources they invested), but also how those profits (be they time or money) were used. It also signals the potential for profit to be used as a guide for their actions, rather than just a desired endpoint in itself.

...you can't underestimate the fact that money motivates you. The thing that I like is that I feel my level of wealth...or however you want to define that is up to me.... whereas when you're working for somebody else it's not up to you.

I'm not into having loads of money...it's not my motivation, I like having enough and a good amount...I'm comfortable, but I'm not rolling in money or anything...I wanted to be free...that personal aspect of how my business is structured is critical.

I'm kind of literally ambivalent about money. It's nice to have some but...I don't want to be locked into financial arrangements which mean that money becomes most important in our lives...in terms of the business, it's a really useful gauge of how we do want a job...how much time and effort do we put in on this job...we've got to find a balance between doing a great job but having enough so that the company is sustainable.

Therefore, it appears that the positive benefits generated by firm growth might not be confined to those of a financial nature. They might also include other resources (e.g. time, energy, motivation etc.) that offer opportunities for either reinvestment in the future of the firm, or contributing to the sustainability of the activities of the entrepreneur – whatever they might be.

So, for many of the participants the by-products of growth were viewed as multi-faceted, and not solely linked to financial motives or outcomes. For some, growth was about increasing the impact of their firm, dominating a market, and/or as a way of facilitating other activities - such as those of a philanthropic nature. Descriptions of success were frequently qualified with references to the need for the accommodation of other more holistic, moral and/or ethical imperatives (at both a micro and macro level). This 'do no harm' mentality is exemplified in the following quotations from

interviewees: I want to 'leave the world in a better place'; 'leave a legacy'; 'create a good company to work for'; and, be 'well respected in the industry'.

For others, growth was a challenge of a more personal nature. Several participants described how endeavouring to grow their firm was an antidote to boredom. I assume that this is a rejection of the monotony they perceived as potentially being present within the day-to-day management of a firm, rather than during the more entrepreneurial phases of opportunity recognition, firm start-up or a period of innovation or research and development.

The choice by participants to grow their firm was often described with a number of caveats, for example, not growing past the size where it became impossible to make employees feel as valued as they had in a smaller firm. Some of the participants talked about being willing to compromise growth (and profit) in order to pursue other goals (not business related), or to enable other life choices.

A manifestation of this choice (to potentially limit growth) was the fact that many of the participants incorporated personal goals into their business plans. As a result of her research, Rouse (2004) conceived of business plans as 'life-plans' to capture the linking of the business with the life of the individual who is its owner-manager. For her life-plans reflect the nature of enterprise as a combination of an individual's history and the external environment in which they exist. In a similar way, the entrepreneurs in my study appeared to find the encapsulation of personal goals within the framework of a business plan assisted them to resolve tensions between work and 'life'. It also provided a check and balance on pursuing business goals at the expense of personal, or family, well-being.

The caveats regarding growth expressed by the participants went some way towards representing the fact that, for them, the choice to grow was not as difficult as the resulting choices about when, or how to do so. The perceived difficulty of some of these choices alludes to the fact that growth, and its associated permutations in the context of entrepreneurship, is possibly a more fuzzy construct than is often conveyed in the research based literature – and that it might be experienced differently for young entrepreneurs as a specific group.

Failure, one of the most damaging outcomes of a quest for growth, was not described as a fear that curtailed the efforts made by this group of young entrepreneurs. Indeed, all the participants could be described as fearless in relation to their willingness to face the reality of business failure as well as business success. Whether this seamlessness is naivety or outright confidence is less clear – whichever it is they were resolutely philosophical about the chance of failure, or serious error, and the opportunity such a situation would provide for learning.

Others were pragmatic, or acknowledged that they could always resort to paid employment again (especially those who had transitioned to firm ownership from a corporate career).

... you just figure out why you screwed up, do the forensic work, and then you figure out what you've learnt and then you don't do it again.

... basically the way I looked at it was if it was a big screw up.... I would walk back into a job and earn pretty good money... my risk was just money and pride.

Some participants asserted that failure was not an option – whether it meant any risk was calculated, and therefore bearable, or that it was just not something they countenanced thinking about was less clear.

Failure is not something I do... I'll do everything to avoid it.

6.2 Am I an entrepreneur?

As Charmaz (2006) advocated, studying data at the level of detail of language not only advances a constructivist approach, it “prompts you to learn nuances of your research participants’ language and meaning” and facilitates learning about “their meanings rather than make assumptions about what they mean” (Charmaz, 2006, p.34). Following Charmaz’s (2002) assertion (i.e. the importance of examining the data in terms of language within the narratives of the participants), and reviewing the

data in detail, revealed a great deal about how the young entrepreneurs in this study define themselves.

Their choice of vocabulary embodies their implicit assumptions about what constitutes being an entrepreneur, and beyond that, what the term actually means to them personally – that is, how they make sense of it or take meaning from it. Subsequently, both through the examination of narrative and use of language it became possible to focus on ‘how’, or ‘if’, the participants identify with ‘entrepreneur’ as an identity of any sort – and, whether how ‘outsiders’ perceive the lived experience of being an entrepreneur is in parallel, or opposition, to the experiences of these young entrepreneurs. This examination was prompted by Collin’s assertion that the subjective nature of ‘career’ is such that its meaning “may not be the same for the person as it is for those that observe him/her” (1986, p.22).

6.2.1 Choosing the identity of entrepreneur

All but one of the participants did strongly identify as an entrepreneur. They felt the entrepreneur identity is the most truthful representation of who they feel they are, and/or are capable of being.

I guess because I've started a business on my own, mostly because I did it on my own, that's not so easy...I think the thing about being an entrepreneur is you want independence...I have taken a risk really...I think possibly it's because I like having control of my life...For me the objective of having my own business was a combination of self satisfaction and self worth I suppose combined with having freedom.

I quite like being called an entrepreneur actually...because it does imply innovation and creativity and against the odds sort of stuff...fantastic connotations.

I think being an entrepreneur for me actually means just taking a risk and following through on it. That's me...I don't think the greatest entrepreneur has to have the greatest ideas...You don't have to have a great idea to be a great entrepreneur...I just think you have to have that whole commitment and I guess just the balls to be able to go ahead and do it.

I'm an entrepreneur...because it's more than one business...and you're looking at multiple income strings and also that is just my self- image if you like...having the dream, the vision and actually realising it, making it happen...I've started it from scratch, from a creation point of view...there is also the risk factor and also the independence and the autonomy that comes with being an entrepreneur, the choice, the freedom of choice.

I do feel that I am an entrepreneur...I think because I've taken risks and opened up something that is not well represented in the market place.

The terminology used to describe 'the identity' of entrepreneur and what it comprises was also largely common to all the participants. The descriptors they used could be separated into those that related to characteristics of entrepreneurial behaviour associated with creating and managing the firm, and those that were more aligned with attributes of the entrepreneur as a person, though this was not a distinction imposed upon the descriptors by the participants themselves.

Those characteristics related to the operation of a firm included: willingness to bear risk ('a total lack of limiting beliefs'); vision; idea generation; leadership; innovation; opportunity seeking ('not being blind or asleep to opportunity'); and, firm creation. Risk, vision, idea generation and opportunity seeking were the most frequently mentioned. In terms of what might be described as personal characteristics: creativity; confidence; passion; drive; resilience; and, 'capacity to dream' were most prevalent. These could be described more as evocative personal descriptions made by the entrepreneurs, and could perhaps most accurately be described as being particular to their own context, experiences and personality.

The ability of the participants to define entrepreneurship within their own personal contexts should not be under-estimated. The assumption that an individual can, or should, be able to define the essence of the activity they are engaging in (in this case entrepreneurship) is one that is frequently made, often erroneously. For example, a British study involving 24 self-employed women identified how difficult they found the term entrepreneur to coherently define (Cohen, 1997; Cohen & Musson, 2000). The participants in this study expounded their meaning of entrepreneurship and the

nature of entrepreneurial identity, with certainty and with a confidence that was grounded experientially.

Their own experiences appeared to be at the core of the reasoning and descriptions they offered – i.e. this ability to articulate their personal experience is in contrast to the potential influence of the many external sources, and therefore potentially myths, clichés and stereotypes, that they could have absorbed and seeded their own definitional ideas from. Indeed, extensive work by Down (2002) has explored how individuals use cliché and ‘talk’ as a means of maintaining the identity. Many of the young entrepreneurs in this study went as far to voice their rejection of public or external messages pertaining to entrepreneurship, and instead described how they created their own meaning and understanding of what it was they had chosen to do with their life. The ‘maintenance’ of this entrepreneurial identity was not something they attributed to a particular mechanism or behaviour. The identity itself could be described as internally driven, and integral to their sense of self, and so therefore embodied within attitude and values, rather than maintained through behaviour or action. The centrality of the entrepreneurial identity to the sense of self of the participants was an important theme throughout the dialogues. Indeed, it was their certainty of self, rather than external affirmation, that drove their embracement of their chosen identity and way of life-work.

A number of participants questioned the ability of a ‘label’ to effectively capture, or symbolise, the experience of running your own firm as a young person. One participant felt that a descriptor or label represented ‘a status, or a label, or a static achievement’ and didn’t do justice to the richness and diversity of her experience. She also emphasised that running your own firm was about a spirit of endeavour or enterprise:

I identify as a business owner, and when I think..... it's as an entrepreneur. But, it's not the first thing that pops into my head...I don't think anyone can ever say that they are an entrepreneur and therefore you don't have to learn or that you know everything. I think it's more of a spirit...I think it's about where we're going to be in five or ten years time.

It would seem she felt that this notion of an entrepreneurial spirit represented the evolution that was possible for both firm and person through the experience of entrepreneurship, better than a tag or label that represented something unchanging in nature or character. Many of the narratives of other participants were consistent with her assertion. They indicate that the core of meaning that they attach to their experiences as young entrepreneurs represent an entrepreneurial identity that is fluid and capable of change and evolution, rather than the adoption of an identity that is fixed, or static.

Only one participant strongly rejected the entrepreneur label:

I think I can get to 3 reasons why I'm not. One of them is that thing about being inseparable from the business. I see for a lot of entrepreneurs that it [the firm] is the main thing in their life....that's not what I want... Another one is that I don't think we are massively pushing boundaries necessarily. We are pushing boundaries in terms of how we relate to clients. So we might be entrepreneurs in the relationships that we have, but we haven't come up with something that is going to totally change the world... The third one [is] most entrepreneurs do something that is replicable and can end up existing on a really big scale.

As well as this relatively factual account outlining the inappropriateness of the entrepreneur 'label', the participant went further in stating why, at a very personal level, the identity of entrepreneur was not one he chooses to align himself with. At the end of that narrative he concluded that:

... obviously the world entrepreneur has more cash value but personally it has got some huge negatives for me.

This quotation implies that he perceives of the identity of entrepreneur as being potentially useful as a tradable commodity, but that despite this awareness (or perhaps because of it) it is still not an identity he wishes to adopt.

6.2.2 Defining the identity

In terms of defining the nature of the entrepreneurial identity adopted by the participants in this study, it was useful to apply one of the few definitions of the construct, that of Hoang and Gimeno (2005). They specified four dimensions as constituting an entrepreneurial identity: 1) attributes (experiential or ideal); 2) perceptions of what constitutes entrepreneurial activity; 3) the centrality of the identity to the individual; and 4) identity regard. The narratives of the participants covered these four dimensions. In terms of attributes the participants focused on the experiential, rather than the ideal, and these were listed in an earlier section of this chapter.

The perceptions of the participants as to what constitutes entrepreneurial activity were embodied in their descriptors of what being an entrepreneur means to them and how they fulfil that meaning. So while these could not be considered to be generalisable, they clearly illustrate the ability of the participants to communicate what they believe underpins the construct. The participants did describe the centrality of the identity emphatically (that is how important it was to them). Hoang and Gimeno describe how “individuals with central entrepreneurial identities may enact that identity in other social contexts, such as with family and friends” (2005, p.89). Rather than being situated within a hierarchy of other identities (as the researchers suggested), it in many ways appeared as a sole, all encompassing, identity for the participants in this study. Finally, in terms of the fourth dimension, identity regard could be described as highly positive (apart from the one individual for whom the entrepreneur identity did not resonate).

The other ‘label’ that the participants might feasibly have identified with (either explicitly or implicitly through their choice of language) is that of small firm owner-manager. The narratives of over half of the participants revealed they were opposed to the use of the label as a descriptor of them, and were adamant about their reasons for its inapplicability. They all felt that small firm owner-manager represented a certain type of firm: typically one not involving innovation or creativity; one of a small scale (frequently not employing others and not characterised by a growth orientation); and,

one that was a single enterprise with a single owner (i.e. the proprietor was not a portfolio entrepreneur⁶).

I would label entrepreneur as someone who was actually successful at developing a business... whereas a small business owner could be... making no profit and just plodding along.

It [being an entrepreneur] just means I seek opportunity. I seek to grow my business... I look for new opportunity in everything... as a small business owner you can be content. I'm never content.

An entrepreneur... sees opportunities and does it multiple times rather than say your small business owner that maybe starts a bakery and maybe they do that for 50 years. An entrepreneur is someone that pushes the boundaries and creates wealth in innovative ways.

A number of participants also equated small firm ownership as using the business as a way to create a job for yourself, rather than as being ambitious, innovative or pursuing, and exploiting, an opportunity.

I don't really like owner of a small business [as a label]... even though it's probably reality. I don't like the idea of small business... because that to me that means someone who owns a shop... someone who's not going to be anything apart from a small business... somebody who's creating a business for a job you know... has no sort of grand aspirations... I'm creating a business to fulfil a vision.

... to me that would mean that I had made myself a job and my biggest goal in this business is actually to do myself out of a job.

Several participants were particularly vehement in their denouncement of the suitability of the descriptor small firm owner-manager. One said it was not a 'distinctive definition', another that it was 'incredibly lame', and another that it

⁶ A portfolio entrepreneur being one who owns multiple businesses simultaneously (Carter & Ram, 2003).

sounds like 'Doris at home knitting her woolly little socks'. However, four of the participants conceded that the 'label' small firm owner-manager was one that could be applied to them as well as that of entrepreneur. They added the caveat that while the small firm owner-manager descriptor was factually precise, it did not capture the spirit or characteristics of entrepreneurship that they felt as individuals they embodied. Therefore, it might be said that entrepreneur was the preferred identity and small firm owner-manager a simple matter of accuracy. Indeed one participant conceded that he was obliged to acknowledge the accuracy of the label small firm owner-manager, but was not willing to adopt it as a work identity. So, participants in this study were, in essence, entrepreneurs in spirit but small firm owner-managers in reality.

It is important to point out that in their narratives participants were not neutral about the adoption of either label. They were passionate when arguing the appropriateness and desirability of the entrepreneur identity, and equally emphatic in their denial of the appeal, and appropriateness, of the descriptor small firm owner-manager. It appeared important which term was applied to them, and equally so was their ability to justify why each was right or wrong – and ultimately, which they identified with and which they did not.

One participant described how calling himself an entrepreneur was a way of 'making a statement' to those around him. He felt that it communicated intention and implied success, sustainability, and stability with regard to the future. Similarly, another participant linked the entrepreneur identity to future plans or intentions in this way: 'I'm not a small business owner-manager because when you ask me I don't answer about now, I answer about the future'. Another said that entrepreneur is his 'self-image' and that it embodies the values he has in relation to risk, opportunity and success – and that it best represents him as a 'creator' and a 'dreamer'.

Several participants described how they might attribute to themselves a different label according to the image they wished to portray in various situations they found themselves in. For example, two participants said they described themselves as a small firm owner-manager when they wanted to 'downplay' their activities. Stories such as these are indicators of the opposite attitude to that which might reasonably be expected to be the motivation behind the choice of one or other descriptor - that is, using the entrepreneur label, or not, primarily as a means of enhancing reputation or

ego, or embellishing achievement. Rather these young entrepreneurs needed no such external validation of the connotations of the tag 'entrepreneur', nor did they feel they needed the social legitimacy or occupational currency using it might provide them. This finding is consistent with Rae's (2003) assertion that a vital component of the entrepreneurial act of firm creation is the shift from the assumption of an identity that is defined by others, into the formation of an identity of one's own.

A number of participants described a link between the aptness of a descriptor (entrepreneur cf. small firm owner-manager) and the chronology of events in terms of the life of their firm. For example, one participant felt she was less of an entrepreneur and more of a small firm owner-manager at the beginning of the life of her firm. Another participant told how she only identified as an entrepreneur two years into the life of her business, and that she 'only now deserves the title as the business is sustainable'. Another explained that she felt she was now more of an entrepreneur because her firm now employed others and she felt that leadership (or 'taking people with you') was an important component of entrepreneurial behaviour.

I guess I do now, it probably took me a year or two before I did....I've always wanted to be one you see...but it wasn't until probably a year and a half or two years after I started it that I actually felt like I deserved that title...It was probably when the business came actually sustainable and it wasn't just something I was doing part time.

This link between the chronology of start-up and the presence of entrepreneurial behaviour is consistent with Rae's assertion that being an entrepreneur is "a matter of degree rather than 'being' or 'not being'" (2003, p.12).

In terms of willingness to claim the entrepreneur identity, and advocate its saliency, it was only among some of the female participants that circumspection about its adoption could be identified. It would not appear that this was due to any uncertainty about the unsuitability of the title; rather it appeared to stem from the presence of other 'identities' within their life. In particular, those who had roles as mothers, whilst still embracing the label entrepreneur, conceptualised the place of the identity in a

different way. Several of the women used the entrepreneurial identity to resolve tensions that had emerged for them when they left a successful working life to have children. The perception that they had abandoned a thriving working life in order to have children often left them feeling resigned to being written off in terms of having a career or making a contribution in terms of 'work'. One of the 'mother entrepreneurs' described how being an entrepreneur allowed her to 'trump' the mother identity with something that enabled her to still claim a work presence and signal her capability for success and contribution – both to her family and in a wider sense. Another participant described how starting her own business and being an entrepreneur enabled her to juggle her roles and identities, and was the mechanism by which she could best resolve the tensions between them. Therefore, for her being an entrepreneur (as a way of working and as an identity) was the best fit with motherhood - and all its ramifications.

6.3 Chapter closing

This chapter dealt broadly with the topic of entrepreneurial identity, and specifically with: how the participants in the study described success for themselves; whether they identified as entrepreneurs; and, in turn how they defined that identity. The scale of the ambitions of the young entrepreneurs in the study was significant – and growth and profit as a result both perceived logical, and inextricably linked, outcomes. However, the pursuit of this success was not described as occurring at any cost – and indeed compromising achievements was perceived as acceptable if that entailed satisfying other holistic and/or moral imperatives. The young entrepreneurs in the study were also keen to unbundle 'success for firm' from 'success for self'. The majority of participants strongly identified as entrepreneurs. They felt it was the identity that was most consistent with their approach, values, attitudes, and aspirations. They accepted that in some instances the label small-firm owner manager was accurate in terms of the scale of their operations, but rejected its appropriateness on any other grounds.

Chapter 7: Drawing together context, theme and question

The outcome of any serious research can only be to make two questions grow where only one grew before.

Thorstein Veblen

1857-1929, Norwegian-American sociologist & economist

The research question at the centre of this study is:

What meaning do young New Zealand entrepreneurs attach to being in business?

The preceding six chapters are a written representation of the research journey I have taken to seek an answer to that question. In the first chapter I contextualised my research question in terms of current thinking in order to show how it evolved out of a real world phenomenon: the participation of young people in entrepreneurship, a form of ‘work’ that is perceived as desirable in the modern age. I also outlined the way in which I broke down the central research question into three sub-questions in order to facilitate enquiry into three specific dimensions:

1. **According to young New Zealand entrepreneurs, what links are there between self and firm?**
 2. **Do young New Zealand entrepreneurs think of entrepreneurship as a form of work?**
 3. **Do young New Zealanders who run businesses identify as entrepreneurs?**
-

The second chapter framed the research question relative to relevant research literature, and both in historical and theoretical terms. The foci of the chapter were: writings on youth entrepreneurship as a distinct phenomenon; what career theory could offer to describe entrepreneurship as a 'work' experience; and, describing the emergence of the study of entrepreneurial identity. Chapter three outlined the research design that underpinned the pursuit of an answer to the study's central question. The rationale for an interpretive study rooted in a constructivist worldview was presented, and the details of the phenomenologically driven in-depth interviews described. The following chapters (four, five, and six) presented the findings from the data gathering engagement. Each of the three results/discussion chapters was dedicated to a specific research sub-question, and in turn arranged according to theme. Chapter four examined the relationship between the young entrepreneur and their firm, chapter five how they conceptualise their 'work', and chapter six how they identify and define entrepreneurship.

This final chapter is the written capstone to the study. It will draw conclusions from the data gathering and analysis process, and frame these in terms of both the sub and central research questions. Structurally therefore, this chapter is split according to those questions, and supplemented by sections devoted to the limitations of the study and identifiable areas for future research.

7.1 The relationship between young entrepreneur & firm

What, if any, links are perceived as existing between the individual young entrepreneur and their firm was the first sub-question posed in this study. As the findings of chapter four demonstrated, there are definitely links perceived as existing between this group of young New Zealand entrepreneurs and their firms. These multiple links are diverse but similar in character: they are defining, intense and critical. Together they constitute a complex dynamic between individual and firm that is more akin to a relationship, than the objective, analytical, descriptor of 'link'. The choice of the word relationship to represent the nexus between person and firm embodies the heart of the relationship itself: emotion. It also signifies the potential of the relationship to enhance or diminish the self-esteem of the young entrepreneur.

The impact of the relationship is reciprocal, and the influence symbiotic. Its natural subjectivity dictates that much of 'it' must be intangible; however, there are also external manifestations of its significance (e.g. firm goals and personal aspirations; firm structure and management practices). The driver of the relationship and, one would therefore assume, the mechanism that maintains the relationship is the intense sense of emotional attachment these young entrepreneurs have to their firms. Their firm is the vessel in which they have invested all their emotion, commitment and effort into in order to bring to life their dream of living as an entrepreneur.

At its most positive, the relationship is an enabler, of evolution in terms of both person and firm. It can also be a catalyst for change and development in both these spheres of life – the fortunes of one entwined with those of the other. As such, the relationship between entrepreneur and firm is not static. It is inherently dynamic and can change under different circumstances. Some moderators of the relationship appear to be gender, stage of life and associated commitments, length of time as an entrepreneur, and the point in the business lifecycle at which the firm sits.

The conceptualisation of entrepreneurship as comprising a relationship between self and firm that is reciprocal and symbiotic means the potential impact of acts of entrepreneurship (i.e. firm creation) is increased. The transformative power of an entrepreneurial act is enhanced across all dimensions of impact (e.g. community and country – person and personality). This notion of a relationship immediately changes the way we think about the phenomenon of entrepreneurship, and points to what people *can be*, as well as what they are, when engaging in the act.

For the young entrepreneurs in this study, the act of entrepreneurship (i.e. which in the context of this study was starting a firm) was more than a rational occupational choice. It was a means of self-expression that represents more than what they wanted to do to make or earn a living. It represents how they want to live their life and who they want to be. Starting their firm as a means of self-expression dictates that they see firm start-up as an act of creativity and 'the firm' as more than a simple business structure. It, and everything about how it exists and is enacted/managed, becomes more. More than an entity that provides products and services and files financial returns to demonstrate its success. At its heart it becomes a tool to examine the very essence of its entrepreneur. The firm becomes a window to their self; a mirror to their

philosophies and personality, a testament to their values and choices, and, a barometer of their hopes and expectations.

The notion of a relationship between individual young entrepreneur and firm (rather than merely interactions or links) permits the reconceptualisation of a number of constructs that have, up until this point, been used to explain the links or interactions between person and firm. These include for example, domains, roles, borders and boundaries. What all these have in common is an attempt to mediate the connection between person and firm, and attempt to impose upon it divisors, methods of separation or rationalise the merging of domains or crossovers of spheres. Instead, the experiences of this group suggest a more organic, holistic reality. The worlds of home and work don't intersect, merge or cross over – in this study they are found to be crafted to be entwined, immersed in one and other, the fortunes of one inherently linked to those of the other – and this state is desirable, aimed for, and life is designed as such. Entrepreneurship is the thread that binds 'home' and 'work', it weaves together a life-design that seeks integration, meaning, and difference.

The reality of this was often messy, hard to pin down, amorphous, and about feelings rather than time management, and about what felt right, not what appeared right. What was important was what facilitated the best for all of life, not the prioritisation of one part of it over another – or one at the expense of the other. In this sense there was no state of balance to aim for. Instead there was a pendulum effect, the priority swinging from one equally important constituent to another. The aim was not so much balance as the fluidity to emphasise, at will, certain resources in certain directions. Sometimes this was manifested not as a balancing of multiple activities, but rather as a total commitment to one at one time and another at another. It was the certainty they had about what fitted where in their life, and what was in and what was out that made this fluidity achievable. Along with tremendous certainty and self-possession in terms of their choices, this group of young entrepreneurs also had the ability to consciously reflect on what they wanted in their life, what was most important to them, and how it all fitted together.

The essence of the relationship between individual and firm is then therefore what? Emotion; possibility; meaning beyond reality; liberation from norms and expectations; chart your own course, captain your own team, rule your own universe; rescue yourself (and others), from a life where you don't fit, from where what you

value isn't what is valued (by others), and from the antithesis of what you stand for (or want to ultimately be). The relationship, and all the facets of entrepreneurship it encompasses, gives the chance to be your own hero.

7.2 Conceptualisations of 'work'

If we logically follow through on the thought process outlined in the conclusions made regarding the preceding research question, it is unlikely that many satisfied young entrepreneurs will conceptualise what they do as a form of 'work'. The evidence from this study supports that conclusion. These young entrepreneurs described 'what they do' as more complex, more emotional, more important, and, ultimately, more meaningful than work. If they ever were to be able to ascribe the label of work to describe their day-to-day endeavours that would require a serious revision to the ways in which work has been defined to date. So, for these young entrepreneurs being 'in business' is more than a form of work. In many instances it fulfilled a need of a higher order and what could be described as a response to a higher calling. A calling, a mission and a life's purpose were all evocative phrases used to attempt to capture the meaningfulness of what, to all and intents and purposes, the rest of the world labels their work.

If, for this group of young entrepreneurs, their relationship to their firm was more akin to an emotional engagement than an occupational choice, then the choice to start a firm immediately becomes more of a life-milestone than the outcome of a rational decision-making process. That is not to say it can't be the latter also, but that whichever it is, there is a significant emotional component to the decision. If we imagine the choice to start a firm as being more momentous, more prophetic, more filled with possibility than before, then we engender some understanding of the sense of importance this choice plays in their mind, their heart and ultimately their life. All paths are entwined, all decisions interwoven and all outcomes enmeshed in their existence - both as person, entrepreneur - and in terms of any other identities they assume, or roles they fulfill.

The decisions the young business owners make in the context of their firms then immediately take on more import for researchers, and those tasked with intervening in order to enhance their performance. These methods of management, strategy making and resourcing all become much more than functional manifestations of business

choices – they become insights into character, reflections of personality, and mirrors of values that matter. They codify what is implicitly important to that young entrepreneur as an individual. Rather than explicit tools such as vision or mission statements for communicating values, these structures and management mechanisms speak volumes about the character of the entrepreneur that the firm is an extension of, as well as ‘how we do things around here’. This group has management creeds rather than styles. These exemplify, and are testament to, their desire for personal authenticity.

7.3 Identifying as entrepreneur

In this study the young people who started up, and continued to run, businesses strongly identified as entrepreneurs. Their affirmation of the appropriateness, and acceptability, of this identity to them posed the logical question of why was it such a good fit? The reasons behind their willingness to engage with the identity, and its ramifications, were as various as their individual experiences. However, there were some common underlying motivations behind the acceptance. Primarily the assumption of this identity (as opposed to any other) was driven by its ability to best encapsulate the spirit and potential of what they were trying to do. It was, in their eyes, the embodiment of their experiences, their hopes, and their ultimate goals. It was also a way of signaling possibility and potential. Their possible selves, or best possible self, were bound up within all that the identity of entrepreneur suggested was possible. The identity of entrepreneur was also seen as the most apt way of honoring the meaningfulness of what they chose to do with their life, and the nature of the link between them as an individual entrepreneur and their firm.

The status of the identity in their minds was heroic and aspirational. This idea of a potential, or ideal, state to aim for was reinforced by the largely wholesale rejection by this group of young entrepreneurs of the notion of identifying as a small firm owner-manager. The perceived mundanity of the character of this possible identity did not appeal to the temperaments of the young entrepreneurs, reconcile with their ambitions, or resonate with their style of life-work/work-life. The potential for the adoption of such a descriptor to inhibit the scale of both their dreams and reality was apparent by their reactions to the appropriateness of the descriptor. That is, their unequivocal dismissal of it, or firm argument as to its irrelevancy.

For some, choosing an affiliation with the identity of entrepreneur had more pragmatic underpinnings. For example, it empowered them to resolve tensions (either consciously or sub-consciously) that exist for them between the various roles that they assume within their life. Principally these were in the context of the women who were choosing to be mother-entrepreneurs or entrepreneur-mothers. These young entrepreneurs felt that the identity of entrepreneur enhanced the legitimacy of their activities, and validated their work as meaningful enough to ‘compete’ with expectations made of them as mothers. Often the label afforded them a personal sense of value that had been missing in their life if they had absented themselves from the occupational sphere of their life in order to raise children. It gave them a sense of self-worth that they felt they only got from ‘work’. This seemed especially pertinent to those who had turned away from status-creating positions or senior rankings with large organisational bureaucracies. The label entrepreneur was in some ways armour against those who may judge them for wanting to combine roles, or pursue one at the perceived expense of the other. The reality was, that in most instances, the choice to form a firm was as a solution to role tension and to give the best to both ‘jobs’ not as an abdication of one responsibility for the other. It was juggling more than balance, and a chance to claim the freedom back that in many situations they felt they had lost when they had chosen to pursue motherhood fulltime, not work full-time.

Beyond merely stating that they assumed the identity of ‘entrepreneur’, and ascribing to its perceived desirability, there were other signifiers as to the importance of the assumption of this identity to this group. The primary means of demonstrating their commitment to the identity was their ability to articulate its meaning. Their lucidity extended from the specific meaning of it to them as an individual, right through to more generic descriptors that might, or might, not be relevant to their own experience. They were as eloquent about what entrepreneurship was not, as well as what it did comprise, and did so without resorting to (what may be considered) stereotypes, media myth or popular discourse. This signaled the level of consideration they had given the issue, and the way they had seriously reflected on the meaning of the generic to their specific context, personality, and experience. It pointed to the meaning being internally and experientially driven, rather than externally prompted and moderated.

7.4 Limitations

The findings of any study must be carefully considered in relation to the research design that informed the findings. In following that caveat, readers are therefore restricted from taking the findings and attempting to do more with them than the researcher who wrote them intended.

The findings are intended, by their very nature, not to be replicable or generalisable. They are entirely dependent on the interpretations of myself (as the researcher) and the participants in the narratives. They focus on meanings, experiences and essences that are particular to each individual participant. The particular choice of research context (young New Zealand entrepreneurs in the 21st century) can also be considered to limit the relevance of the findings.

The characteristics of the group of young entrepreneurs who participated in the study may also have potentially limited the findings. By chance, the group shared some similarities that may mean a group with different characteristics would have contrasting experiences. For example, this group were highly educated (seven tertiary qualified or engaged in tertiary study), involved in what could be described as successful ventures, and at a particular point in the life-cycle of their firm (e.g. on average, interviews took place two to seven years since they started their firm so all were past what might be classified as the difficult start-up phase).

The nature of the data collection process also placed some limitations on the study. For example, the timing of the interviews prevented any type of longitudinal data gathering. Also, the scope of the study itself limited the inclusion of a greater number of participants. The topics of the three interviews also facilitated a focus on the more positive aspects of business ownership and the entrepreneurial experience. An alternative research design may have permitted the more deliberate, and explicit, focus on the negative facets of both.

7.5 Areas for future research

The potential for research to generate more questions than answers to questions is immeasurable. From this study it is possible to identify a further raft of questions that could be posed to subsequent groups of young entrepreneurs – across different cultures and contexts – in order to elaborate on the findings of this study.

At the conclusion of this study, the possibility that young entrepreneurs might experience the phenomenon of entrepreneurship in a unique way is very real to me. This raises serious challenges to the way we conceptualise entrepreneurship, and opens a Pandora's box of opportunities when we take future work into the realms of nuanced, subjective, sociological exploration. These are the types of studies that could usefully build on the beginnings presented in this piece of work.

Specifically, areas of future research that would directly build on findings from this study could include an extension of the emotional dimensions of the entrepreneurship experience introduced by participants in this study. Particularly, situating this in the context of emotional/moral intelligence in relation to entrepreneurship, and considering the negative implications of such a strong bond between individual emotion and business outcomes. In addition, the various metaphors that have been used to characterise the entrepreneurial journeys of the various participants are insightful, and future investigation could focus on drawing these out further and in relation to other roles, personal history, and individual intentions. Differences in language used by male and female participants to describe facets of their experiences of entrepreneurship also emerged from this study. There is potential value in further work with an explicit focus on such differences.

There is also a place for a study that deliberately investigates perceptions of the role of finance as motivator, rationale and reward for young entrepreneurs. It could build on the emergent findings from this study that remain under-developed due to the particular research design, and way they emerged in the interviews. Finally, the way in which young entrepreneurs can be best supported merits serious exploration in order to better inform those tasked with either understanding their experiences (in order to provide assistance – e.g. practitioners) or who wish to effect change by obtaining a better understanding of the process of entrepreneurship (its character, effects and outcomes) and what we value in terms of 'business outcomes' (e.g. policy-makers).

7.6 Overarching question

Historically there has been a focus on defining entrepreneurship in objective terms or through achieved consensus in regard to matters of vocabulary, construct, units of analysis, action or attitude. This study attempted to go beyond that, into the realm of

the subjective, the holistic, the richness of the stories of individuals and their tapestries of experience. The aim was to bring to the forefront the meaning of the experience of entrepreneurship in the lives of this group of young people. To gain insights into how meaning is made, not sense; how internal perceptions are created, not external ones adhered to; and, the emotional side of entrepreneurship, not the rational. In parallel, the study ended up exploring the importance of intuition over logic when enacting, and learning to understand, entrepreneurship as a phenomenon - to reveal the role of gut feel and heart, as well as passion and drive. The study takes both an approach, and context, that might be considered to exist on the periphery of understanding, and assimilate it within more mainstream, traditional modes of understanding experiences of entrepreneurship. This was in order to attempt to expand the repertoire of thinking, way of looking, and models of understanding entrepreneurship that currently are adopted.

The question that drove the study is: what meaning do young New Zealanders attach to being in business? To this group of ten young New Zealand entrepreneurs being in business meant: expression (of self, of emotion, and of potential – or possible selves); authenticity (in both mindset and management); and complexity (inter-weaving of facets of life, evolution of thought, feeling and action). The meaning is necessarily subjective. Rather than merely acknowledge this subjectivity, and run from its implications, this group of young entrepreneurs embraced it and refused to prioritise objective measures of performance ahead of their own measures of satisfaction.

Running a business was far more than an outcome of a rational choice; it was a means of expressing personal truth, creativity, passion, intensity and faith (in themselves, in others, and in the future). It is for them, in essence, a hopeful endeavour – borne out of a drive to be, and do, better. An attachment to their firm rooted in emotion and comprising significant commitment was for them a logical manifestation. Beyond occupational choice, running a business was a life choice – part of a life design that incorporated activity that was more meaningful than ‘work’, and more rewarding than a ‘career’. The resulting attachment, is perceived by this group as therefore being, ultimately, more sustainable, meaningful, and satisfying.

In parallel with this engagement with their day-to-day business routines, and in deference to their respective entrepreneurial destinies, the young business owners described their drive for authenticity and their will to do what they do, the way they

do it. In other words, for them to compromise their way of doing things, in order to satisfy others, would preclude them from wishing to continue. Their commitment to being entrepreneurial, within the context of a business, was contingent upon doing it in the most truthful way they knew. Not being disguised behind identities, personas and roles that were unreal to them; not engaging in business activities, routines and practices that did not parallel their own personal values; and, ultimately, not betraying the very reasons they chose to engage in 'being in business' – to honour who they felt they really were, and to allow them to be the best possible 'me' they could be. This entrepreneurial creed existed in varying forms, but the resoluteness to which it was held by each individual was common. It went beyond the catch cry of ethics - it is a creed that in its different guises embodies reciprocity and a deep sense of responsibility. It is testament to their belief that to have a place in a community and a country, and to have a business, entails some obligation to consider what that means about what and how you interact with your constituents – be they your customers or your staff-friends/team-family.

The findings of this study are a contribution to the body of knowledge concerning entrepreneurship. With its central focus on the young entrepreneur as the unit of analysis the study is an effort to address the gap that currently exists in the research literature, and especially in terms of work in the New Zealand context. The findings of the study allude to the potential differences in experience between younger and older entrepreneurs, and bring to light results that can contribute further, or extend, understanding of existing constructs (e.g. the importance of personal autonomy and the idea of work-life balance). The study also contributes new findings that future work may cement as being particular to young entrepreneurs as a group. To policy-makers and practitioners, the study offers insights into the lived experiences of a group of New Zealand entrepreneurs. When the findings from this study are translated into appropriate outputs to meet the needs of those stakeholders, and disseminated appropriately, the findings have the potential to enable better design of initiatives (at both a policy and programme level) for young entrepreneurs in this country.

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Appendix A: Information sheet _____



Youth & entrepreneurial identity

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher introduction

This project is being carried out for a Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD) at Massey University. The primary research objective is to explore how young New Zealand self-employed individuals perceive business creation as contributing to their identity. The project is being carried out by:

Kate Lewis, Associate - New Zealand Centre for SME Research, Massey University, Private Box 756, Wellington. 04 8015799 (x6369), 021 475144. K.V.Lewis@massey.ac.nz

Her chief PhD supervisor is:

Associate Professor Claire Massey, Director - New Zealand Centre for SME Research, Massey University, Private Box 756, Wellington. 04 8015799 (x6506). C.L.Massey@massey.ac.nz

Participant Recruitment

Your name was identified by the researcher through a publicly available source (e.g. a newspaper or magazine article, or a website). To be selected as an interviewee you had to have become self-employed under the age of 30. Ten high profile interviewees have been approached to participate from three main centres in New Zealand.

Project Procedures

The data from the three interviews that will be carried out with you will form the basis of a PhD thesis to be written by the researcher. A copy of each of your three transcripts will be returned to you after each interview. You will have an opportunity (within the timeframe specified) to amend the transcript should you wish. You will also have the choice as to whether your name, or the name of your business, is used during the write up of the data.

Participant involvement

You will be interviewed by Kate three times for approximately one hour each over a three month period. If you consent the interview will be recorded.

Participant's Rights

If you decide to participate, you have the right to decline to answer any particular question; withdraw from the study at any time; ask any questions about the study at any time during participation; and ask for the recording device to be turned off at any point during the interview.

Project Contacts

If you have any questions about the project please contact Kate Lewis or Associate Professor Claire Massey (contact details above).

Compulsory Statements

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Ethics & Equity), telephone 06 360 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix B: Consent form _____



Youth & entrepreneurial identity

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree/do not agree to my name, or the name of my business, being used when the data is written up by the researcher.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Full Name - printed _____