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The Serial Intrapreneur:

An exploratory study of repeat intrapreneurs.

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Abstract

This paper seeks to understand people who repeatedly act entrepreneurially within organizations, what we have called serial intrapreneurs. Intrapreneurship has been linked to a broad range of innovative activities which increase organizational performance, making intrapreneurs a valuable resource. Mechanisms driving intrapreneurs out of their organizations are well known, but according to our search serial intrapreneurship is not adequately covered in the academic literature. Serial intrapreneurship should be of interest to researchers, businesses, and other organizations, as increasing understanding of the topic has the potential to build and retain a resource central to innovation and performance.

Through a range of in-depth interviews of serial intrapreneurs, serial entrepreneurs, and facilitators of intrapreneurship, this study arrives at an inductive model of serial intrapreneurship consisting of four dimensions; Person, Environment, Circumstance and Interplay.

The model shows serial intrapreneurs as having major overlaps in personal traits and behaviors with serial entrepreneurs, and that the differences are largely present due to circumstantial and environmental factors, as well as their interplay with the intrapreneur. The paper uncovers key differentiating factors between serial intrapreneurs and other types of entrepreneurs as their increased aptitude and tolerance for navigating the internal politics of their parenting organization, as well as differences in risk tolerance and perception.

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1. Introduction

An intrapreneur, short for intra-corporate entrepreneur (Pinchot, 1985), is someone who can turn an idea into a profitable reality within their organization. Intrapreneurship is characterized by entrepreneurial activities (Hisrich, 1990) that often go beyond what is expected of the employee (Neessen et al., 2019).

Over the last 15 years, interest in intrapreneurship has grown steadily as it has been positively linked to the innovativeness of organizations (Hornsby et al., 2013, Hernández-Perlines et al., 2022). Intrapreneurship has been linked to companies' abilities to create product-, process- and service innovations, to initiate self-renewal, and to venture new businesses in order to enhance competitiveness and performance (Rigtering and Weitzel 2013; Urbano and Turro 2013; Urbano et al., 2013).

The roles of employees are changing as decision making processes are becoming increasingly decentralized (Foss et al. 2015). Employees now have more responsibility and autonomy, and entrepreneurial skill sets defined by flexibility, proactivity and innovativeness have become desirable (Giunipero et al. 2005). Employees are often viewed as a strategically important resource because the knowledge within an organization lives in the employees (Barney, 1991). Combine this with the fact that most innovation happens as a result of combining existing knowledge from across disciplines (Usher, 1954) and it becomes clear how valuable these employees can be. Often called knowledge recombination, this is how Schumpeter (1934) argued entrepreneurs contributed to the economy, by combining technical, organizational and market knowledge in novel ways (Nelson & Winter, 1985).

When employees become intrapreneurs the risks of losing them increases, as employees with varied and balanced skill sets are more likely entrepreneurs (Lazear, 2004, 2005). Entrepreneurial knowledge combined with lack of opportunities within parenting organizations can often lead to employees seeking new opportunities elsewhere (Garrett et al., 2017). Losing these innovative employees can be costly for companies as it reduces their competitiveness. We seek to improve the understanding of how to retain them whenever possible.

1.1 Problem statement, research questions and working definition

The intrapreneur is a valuable resource that contributes to vital innovation and development of their parenting organization. Mechanisms which lead to intrapreneurs disproportionately leaving their jobs to seek opportunities elsewhere are well established in the literature. Despite this, there is little research into intrapreneurs who stay in an organization over a long period of time and are able to remain entrepreneurial. This study aims to contribute by investigating the origin, perpetuation and differentiating factors of these serial intrapreneurs.

To provide an answer for the problem statement above, we arrived at the following research questions:

1. What are the origins of serial intrapreneurs?
2. What perpetuates intrapreneurship into serial intrapreneurship?
3. What differentiates serial intrapreneurs from other types of entrepreneurs?

We also created a working definition of the serial intrapreneur, as it does not have an academic definition as of the writing of this thesis.

Serial intrapreneurs repeatedly take new ideas and turn them into valuable realities within the organization.

This definition will be further elaborated in the literature review - 2.4, and the discussion - 5.2.

1.2 Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first has introduced the topic, covered background, and formulated goals through the problem statement and research questions. Chapter two contains the literature review. Chapter three covers methodology. Chapter four presents our inductive model and findings. Chapter five summarizes key findings, before discussing the working definition of serial intrapreneurship, tackling the research questions and additional insights. Chapter six provides an overview of implications and further research possibilities. Finally, the seventh chapter concludes and considers limitations.

2. Literature review

In this chapter we will take a closer look at the relevant academic literature.

We undergo a thorough literature review of our main topics; entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship, entrepreneurial spawning, and strategic implications, in order to get a grasp on the relevant topic required to design our study and ultimately answer the research questions.

2.1 Entrepreneurship

Drawing attention from both academics and journalists, entrepreneurship is one of the most widely discussed topics in the field of business (Gutterman, 2018).

Entrepreneurship is a complex idea consisting of; personal characteristics and traits of the entrepreneur, innovation, organization creation, value creation, growth, uniqueness, and ownership and management (Gartner, 1990).

There are many non-academic definitions of the entrepreneur. One is from Oxford dictionary:

“[An entrepreneur is] *a person who makes money by starting or running businesses, especially when this involves taking financial risk*” (Entrepreneur Noun - Definition. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary).

Cambridge dictionary defines it;

“*[An entrepreneur is] someone who starts their own business, especially when this involves seeing a new opportunity.* (Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus).

Professor Howard Stevenson (2006) at Harvard defines it broadly, leaving a wide range of activities to be defined as entrepreneurship.

“*[Entrepreneurship] is the pursuit of opportunity without regard to resources currently controlled.*” (Stevenson, 2006).

A common theme is that entrepreneurship is typically understood as the creation of a new business and the acceptance of the risks associated with that business in

exchange for profits obtained from exploiting market opportunities. (Butler, 2020, p.1-4)

Entrepreneurship is famously linked to Schumpeter's "Creative destruction". According to Schumpeter, the entrepreneur is driven by innovation, which can be in the form of a new product or process, or an innovative change to existing products or processes, which in turn "destroys" or makes obsolete previous products and processes (Schumpeter, 1942).

Entrepreneurs are individuals who possess a diverse set of skills. They do not necessarily excel in any one area, but they are well-rounded and have the ability to bring together multiple elements necessary to establish a thriving business. This often leads to them being more balanced individuals (Lazear, 2005).

2.2 Intrapreneurship

Intrapreneurship is broadly defined as entrepreneurial activities within an existing organization (Hisrich, 1990). It is a subset of entrepreneurship research (Nicholson et al., 2016). Originally short for "Intra-Corporate Entrepreneur", the term was coined by Gifford Pinchot III in his 1985 book *Intrapreneuring: Why You Don't Have to Leave the Corporation to Become an Entrepreneur*. As an area of study, it has seen a significant increase in attention over the past 15 years (Hornsby et al., 2013, Hernández-Perlines et al., 2022), after existing in relative obscurity since its conception. The growing interest in the study of intrapreneurship has led to an increased understanding of the importance of entrepreneurial behavior within organizations. Researchers have examined the intrapreneur's impact on different aspects of the organization and their environment (Lee and Suh, 2022). Intrapreneurship has been linked to companies' abilities to innovate on products, processes, and services (Sinha and Srivastava, 2013), initiating self-renewal (Rigtering and Weitzel 2013; Urbano and Turro 2013; Urbano et al. 2013) or venturing new businesses in order to enhance the competitiveness and performance (Antoncic and Hisrich, 2001). It is also linked with overall company success, survival (Ireland et al., 2003), growth (Sinha and Srivastava, 2013), and organizational effectiveness and value creation (Kearney and Meynhardt, 2016).

According to comprehensive literature reviews and bibliography studies, the study of intrapreneurship has likely been severely slowed by the confusion around central terms (Hernández-Perlines et al., 2022, Neessen et al., 2019).

Intrapreneurship, corporate entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial orientation are all largely used to refer to the same activities, though the former often focuses on the employee's perspective while the latter two as a general rule focus on attributes of the organization (Hernández-Perlines et al., 2022).

Intrapreneurship is viewed as either an aspect of the individual or as a result of organizational factors. Research is often limited to intrapreneurship as a characteristic of the organization. Multiple studies focus on connections between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance (Covin et al., 2006; Wiklund and Shepherd, 2005). Entrepreneurial orientation describes the innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking behaviors of organizations (De Clercq et al., 2010). Rather than focusing on the variation on an employee level, these studies focus on the different 'climates' of intrapreneurship (Neessen et al., 2019). Openness to new ideas, creativity, tolerance for failure, and a culture of innovation are common characteristics of climates conducive to intrapreneurship (Santos-Vijande et al., 2022).

Entrepreneurial orientation exists as a continuum, ranging from a bureaucratic inflexible system to a flexible system with a flatter hierarchy (Covin & Slevin, 1989). Employees at organizations with a low degree of entrepreneurial organization are expected to follow instructions, not to make any mistakes, not to fail, not to take initiative, to stay within their turf, and protect their backside. Conversely, in a company with a high degree of entrepreneurial orientation flexibility, creativity, independence, and risk taking are welcomed. Developing visions, goals, and action plans, taking action and being rewarded, suggest, try and experiment, take responsibility and ownership. The more flexible, entrepreneurial company culture supports individuals in their effort to create something new.

Intrapreneurs are innovative, proactive, risk-taking, able to recognize and exploit opportunities, and to build networks (Neessen et.al 2019). They also understand their environments, are visionary, flexible, create management options, promote

teamwork and discussions, build support, and persist (Hisrich, 1990), see Appendix 1. Hisrich also compared traits of traditional managers, entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs and found many similarities between the latter two. They are more risk taking, less concerned about status, autonomy in decision-making, and more motivated by independence than the traditional managers. Risk taking behavior is found to be correlated with the personality traits of low neuroticism and high extraversion (Oehler, A., & Wedlich, F. (2018). Determinants of intrapreneurial behavior are skillset, perception of capabilities, knowledge and experience, relation to organization, motivation, satisfaction, and intentions (Hernández-Perlines et al., 2022).

Similar to entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship can take many forms. The best definition seems to be the one formulated by Neessen et al., (2019) based on a comprehensive literature review of 1252 peer-reviewed articles.

“Intrapreneurship is a process whereby employee(s) recognize and exploit opportunities by being innovative, proactive, and by taking risks, in order for the organization to create new products, processes and services, initiate self-renewal or venture new businesses to enhance the competitiveness and performance of the organization.”

(Neessen et al., 2019, p.551)

This definition summarizes the intrapreneur’s qualities of innovativeness, proactivity and risk taking and highlights the benefits to the organization. Neessen et al., (2019) also describe going beyond expectations as a common trait among intrapreneurs.

2.3 Serial Entrepreneurship

Serial entrepreneurs are defined as people who engage in repeated entrepreneurship, choosing to re-engage in firm creation after business closure (Guerrero & Peña-Legazkue, 2019). According to entrepreneur.com; “... *a serial entrepreneur is an entrepreneur who continuously comes up with new ideas and starts new businesses*” (Samuelson, 2018, para. 1).

Similarly, Hyytinen and Ilmakunnas establish; “... *serial entrepreneurs are repeat business starters who in the past have sold or closed down a business which they*

at least partly ran and owned and who currently run another, possibly new business which they at least partly own.” (Hyytinen & Ilmakunnas, 2007, p. 793)

According to Dabic et al., (2021) employees who have past experience being entrepreneurs are more likely to have aspirations of starting another business than those without such experience. Controlling for aspirations, they found that past experience as an entrepreneur increases the probability of transitioning from employment to starting a business by 12%. They claim serial entrepreneurs could account for up to 30% of transitions from paid employment. (Dabic et al., 2021) In addition to being more likely to start businesses, serial entrepreneurs are also more likely to find success when doing so (Lafontaine & Shaw, 2016, Lazear, 2005, Kirschenhofer & Lechner, 2012).

2.4 Serial Intrapreneurship

The term serial intrapreneur has seen some use in popular media (Ragir, 2020) and has been discussed on online message boards (*Is There Such a Thing as Serial Intrapreneurship?*, 2019), but has not been examined within the academic entrepreneurship literature. When searching Google Scholar, we conducted an advanced search with the exact phrase “Serial Intrapreneurship”, where there were a total of 4 results and 8 citations. (*‘Serial Intrapreneurship’ - Google Scholar*, 2023) Searching Oria for “serial intrapreneur” and “serial intrapreneurship” provides no hits that examine the term in a scholarly context (*Oria.No - Serial Intrapreneurship*, 2023). Searching other similar databases, like Web of Science, provides us with the same results. (*Advanced Search - Web of Science Core Collection*, 2023)

Employee intrapreneurship, personal resources, and work engagement are interconnected, where an increase in one can lead to an increase in the others (Gawke et al., 2017). This shows that intrapreneurship can increase job satisfaction thus leading to increased longevity. However, the study only looks at a 3-month perspective and as such fails to capture the long term serial intrapreneurship phenomenon we are after.

We created a working definition of serial intrapreneur, as it does not have an academic definition as of the writing of this thesis;

Serial intrapreneurs repeatedly take new ideas and turn them into valuable realities within the organization.

The definition was arrived at based on comprehensive literature reviews by Neessen et al. (2019) and Hernández-Perlines et al., (2022), and on the original intrapreneur definition and writings by Pinchot (1985). The accuracy and effectiveness of this definition is discussed in 5.2.

2.5 Entrepreneurial spawning

“(...) the existence of abundant entrepreneurial knowledge and lack of commercial opportunities within parenting firms leads to employees becoming entrepreneurs.” (Garrett et al., 2017, p360)

Entrepreneurial spawning is the process of employees leaving their jobs to start a new venture (Garrett et al., 2017). Employees with wide skillsets are more likely to become entrepreneurs, and employees often leave to start their own business when they get frustrated with their employer not embracing their ideas (Garrett et al., 2017).

A rounded skill set is an important contributing factor to “the small firm effect”, which explains the increased tendency for employees in smaller organizations to start their own companies (Elfenbein et al., 2010). The “jack-of-all-trades” perspective posits that individuals with diverse and well-rounded skills are more likely to become entrepreneurs. This theory has been supported by numerous studies (Åstebro & Thompson, 2011; Lazear, 2004, 2005; Wagner, 2003). According to Lazear (2005), individuals who gain balanced skills through various jobs and multiple roles have a higher chance of becoming entrepreneurs.

While intrapreneurship brings with it a lot of benefits for the company, as we have seen above it also increases risks of them leaving.

2.6 Strategic implications of entrepreneurial employees

Roles in the workplace are changing in response to decision making processes becoming more decentralized (Foss et al. 2015). Employees overall have increasing levels of responsibility and autonomy, and entrepreneurial skills like

flexibility, proactivity and innovativeness have become more desirable traits for employers (Giunipero et al. 2005).

Employees often drive innovation on products, processes, and services (Sinha and Srivastava, 2013), though innovations can have a wide range of other origins like users, manufacturers or suppliers, and external pressures (Hippel, 1988). The ability to innovate, particularly to do so quickly and frequently, is crucial for the success in dynamic business environments (Hilmersson and Hilmersson, 2021), driving the value of employees with entrepreneurial skill sets.

The skills and expertise of individuals are often the source of the competitive advantage of firms making this a strategically important and valuable resource according to the resource-based view and VRIO-analysis method (Barney, 1991).

2.7 Innovation

Most innovation happens as a result of combining existing knowledge from across disciplines (Usher, 1954). Often called knowledge recombination, this is how Schumpeter argued entrepreneurs contributed to the economy (Schumpeter, 1942) by combining technical, organizational and market knowledge in novel ways (Nelson & Winter, 1985).

Exploration vs exploitation refers to the tensions between an organization competing in mature technologies and markets driven by efficiency also competing in new technologies and markets defined by uncertainty and innovation (March, 1991). Organizational ambidexterity is the ability of an organization to both explore and exploit (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013).

3. Methodology

This chapter elaborates on chosen qualitative methodology, our data sample, and considerations.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. This method allows for a free exploration of respondents' experiences, not tied down by strict adherence to prior knowledge. Adopting a cross-case study design allowed for a diverse range of perspectives, which enabled the examination of multiple cases where similarities and differences could emerge. We discuss the context in which our research takes place, and the process for data analysis. Finally, touching upon ethical considerations and compliance with guidelines for data collection and stewardship.

3.1 Research design

Qualitative methods aim to discover a phenomenon on an individual level by using non-numerical data (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). This approach can provide rich descriptions of complex situations and allows researchers to highlight experiences and interpretations of people with diverse sets of roles and stakes (Sofaer, 1999). According to Richard Swedberg (2020), in areas where there is little prior knowledge or research available, an exploratory process allows uncovering information researchers would be unable to specify *ex ante*. The researchers must be able to change direction as new data and insights reveal themselves. These studies do not aim to provide conclusive answers but explore the area and to form a foundation upon which to build more conclusive research (Swedberg, 2020). This paper seeks to uncover whether the topic of serial intrapreneurs merit further examination separate from the related concepts of intrapreneurship and serial entrepreneurship, or if it is sufficiently similar to these extant terms that we can conclude it is likely sufficiently covered by the existing research.

This study makes use of the grounded theory approach, which employs a systematic collection and analysis of our data to surface concepts and understand the complexities better (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). With the aim of being able to generate insights and theories, we were able to generate a comprehensive

understanding through the identification of key themes and categories using this research method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, Thomas, 2006). Moreover, this is an active approach where constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and systematic data collection - including generative and concept-related questions are employed. By doing this, we aim to reach adequate density and integration (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As our research design is exploratory in nature, the process of collecting and analyzing primary data overlapped with an ongoing review of the existing literature.

When studying intrapreneurship there are several valuable perspectives to consider; the intrapreneur, facilitators and people who display traits and behaviors correlated with intrapreneurship, but who are not intrapreneurs themselves, typically entrepreneurs. We have included these other perspectives because of the epistemological assumption that social phenomena are too complex to be reduced to a single isolated variable (Yilmaz, 2013). As stated by Morgan & Smircich, each of our respondents can be considered knowledgeable agents because they present their reality subjectively (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

Phenomenological research design seeks to investigate phenomena through the subjects' lived experiences (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018, Natanson, 1973). As we conduct in-depth interviews in this study, we incorporate elements of their subjective experience by factoring in their explicit and non-verbal communication to form an understanding of factors like their level of enthusiasm and whether they are sure or unsure about the answers. This approach fits especially well to our context because our study was aimed at our respondents' subjective experiences, where we capture the richness of these perspectives. (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018)

An inductive model allows for a flexible data collection and analysis to better understand the complexities of intrapreneurship in a corporate setting. This model allows patterns, themes, and insights to emerge *from* the data rather than being imposed on the data a priori (Thomas, 2006). We identify and describe various factors that influence intrapreneurship without any preconceived assumptions. This approach is particularly useful when studying a topic that is not yet well understood or is not well defined academically, which is the case of intrapreneurship in corporate settings (Eisenhardt, 1989).

We utilized methodology derived from Gioia to code data and identify themes. The Gioia methodology is “a systematic approach to new concept development and grounded theory articulation that is designed to bring “qualitative rigor” to the conduct and presentation of inductive research” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 15). We wanted to suspend judgment until after the initial empirical discussion and its conclusions, and therefore allowed us to discover new insights during the data collection. As opposed to a quantitative approach where data fits neatly into preconceived codes, Gioia allows for the emergence of codes while the data is collected and therefore, we are more alert to emerging ideas and concepts. (Gioia et al., 2013).

Codes	Themes	Categories
<i>First order</i>	<i>Second order</i>	<i>Third order</i>
<p>Assertiveness</p> <p>Definition: The ability to speak up for oneself.</p> <p><i>"When I did not get the traction I wanted from my manager, I just called his manager" - SBO</i></p>	<p>PT - Personality traits:</p> <p>Personal characteristics that lead to entrepreneurial or intrapreneurial behaviors.</p>	<p>Person</p>
<p>Business model fit:</p> <p>Definition: Whether or not the intrapreneurial idea matches current or future core business/strategy.</p> <p><i>"People often quit because they want to pursue ideas diverging from core business, and they don't get the necessary support to do so." - TM</i></p>	<p>EEF - Employee/employer fit</p> <p>How the employee and the employer fits in terms of the intrapreneurial idea</p>	<p>Interplay</p>

Table 1: Example of Coding Process with Definitions and Quotes

3.2 Data sample

Our data sample consists of individuals who self-identify according to our definition of serial intrapreneurs; “individuals who repeatedly work toward turning new ideas into valuable realities within an organization”, and those who do not. The plan for the interviews was to talk to people with a wide range of backgrounds, across different firm sizes, scopes, operations, and industries. We sought a sample that was as broad as possible, increasing the chance of identifying areas for further research on serial intrapreneurs. The interviewees were found through various connections and had varying experience with entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship. While we were looking for serial intrapreneurs we were also open to interview people who had previous experience with entrepreneurship in a corporate setting in general as they likely have insight about current or previous employees who fit the description. They can also provide interesting perspectives

as to why they do not fit the description themselves and their experiences related to this.

During our research, we have conducted 16 interviews following our initial lead generation phase. We assembled some of our participants through our network. An informal conversation with a serial entrepreneur proved to be very beneficial both in terms of valuable insights and the further development of our interview guide. It resulted in a comprehensive list of potential interviewees which we then contacted. The focus of the list and the parameters our contact focused on, were mainly on serial entrepreneurs and potential intrapreneurs.

To further expand our pool of participants, we further made use of our own network to reach a corporate venture and innovation agency known for their intrapreneurial work. This further resulted in more interview objects and participants willing to elaborate on their experiences. We also got contact points from our supervisor which proved fruitful.

Code	Industry	Role	Duration (min)
ME	Maritime	Engineer	55m
IBD	Insurance/finance	Business Developer	57m
CL	Consulting	Leadership	55m
TSE	Telecom	Software Engineer	1t32m
CL2	Insurance/finance	Leadership	56m
TE	Telecom	Business owner	1t14m
SL	Software/IT	Leadership/Strategy	50m
ET	Youth/Education	Teacher	33m
TM	Telecom	Management	1t3m
GE	Greentech	Engineer	44m
SBO	Software/IT	Business owner	1t22m
TL	Telecom	Leadership	48m
SSD	Software/IT	Software Engineer	1t14m
EC	Youth/Education	Coach	59m
SSE	Software/IT	Serial Entrepreneur	58m
CF	Construction	Finance	1t5m

Table 2: Interview list.

See more information on the respondents and their backgrounds in Appendix 3.

3.3 Data collection

Exploratory studies can be conducted in several different ways and collected through study groups, interviews, or secondary sources. We elected to conduct semi-structured interviews as our method of primary data collection as there was a high probability that early interviews could inform the process significantly. While the term “Serial Intrapreneur” has been mentioned, it is not fully elaborated in the literature. This meant that our understanding of the concept evolved throughout the process of the interviews. We conducted 16 in-depth, semi structured interviews with respondents from various backgrounds, sectors, and industries (see table 1). As a form of data collection, semi-structured interviews enable the collection of various and different in-depth perspectives. These interviews are based on flexibility and critical methods such as open-ended questions, while also allowing for follow-ups. The main focus is the respondents' perspectives. It is an exploratory exercise where we do not know exactly what we are looking for, but which is versatile, and allows us the flexibility and to be able to detect the unexpected. By keeping the interviews semi-structured we can choose to dig deeper into areas that seem particularly salient during the interview allowing us to uncover what we are looking for as we go (Kallio et al., 2016). Our interviews commenced in December 2022, and were all successfully completed within the end of March 2023.

This process of conducting interviews with people from different contexts with no discernible ties is called a cross-case study (Gerring, 2007). Inductive cross-case study design can be an effective way to conduct a causal analysis by exploring specific causal pathways (Gerring, 2007). This approach fits the core of our research well and is establishing to what degree the mechanisms which determine serial entrepreneurial behavior also promote serial, or repeated, intrapreneurial behaviors. Gerring argues that the case study approach to research is most usefully defined as an intensive study of a single unit or a small number of units, for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units (Gerring, 2007. p. 37). We hope to create a generalized understanding of the larger set of intrapreneurs in the world by closely examining our small sample of intrapreneurs.

Advantages with this approach is that we get a varied sample from which we will be able to derive a logic on whether there are any correlations between “Serial

Intrapreneurship” and “Serial Entrepreneurship” while minimizing patterned noise from external factors which might show up if we were to interview many people from just one or a few companies. Cross-case analysis enables us to move beyond individual experiences and decode broader patterns and themes. These studies are a suitable choice of approach as it allows factors which are not yet known, to influence the outcome. (Eisenhardt, 1989)

The interview guide, Appendix 2, was designed with emphasis in a semi-structured and qualitative approach, within the boundaries of a cross-case study context. We made sure our questions were open-ended to encourage sharing of experiences, perspectives, and insights, to explore this through a phenomenological research lens. As the flexibility of our method allowed our participants to elaborate on their subjective experiences and realities, we distributed the same sheet of questions before the interviews, and therefore, ensured a high level of reliability. We also made sure to open the interviews with our definitions of the key terms to achieve a high degree of validity. It is our belief that our interview guide captured rich and nuanced data, and a deeper understanding of our participants’ subjective viewpoints.

3.4 Research context

We will in this section elaborate on the context and the lens through which we are working. The interviews were conducted in Norway. In Norway, there is a widespread understanding of flat hierarchical company structure. It is arguably a good setting to study corporate innovation and intrapreneurship due to this low-context communication form. To further establish context, in the aftermath of Covid-19, the home-office culture has spurred many different novel ways of doing business, both digitally and remotely. In this regard, conferencing software such as Teams, Zoom, and Google Meet have transformed the way we meet and interact. Therefore, we interviewed some of our respondents through such means. Choosing these online tools enables a convenient and cost-effective way (Gray et al., 2020). We also met some of them in-person. Our respondents were chosen based on entrepreneurial experience. Everybody is covered under the “entrepreneur” or “intrapreneur” definitions to varying degrees and on various points on the “one-time/repeat”-continuum. The extent to which they will

contribute to this study might also vary, but all are perceived and selected based on their varying degree of applicability.

As an area of research and in awareness outside of academia, intrapreneurship has seen increased interest over the last 15 years. Corporate initiatives to boost innovative output by using entrepreneurial approaches are becoming more common, with corporate accelerators, calls for ideas and unstructured time becoming widespread. However, Norway is not at the forefront of this development in any sense of the word. R&D spending with firms in Norway is at 82.9% of the European average as of 2022 according to the European Innovation Scorecard (European Commission, 2022.).

3.5 Data & Analysis

As we followed a qualitative research approach, a purposive sampling was identified as our most suitable strategy to select research participants. Purposive sampling allowed us to seek out and contact individuals who are relevant and have a degree of longevity in entrepreneurial or intrapreneurial endeavors (Bell & Bryman, 2007). The participants varied from serial entrepreneurs to parallel entrepreneurs, corporate innovators, to operations partners, etc. The goal was to create an interview sample that includes operational experience from many sectors of businesses and from differing sizes of firms. Throughout all the interviews, we administered a consistent set of questions. Our interview guide has proved a reliable tool to secure in-depth responses from our participants, further fostering comparability across all interviews. By doing this consistently, we also ensured uniformity. This gave us a reasonable basis that the answers and observations of the respondents can be analyzed within the same parameters. We also made sure to open the interviews with our definitions of the key terms intrapreneurship, entrepreneurial and serial intrapreneur in order to achieve a high degree of validity.

In order to understand the individual perspectives of the interviewees, an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was carried out. Through an IPA, we were able to explore and understand the subjective experiences of the individual interview objects in their given context. An IPA is a research method

used to “interpret and understand [the respondents] world by formulating their own biographical stories...” (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, pg. 3). Additionally, an IPA involves analysis of the subjects’ narratives and aims to capture the richness and nuances of their experiences. Brocki and Wearden highlight a set of limitations to this form of analysis in their article from 2006, for the interested reader. It is our view that this research method has several advantages in terms of this study and research into intrapreneurship and entrepreneurial behavior complexities; Firstly, it aligns with our objective of understanding how the experiences of our participants manifest in different organizational settings. And secondly, an IPA aims to capture the individual narratives of our participants through a suitable framework. This provides us a nuanced exploration of individual experiences and insights into factors influencing intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs.

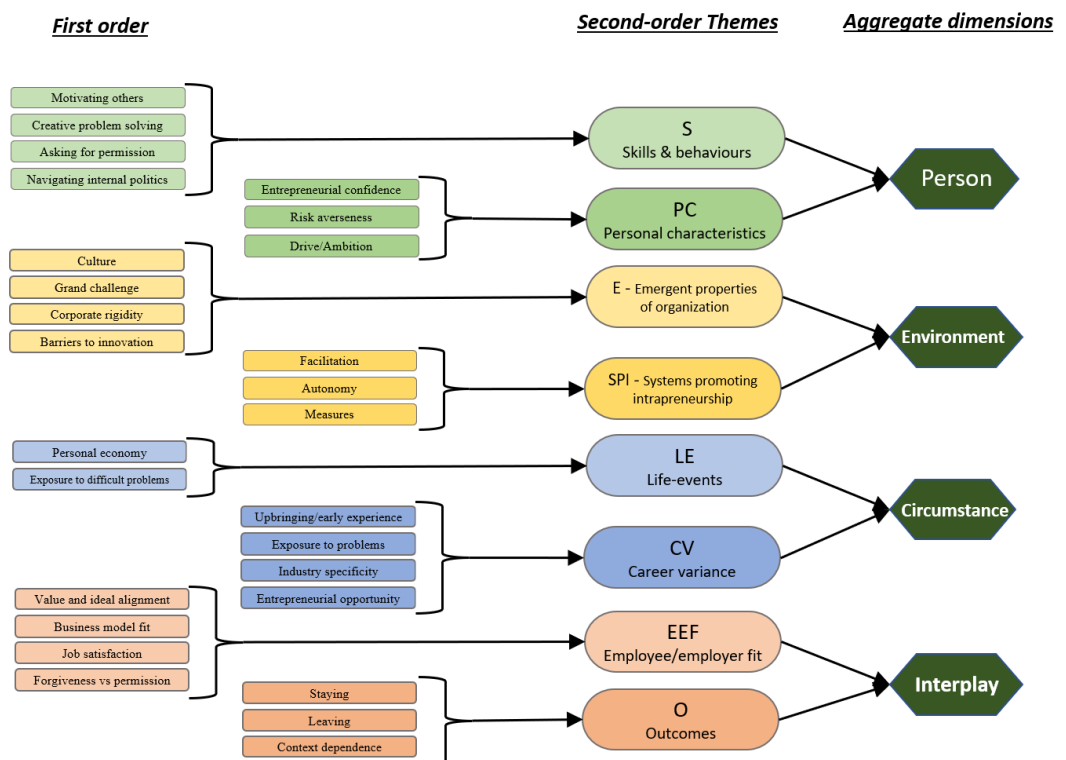


Figure 1: Illustration of coding-process.

3.6 Methodological & ethical considerations

Throughout the process ethical considerations have been a priority. This is because it ensures the protection of both individuals and organizations involved (Silverman, 2014). We made sure to respect the participants' wishes regarding anonymity and confidentiality, which was maintained by excluding personal- and company info from becoming known in our thesis. Before we engaged in every interview, the participant(s) was fully informed about the purpose of our study and the option to withdraw at any given time. Not one of our respondents have requested any insights before the final deadline for this thesis. We have been diligent in referencing our sources and cited clearly to ensure we adhered to existing laws and rules regarding plagiarism. Our goal was to ensure high validity, reliability and that our study can be as trustworthy as possible. (Singleton & Straits, 2018). As the focus of this study is to discover the interviewees' experiences and perceptions, anonymity is of high importance to make sure we discover true and reliable perspectives. By putting anonymity as one of the top priorities, the study had to make substitute codes instead of names in the data collections, and referrals in the text are in relation to these codes. We strictly follow the BI guidelines for storing personal data and will ensure the collected profiles are anonymized and may not disclose the respondent in any way. BI have developed a checklist for us to follow which also ensures we are within regulations. Regarding point 2, our data is not categorized as sensitive, and we have not been through the process of application with SIKT/NSD. This was also confirmed with our supervisor prior to this thesis. (*Routines for Student Assignments*, 2021, *Data and Personal Data in Student Assignments*, 2023, *Laws and Regulations*, 2023).

4. Findings

This chapter presents our inductive model and main findings.

First, we present the inductive model, where we show the relationships between the themes, or second-order codes, and provide an overview of how these themes interact to shape the serial intrapreneur's journey. Thereafter, we go over our findings structured after the four aggregate dimensions; Person (4.2), Environment (4.3), Circumstance (4.4), and Interplay (4.5).

For an overview of our respondents and their backgrounds see Appendix 3.

4.1 Inductive Model

The inductive model method allows patterns, themes, and insights to emerge from the data rather than being imposed on the data a priori (Thomas, 2006). Because our research topic is not well defined academically it is particularly useful as we did not know what might emerge (Eisenhardt, 1989).

We seek to provide the reader with an understanding of the dynamics emergent from our research approach to studying intrapreneurship by presenting a simplified figure of our resulting inductive model. By providing a condensed overview of the complex topic of serial intrapreneurship, we hope to achieve a high level of explanatory power (Daft, 1983).

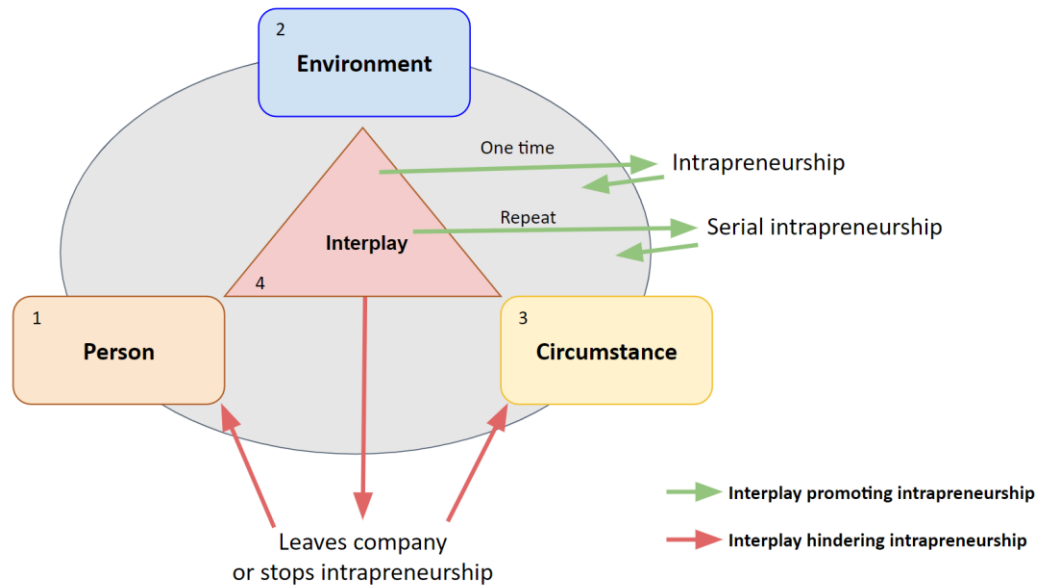


Figure 2: Inductive model of serial intrapreneurship

After studying intrapreneurs and their collaborators we find that (1) factors internal to the person, (2) factors specific to the organization, and (3) circumstantial factors (4) interact to create an intrapreneur and over time a serial intrapreneur or derail the intrapreneurship process leading to the employee leaving or stopping.

The starting point of our model is (1) Person. This dimension captures inherent traits, skills, behaviors, preferences, and internal motivations. While some personal characteristics are likely static, we have come to see them mostly as dynamic meaning that they change as they interact with the other dimensions.

The next dimension is (2) Environment which in most cases means the parenting organization. Environment is both the culture and the structural elements of the organization. These can either promote or interfere with intrapreneurship.

Third is (3) Circumstance which refers to any factors not specific to the organization or the individual. We identified the core themes of life events and career variance as impactful for the development of serial intrapreneurs.

The three aforementioned dimensions interacting forms the fourth dimension (4) Interplay. Here individuals with entrepreneurial traits are acted

upon by their environment and circumstance. The quality of the match between individual, organization, and the outcomes of entrepreneurial actions serves to build further entrepreneurial skill sets and knowledge which then, in a suited environment, can propel into serial intrapreneurship or derail into entrepreneurship, seeking intrapreneurial opportunities in a different organization or ceasing.

The outcomes of an intrapreneurial project, signified by the red and green arrows have differential impacts based on whether the intrapreneurial process is promoted or hindered by the four dimensions. In the case of positive outcome of intrapreneurship all four dimensions are impacted through processes like (1) development of entrepreneurial skills, (2) further development of entrepreneurial culture, (3) reinforcement of behavior through recognition, and (4) developing or reinforcing self-perception as a serial intrapreneur. Conversely, negative intrapreneurship outcomes only develop person and circumstance dimensions. We find having a positive or negative intrapreneurship outcome is unrelated to the success of the project itself, but rather ties to reception and management by leadership (4.5.3).

4.2 Person

We identified the aggregate dimension ‘Person’ which has four distinct sub-themes; (1) Skills & Behaviors, (2) Personal characteristics, (3) Preferences, and (4) Intrinsic Motivation.

4.2.1 - Skills & Behaviors

Skills & Behaviors focuses on specific capabilities and competencies that the individual possesses and how they act in the work environment. These skills and behaviors are what enable individuals to navigate the challenges of intrapreneurial endeavors. The strength and fit of these are what determine whether they succeed or fail to bring their ideas to reality. We have identified **(1)** Motivating others, **(2)** Innovativeness, **(3)** Not asking for permission, and **(4)** Navigating internal politics as central to this theme.

(1) The ability to motivate others is central to both entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs. While entrepreneurs might utilize the motivation of others to build a new venture, it is equally important for intrapreneurs to recruit resources and collaborators to work on their projects. Two of the respondents have experience working with and for international tech companies where employees have some time dedicated to working on internal innovative projects of their choice. Famously this model has been used by Google in what is called the 20% time rule codified in a 2004 IPO letter (Alphabet Investor Relations, 2004). Which projects are ultimately successful hinges on the intrapreneur’s ability to recruit and motivate co-workers to realize these projects.

“We were able to recruit and motivate the best people to our project internally. The idea was good, but I have no doubt that we were successful because of the quality of the people we had on our team.” - SSE

Motivating others to work on your project is seen as a key aspect of an intrapreneur:

“An intrapreneur is a person who is courageous, dares to try(...), and has the ability to motivate others to work on something (...).” - CL2

(2) Innovativeness is the ability for creative problem solving. This means seeking novel solutions and having the skills to circumnavigate hurdles that can impede the intrapreneurship process. We find widespread agreement that adaptability and problem-solving skills are shared abilities between entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs, which allows for overcoming barriers for innovation. Unsurprisingly, serial entrepreneurs had a way of thinking of restrictions as a source for new ideas;

“Barriers are cool because they demand new ways of thinking.” - TSE

Being able to find creative solutions when faced with barriers is also a common theme among serial intrapreneurs;

“Those who lack creativity, lack the vision to overcome barriers.” - EC

Innovativeness does not seem to be unique to entrepreneurs, intrapreneurs or facilitators or to be industry specific. CF, who works in a conservative industry within the finance department, an area they themselves describe as an area where innovation is difficult, still holds creativity as a core value and finds ways to leverage it to make incremental improvements when sweeping changes are few and far between.

“Thinking creatively in order to improve systems and processes is very important to me personally, and in my job.” - CF

(3) Not asking for permission can in many cases demonstrate a sense of initiative, where many of our respondents agree that it is important to the intrapreneur to be able to overcome resistance by acting on one's initiative. Drive, vision, confidence, and a fair bit of stubbornness are some of the factors that lead intrapreneurs, and serial intrapreneurs in particular, to push the boundaries by pursuing ideas without the direct approval of their managers.

“It is an absolute necessity for intrapreneurship.” - TSE

The attitude of creating results first and getting approval later can overcome the inherent risk averseness of many organizations. Not to say that intrapreneurs are reckless and don't care about doing the right thing, but they seem to believe that even though it might not be obvious to others, it is still worth pursuing.

“You do what makes the most sense. It is a part of the culture where I grew up.” - ET

Facilitators to intrapreneurship have a different view. While pursuing ideas without approval can be beneficial to overcoming resistance, it is also important to balance not asking for permission with a sense of responsibility and avoiding letting it evolve into misconduct. One respondent was hesitant to support forgiveness rather than asking permission;

“From an innovation perspective, yes, but as a leader, no.” - GE

As we will cover later, having room to be creative is important to most entrepreneurially minded people. Some respondents also say that an important skill of an intrapreneur is the ability to create this room yourself. This is another aspect of not asking for permission: the ability to create room for intrapreneurship.

“Yes, but you have to create it yourself.” - SL

Not asking permission is a set of behaviors common between entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs within our data. While there are some who disagree, they do so by avoiding the question saying that forgiveness shouldn't be necessary, or that intrapreneurship is a collaborative process by nature;

“There shouldn't be a question of forgiveness in the first place. If [intrapreneurs] want a yes and they don't get it – they'll do it anyway. This is why innovative people quit– no support for innovation.” - CL

“I do not think so, [intrapreneurship] is a collaborative work. Replace “permission” with “brainstorming”.” - CF

(4) The final set of skills and behaviors is one where serial intrapreneurs differ from other subtypes of entrepreneurs: navigating internal politics. Serial intrapreneurs have higher aptitude and willingness to engage in internal politics. Serial intrapreneurs demonstrated a greater emphasis on navigating the internal power structures, alliances, and leveraging organizational resources to achieve their goals. They also have a higher tolerance for dealing with the political workings of the organization, which can be a key driver to pushing intrapreneurs out into entrepreneurship or to stop them from innovating.

"Intrapreneurs need to understand the political side, for example stakeholder-management." - CL2

"Intrapreneurs are more inclined to handle political matters and needs." - SBO

The relationship between intrapreneurs and risk is a central dynamic (4.4.4 **(2)**), and here the understanding of internal politics also plays a role. While many claim intrapreneurship is inherently less risky than entrepreneurship, several of our respondents bring up the fact that the type of risk is also different, claiming that intrapreneurs take on political and career risks instead of the direct economic risks often taken on by entrepreneurs.

"I am not sure if there are any differences. Risk-willingness? Risk-awareness? Situation plays the deciding role. You take risks in both situations, intrapreneurs take political and career risks instead of direct economic risk." - SSE

We find that being skilled at navigating the internal politics lessens the perceived risks of intrapreneurship. People who emphasize these skills are overrepresented among intrapreneurs, serial intrapreneurs in particular.

4.2.2 - Personal characteristics

Personal characteristics are the inherent traits and attributes exhibited by individuals. We have grouped the most prominent findings into: **(1)** Entrepreneurial Confidence, **(2)** Risk Averseness, **(3)** Drive & Ambition, and **(4)** Contentment. These traits seem to play a crucial role in shaping individuals' inclination to act entrepreneurially.

(1) Entrepreneurial confidence is the belief in one's own ability to come up with valuable ideas and to execute. We find entrepreneurial confidence to be a key driver in serial entrepreneurs and serial intrapreneurs.

"You keep doing it because you can, and you know you can. Sometimes having the ability to do it might be the only reason." - SL

Early career experiences often acted as a catalyst to increase confidence and let our respondents see patterns in development;

“I taught myself with experience. When I started my second company, I started to see patterns.” - SL

“The spark to create something for myself came from confidence from previous experience, where I ended up in a company where I was valued.” - TSE

Confidence seems to be an important trait in both entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs because they must stake out their own course and often have to challenge the status quo. Entrepreneurial confidence has a mediating effect on perceived risk associated with acting entrepreneurially. Even though starting from scratch with a new company has higher risks associated with it on paper, how it is viewed by the would-be founder changes with their increasing confidence;

“I have started a few businesses, and found success. The chance of me doing it again is high. It is easier for me to start a new start-up than working in a leadership position in an established company.” - SSE

(2) Attitudes toward risk is the personal characteristic we find differentiates most between intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs. In general, our respondents agree that entrepreneurship is more risky, or at least that it entails more direct economic risk;

“Whether to be an intrapreneur or entrepreneur depends on if you want to base jump with- or without a parachute.” - TE

Entrepreneurs demonstrated a greater inclination to leave the safety of their corporate job to go into new ventures;

“[An entrepreneurial former colleague] went back to start-ups after some time.” - IBD

Whereas serial intrapreneurs exhibited a more cautious path where stability took the high seat instead of risking starting on their own;

“No appetite for the risk involved with starting my own company.” - IBD

The importance of reducing risks is directly tied to another aggregate dimension, Life Events, which will be further elaborated and explored in 4.5.1.

(3) Furthermore, we observed people’s drive and ambition were also important personal characteristics, where both serial entrepreneurs and serial

intrapreneurs seem to have a strong motivation to achieve their goals, and a willingness to drive development forward when encountering challenges, risks, and/or barriers;

“Intrapreneurship starts with curiosity, ambition and drive” - CF

“Intrapreneurship is about seeing opportunities and having the drive to do something about it. Learning from doing something they have no idea about and then building upon that.” - SSE

Highlighting the importance of determination and ambition in driving entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial endeavors provides us insights into how personal drive and ambition can catalyze success and achievement in both entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship.

Being driven also leads to being action oriented, or being a doer, which is something that can form a virtuous cycle reinforcing entrepreneurial behaviors. When asked if prior experience with intrapreneurship increased the odds of repeating it we got this response:

“Yes, I think so. People who make things happen are acknowledged.” -

EC

(4) Contentment implies to what degree the employee is satisfied with the current situation at work. We find that contentment has a role in determining an individual’s inclination to act entrepreneurially. The data suggests that employees who tend toward being content with how things are less likely to pursue new ideas.

“What stops people innovating? They are too fat and happy.” - SBO

“Some people cannot sit still, others are content with how things are and don't bother trying to improve on it.” - EC

Not being content leads to pursuing incremental improvements. This way of thinking was extremely common among the serial intrapreneurs we interviewed.

“You don't have to make something new all the time, but you do need to think about how to make what you have better.” - SBO

This can also be a reason many entrepreneurial employees quit their jobs after a while.

“Some innovative people leave because they are constantly seeking new challenges. They need to change their environments.” - TM

“No, not everyone can stay happy in their job for a long time.” - CL

4.2.3 - Preferences

The preferences individuals appreciate in their work environment explores; **(1)** Freedom to experiment and **(2)** Structure. During our analysis, these preferences contribute to understanding how the preferences of individuals influence them to engage in entrepreneurial or intrapreneurial ventures.

(1) Our evidence shows that freedom to experiment in the workplace is a shared preference in both entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs. Respondents expressed strong wishes to have the autonomy and freedom to explore new ideas for their work.

“Having freedom to innovate is not merely something that is nice to have at work, for me it's an absolute demand.” - TSE

Our respondents recognize the importance of experimentation to innovation, and view freedom to experiment as central for intrapreneurial success in a corporate setting.

(2) Some intrapreneurs expressed a desire for structure in their work and environment. They showed they value a sense of order and predictability within the corporate environment.

“Speaking for myself, I work well in structured environments. I've always done well within structure before, in school, university. It makes me feel appreciated.” - ME

Working in an established firm is also seen as more comfortable.

“It is more comfortable to work for an existing firm” - TSE

This desire for structure and comfort seems to tie into risk perceptions.

4.2.4 - Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation delves into the internal drive and passion individuals have to pursue entrepreneurial or intrapreneurial work.

Work engagement matters to both entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs. Our respondents expressed a strong drive, enthusiasm, passion, and dedication to their work, towards realizing their endeavors or growing their company. This intrinsic motivation fuels their pursuit of innovation, regardless of the context;

“The entrepreneur is relatively more economically driven and seeks to capitalize on an idea. Intrapreneurs have a need to see things grow and scale and are more engaged in the thought process in developing one’s workplace and building or scaling the company. They are motivated by the collective.” - TL

Many serial intrapreneurs stay engaged is because they are fuelled by fun and curiosity;

“Many entrepreneurial people I know are not driven by ambitions or status, but by that they think it's fun developing new things.” - TM

“I am motivated by curiosity. (...). The development path is the fun part.”
- SSE

They can also stay because they want to see what they started through:

“[an entrepreneurial coworker] stayed because he is deeply invested in his work and did not want to leave in the middle of it.” - EC

Serial intrapreneurs pursue having an impact from within, which is what drives their motivation to innovate and take risks, both structurally and individually.

“Impact is a big motivational factor, it can be easier to reach your goals from the inside. (...) Having the startup be a part of [parent company] is massively beneficial from a brand recognition and trust point of view.” - ME

4.3 Environment

The next aggregate dimension is “Environment”. This dimension is made up of four subcategories which influence the intrapreneurial tendencies of individuals working within the environment. The subcategories are; **(1)** Extrinsic motivation, **(2)** Emergent properties of the organization, **(3)** Resources, and **(4)** Systems promoting intrapreneurship. Our data shows that these factors are the driving forces behind serial intrapreneurs, or alternatively, if an individual converts to entrepreneurship.

4.3.1 - Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation in this regard refers to external factors that motivates the individual(s) to engage in intrapreneurial behavior. Factors such as **(1)** Status and recognition, **(2)** Options and Shares, and **(3)** Money can have a powerful impact on the motivation people have in their respective setting.

(1) Our respondents indicated that status and recognition is a common motivation in both entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship;

“If they leave, they will get no recognition for their hard work. Those who stay will contribute to further build an innovative company, scale, and get the affirmation they might be looking for.” - CL

It shows us that acknowledgement and appreciation are equally important within entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial roles. As a form of external validation fueling their motivation for either building their own ventures or driving innovative engagements in an organization, the significance of such motivation has been highlighted throughout our interviews, and is regarded as a reason for intrapreneurs to keep innovating, or stop;

“[Intrapreneurs stay] because they get recognition and support.” - TM

“People are stimulated by acknowledgement of a job well done. Without it, things might become difficult.” - ET

“[Intrapreneurs] get more responsibility. They also get internal recognition, we have a weekly prize for an innovative employee. It is the recognition that matters, it gives a sense of accomplishment.” - CL2

(2) While options and shares are common motivating and compensating tools, these are rarely used in intrapreneurship. In large corporations where the ownership of the company is different to that of entrepreneurial ventures, this form of compensation has little to none impact on the intrapreneur.

“In start-ups, there are clear [extrinsic motivating factors] e.g. options or shares. It does not work the same way in larger corporations.” - SSE

Entrepreneurs can utilize options and shares to attract and motivate talented individuals to/in their own venture. These compensation mechanisms can foster a strong sense of ownership in the correct setting. Many serial intrapreneurs find this to be lacking, especially when talking about starting internal ventures, and explain ownership would increase their likelihood of remaining.

“No ownership stakes for the employees of [the internal startup] resulted in talents vanishing.” - SSE

“I think part of the reason I do it is that I think it's a good career move, even though there aren't really any incentives. I'm motivated by the idea and the impact it can have. It's fun and exciting and I think it lets me learn a lot, while getting good exposure internally and externally. Speaking about the startup at conferences for instance. The main thing missing for me is some ownership. That would be a huge motivator.” - ME

(3) Lastly, money can serve as a motivating factor for both intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs. Our respondents acknowledged the direct importance of financial stability, although entrepreneurs might be relatively more inclined to choose their own path due to the potential for higher financial rewards;

“Intrapreneurs are politicians. Entrepreneurs chase money.” - TSE

4.3.2 - Emergent properties of the organization

Emergent properties of the organization encompass how the organizational- (1) Culture, (2) Rigidity, (3) Barriers to innovation influence intrapreneurial behavior.

(1) We find company culture to be decisive in influencing intrapreneurial behavior. Our respondents indicated that a supportive and innovation-inclined culture is paramount for successful intrapreneurial ventures;

"Culture is what enables employees to be intrapreneurs." - TM

"Bad culture kills good ideas" - TM

Thus, a collaborative culture has the positive upside of empowering the organization to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors and being open to new ideas;

"Team building, working with colleagues from different departments. Always room for people to build relations and trust." - CL

When asked if the most innovative employees would leave the company regardless, we got varied responses, but culture seems like a strong mechanism for retaining them.

"Love and culture keep them around" - EC

"I don't think so, not if the culture enables them" - TL

Culture also has the ability to substitute for measures promoting entrepreneurial behavior. When talking about measures in their highly innovative company where most employees can be classified as serial intrapreneurs we got this response;

"Measures are boring, that's not our soul!" - TE

(2) Corporate rigidity is a barrier for intrapreneurship. Many entrepreneurially minded people seek to escape the bureaucracy and rigid processes found in big established corporations;

"Rigid structures or cumbersome processes can keep intrapreneurs from innovating" - EC

"Complex processes in large corporations can prove difficult to serial intrapreneurs." - CF

Serial intrapreneurs seem more resistant to the frustrations that accompany trying to innovate in the face of corporate rigidity. They have the ability to persist and find creative ways around rigid processes.

"When I didn't get the traction I wanted from my manager, I just called his boss." - SBO

(3) Barriers to innovation can manifest itself when there is a mismatch between expectations from the organization and their pursuit of innovation;

“We deal with barriers through support from our leadership.” - CF

“I view barriers as access to resources, and how new initiatives diverge from core business. We try our best to handle those that occur.” - CL2

Additionally, it can be a conflict between everyday tasks and focusing on intrapreneurship;

“We deal with barriers for innovation, but still have to prioritize spending time on day-to-day responsibilities. - CL

“To some degree. There are some problems with resource allocation.” - GE

Our respondents argue that barriers to innovation often occur when allocation of limited resources pairs with time constraints and competing priorities. Such barriers can further impede the innovation processes of companies of different sizes and in different industries.

4.3.3 - Resources

The availability of resources, both material and immaterial, in an organization can be defined on intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial behavior and innovative thinking. We have identified three recurring themes related to resources which are: **(1)** Collaborators, **(2)** Networks, and **(3)** Funding.

(1) In both entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship, finding the right collaborators has a particularly important role. The right collaborators can play a crucial role in driving the innovative effort through idea generation, provide feedback and support, and providing expertise;

“Intrapreneurship allowed for access to resources we would never have had access to as a startup.” - SSE

“It was just too little resources and backing” - CL2

Our respondents signal that the right collaborators are paramount in contributing to the overall innovative process, but they also express that the access to these collaborators are different in entrepreneurial ventures and intrapreneurial work. On the one hand, intrapreneurs enjoy the added benefits of complementary skills

and creativity in their setting, and on the other, in entrepreneurial ventures these collaborators might have contrasting skillsets to encompass their company's growth.

(2) Serial intrapreneurs seek to build internal and external networks to drive the innovative efforts from within. Networks are seen as key resources that enable intrapreneurship.

“Your network can have a profound impact on the diffusion of your idea - internally and externally.” - CF

(3) Our study uncovered that intrapreneurs' access to funding is different to that of entrepreneurs. The challenge to other types of entrepreneurs lies in acquiring external funding, while our respondents claim that intrapreneurs often are in the beneficial position of having support from management;

“[...] it is relatively easier to obtain the necessary funding in a corporate setting, compared to starting completely from scratch and on your own”. - SSE

Grounded in the argument that the intrapreneur have the added provision of a safety net, and that entrepreneurs are in a situation where the real challenge is securing the right external investors, one of our more entrepreneurially inclined respondents argue that entrepreneurs are more 'alive' in a sense;

“There is a difference in living and existing.” - TE

4.3.4 - Systems promoting intrapreneurship

In this dimension, systems the organization has in place to promote intrapreneurship investigates formal structures, processes, and policies. This is an environmental subcategory aimed at uncovering how facilitation of the intrapreneurial process plays out. These systems can either enable the intrapreneur or disable them and encourage pursuit of entrepreneurial endeavors. We will elaborate on (1) Facilitation, (2) Measures, (3) Autonomy.

(1) A theme that has been explicitly stated several times throughout our interviews is the effect leadership facilitation can have on the intrapreneur, and how management fosters intrapreneurial behavior;

“If you as a manager can facilitate the intrapreneur, I think you’ll keep them. If not, there are external forces pulling on the intrapreneur.” - SL

To the extent that management can facilitate the intrapreneurial processes, we observed that through creating a culture for innovation, providing funding and the necessary resources, and promoting collaboration, it is beneficial to the organization to deploy systems to retain intrapreneurially minded employees.

(2) We find measures promoting intrapreneurship are often present to some degree. Our sample mentions several of the measures commonly used to promote intrapreneurial behavior, such as innovation competitions, incubators and accelerators, unstructured time, R&D departments, strategic direction, innovation talks, internal innovation programs, access to books or other sources of information, compensation schemes, hands-on leadership, and involvement. Measures can have an activating and retaining effect.

“I think I probably would have if it wasn't for the innovation contest.” - ME

We have also observed that measures can counteract the innovative process. Some organizational measures can be cumbersome to overcome when an innovative employee acts proactively on an idea or external/internal signal.

“Many leaders struggle to see that being overly process focused when developing a new idea might be a barrier.” - IBD

Measures don’t seem to be present as often in smaller companies, even though the smaller companies in our sample have had very intrapreneurial employees.

“Our company is too small for such measures” - TE

These companies also seem to do a good job of retaining innovative talent, but clearly not through targeted measures.

When they are used, measures to promote intrapreneurship send strong signals to employees, unfortunately they are not always backed up.

“It was innovation theater. Leadership had no idea what to do about the projects, even though the ideas were good, resources were abundant, and people were capable.” - TSE

(3) Additionally, we find that autonomy drives both entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs to take more ownership of their work, regardless of their organizational scale and structure. Freedom and independence to make decisions are for many of our respondents’ paramount to their work;

“We don't have to use economic incentives to retain talent because we provide autonomy and freedom to work on exciting projects.” - TL

“I am old and stubborn. Autonomy is important. Not too many employers provide enough autonomy/freedom to retain people like me.” - TSE

Our data show that both the entrepreneur and intrapreneur thrive in structures and cultures where they have a high degree of autonomy. It leads us to see autonomy as an enabling factor for serial intrapreneurs.

4.4 Circumstance

Circumstance is the dimension that encompasses factors which are not company specific and are not directly tied to the personal characteristics of the employee but can have an activating or negating effect on intrapreneurship. This dimension contains two themes; (1) Life events and (2) Career variance.

4.4.1 - Life events

A major influencing factor for our career trajectory is the events of our private lives. Especially important is family life and economic situation. People with entrepreneurial traits may be more or less incentivized to take on the increased economic uncertainties often associated with starting a company based on the degree of freedom offered to them by these major life event factors;

“Personal economy and no financial backing (...) someone can have a low-risk averse personality but still avoid risks due to such circumstances.” - TM

Generally, starting a company often requires a larger time investment than being an intrapreneur. Some employees who possess entrepreneurial traits and skills might choose to remain with their employer due to time constraints;

“There is no time for that combined with raising children.” - IBD

“If it wasn't for the kids I would have done it long ago.” - TM

4.4.2 - Career variance

The second theme comprising the circumstance dimension is career variance which is a collection of recurring factors that seem to have an influence on intrapreneurial proclivities. We have identified (1) Prior experience, (2) Exposure to difficult problems, (3) Industry specificity and (4) The strength of the entrepreneurial opportunity as the themes making this dimension.

(1) When considering prior experience, we found upbringing and other formative experiences to play an important role in developing entrepreneurial skills and behaviors. Respondents highlighted the influence of their childhood, with support from family, and early exposure to entrepreneurial thinking to be defining to their entrepreneurial mindset;

“Support from entrepreneurial parents from an early stage. They facilitated the creative process for me from an early stage. Permission to be creative, with support and a positive attitude towards failing.” - TM

It can also be fostered by leaders;

“I am thinking of a former boss, when I did not have the confidence, the boss reinforced my confidence, and I grew in that situation.” - CL2

Or stopped by them:

“Leaders might be facilitators of innovation, but also the ones who stop it.” - IBD

“Intrapreneurship means stepping on toes, you might become unpopular with many leaders.” - TSE

Prior experiences emerge as central in developing entrepreneurial traits and behaviors. According to our analysis, this holds true for serial intrapreneurs as well as other types of entrepreneurs.

(2) When entrepreneurial employees are faced with difficult problems, it stimulates their creativity and problem-solving skills, encouraging them to think outside the box and come up with innovative solutions. This not only benefits the organization but also provides a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction for the intrapreneurs;

"The resistance that comes with working with challenging problems is how unexpected answers are made. (...) This is one of the reasons we are able to retain our employees, even though they could get a job anywhere in a second." - TE

People develop skills to deal with the situation they are in. In the small firm effect (Elfenbein et al., 2010) the authors detail how employees develop entrepreneurial skills though working in small organizations where they have large variation in the types of tasks they need to perform. Similarly, we find that people who have been exposed to tough challenges develop knowledge and confidence to do so later in their careers;

"I was a part of building a search engine from nothing in the 90s. At that time, I was one of maybe 10 people in the world who could do what we did. Doing something very few people can do fills you with endorphins and it makes you realize you can do what others think impossible." - TSE

(3) Industry specificity can be impactful both because different industries have differing degrees of innovativeness and because innovative ideas emerge from different sources across industries.

Our sample contains several people who have worked as software engineers for the big international tech companies and among these it is clear that this industry attracts and demands innovative, i.e., intrapreneurial, employees;

"I worked for three search engines, employees there are extremely intrapreneurial people with a drive for innovation." - TSE

There are also industries where it is difficult to innovate due to regulation like accounting and insurance;

"Innovation is hard in accounting" - CF

In industries such as accounting and insurance, the responsiveness to external forces like changes in regulation and legal requirements, are key drivers for innovation;

“External events like changes in the law are often the source of innovations for us.” - CL2

While this seems to hold true for product and strategy innovation, employees in these more conservative industries still seem to be the source for incremental improvements, which make up a big portion of intrapreneurship;

“Process improvements come from employees while more novel ideas often come as a result of calls for innovation” - ME

Paradigm change is another key external driver for innovation and intrapreneurship. The emergence of a new generation of cellular broadband networks, most recently 5g, enables a myriad of new possibilities, but according to our sample these are brought to light largely because of the creativity and intrapreneurial spirit of employees;

“Innovation in the big tech companies happens because creative people are enabled and encouraged.” - TSE

One of the questions we asked was if the most innovative employees will leave the company eventually regardless of how they are facilitated. One respondent who work in an industry where innovation comes largely as a result of external forces, acknowledged the difficulty of retaining these employees over time;

“Acquisitions and paradigm changes are the key drivers for innovation.” - SSD

“Yes, and then companies constantly need to work to fill the void left by them.” - SSD

(4) The final theme of the circumstance dimension relates to the entrepreneurial opportunity itself. We find that how easily the idea can be realized and how valuable it could potentially be for its originator, can have the power to turn an intrapreneur, serial or otherwise, into an entrepreneur;

“I would be stupid not to do it. The opportunity was too good.” - SBO

Several of the intrapreneurs we spoke with had side-projects themselves or pointed to previous entrepreneurial coworkers who did. How well these projects evolve can be a determining factor to whether they remain employed or decide to become full time entrepreneurs;

“He left when his side-gig suddenly picked up after he got a massive opportunity.” - ME

Overall, our findings in the career variance dimension suggest that random factors play a central role on developments of skills and characteristics. They also impact how well these are suited to the intrapreneur’s environment and how enticing the alternatives to intrapreneurship are.

4.5 Interplay

Interplay is the final dimension which details any themes that emerge as a result of personal, environmental and circumstantial factors interacting in shaping the serial intrapreneur. Interplay consists of **(1) Self-Perception**, **(2) Employee-Employer Fit**, and **(3) Outcomes**.

4.5.1 - Self-Perception

When asked if they were a serial intrapreneur according to our definition; *Someone who repeatedly works toward turning new ideas into valuable realities within an organization*, we got varied responses. Some self-report as serial intrapreneurs like EC who has a leading role in a youth sports organization;

“Yes, I think I fit that description. I’m someone who is always iterating and questioning how we do things.” - EC

And TL who is President of a tech company;

“By that definition I’m a serial intrapreneur in every aspect.” - TL

Others see themselves as having serial intrapreneur tendencies that emerge to differing degrees based on their context, like ME who runs an internal startup in the maritime industry while simultaneously working in their engineering role;

“I think I have serial tendencies, but it is context dependent. I have been involved in a few different innovation projects and I typically look for ways to improve how things are done. (...) [In my engineering role] it can be easy to get caught up in day-to-day tasks and forget to think creatively.” - ME

Others still view themselves mainly as facilitators like GE who has a research background and is currently the CTO of a deeptech company;

“I’m not a serial intrapreneur personally, more like a facilitator.” - GE

4.5.2 - Employee-employer fit

The quality of the match between employees in their organization is a central theme emerging around repeated intrapreneurship. One of the areas where we see this clearly is when it comes to the area of interest to the intrapreneur and how this slots in with short term strategic goals of the company.

“(…) [it can be] hard for big companies to innovate on a major scale because it often diverges from core business.” - CL

“Ideas that diverge too much from core business are stopped by leaders like me.” - GO

This is a mechanism that pushes intrapreneurs out of the organization.

“People often quit because they want to pursue ideas diverging from core business, and they don't get the necessary support to do it.” - TM

The fit of goals and values are also important to retain innovative employees.

“We have incredibly knowledgeable employees. Our goals and culture motivates them. It’s about impact. There is a reason you choose a football team to follow as a kid. Identification with the dream and direction of the company.” - TE

We find that the importance of strategic fit of the ideas and value/goal fit mean that someone who is an intrapreneur in one context could have trouble pursuing their ideas in another. As such they would be unlikely to be a serial intrapreneur with that company.

4.5.3 - Outcomes

The reception the outcomes of projects receives is key to perpetuating intrapreneurship. They can have a positive effect, creating repeated intrapreneurship, or a negative one, which drives employees out of the organization or to stop acting intrapreneurially.

We have seen examples of intrapreneurs staying with their company because of how a project failing was handled masterfully by a leader:

“I remember being really nervous about going into that meeting. But when the manager that was in charge of the project came in he had a smile on his face and said that we were going to celebrate having saved so much money. We had explored the possibility and figured out that it wasn't feasible. That was a good thing. That's when I knew that I could keep working there, even though I was having doubts at that time.” - IBD

We have also seen examples of intrapreneurial projects stopping due to corporate rigidities when it was well on its way to becoming a success.

“[The innovation department] was designed for this purpose, and it worked well to promote this innovative behavior. They didn't really know what to do about success, but it definitely promoted innovative behavior” - SSE

Whether or not any one project is a success seems less important than how it is received and whether failure is seen as reflecting negatively on the people involved, or if it is an expected part of the process.

5. Discussion

This chapter restates our research problem, key findings, and provides additional insights.

5.1 Research problem

We started with the following problem statement:

The intrapreneur is a valuable resource that contributes to vital innovation and development of their parenting organization. Mechanisms which lead to intrapreneurs disproportionately leaving their jobs to seek opportunities elsewhere are well established in the literature. Despite this, there is little research into intrapreneurs who stay in an organization over a long period of time and remain entrepreneurial. This study aims to contribute by investigating the origin, perpetuation and differentiating factors of these serial intrapreneurs.

To examine the concept of serial intrapreneurship we first penned a working definition based on the definitions of serial entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship. We then divided the task into the three following research questions:

1. What are the origins of serial intrapreneurs?
2. What perpetuates intrapreneurship into serial intrapreneurship?
3. What differentiates serial intrapreneurs from other types of entrepreneurs?

This discussion chapter follows the same structure starting with examining the definition, then discussing the three research questions before ending on additional interesting observations.

5.2 Key findings summary

After following a grounded theory approach, we identified four dimensions key to creating a serial intrapreneur; Person, Environment, Circumstance, and Interplay. A short summary of the most central findings are presented here.

Person - We see significant overlap in our data between serial intrapreneurs and other types of entrepreneurs. Important differences lie in dealing with internal politics and risk averseness.

Environment - Our data suggests that environmental factors are the driving forces behind intrapreneurs developing into serial intrapreneurs or striking out to become entrepreneurs. This includes incentives to intrapreneurship and facilitation of the intrapreneurship process.

Circumstance - External factors from personal life and random elements like having worked with an inspiring leader seem to have a major impact on the trajectory of would-be intrapreneurs. Our findings point to circumstantial factors that can have an activating or negating effect on intrapreneurship.

Interplay - Entrepreneurial traits and behaviors of employees manifest to differing degrees depending on the context. How well suited an intrapreneur is to a company depends on the strategic fit of the intrapreneurs' ideas and interests, and alignment in values and goals. This means that someone who is an intrapreneur in one context could have trouble pursuing their ideas in another and would be unlikely to be a serial intrapreneur within that organization.

5.3 Serial Intrapreneurship - A working definition

To study serial intrapreneurship, we needed a working definition. Intrapreneurship as an area of study suffers from terminological confusion and lack of clarity surrounding central terms (Hernández-Perlines et al., 2022, Neessen et al., 2019). Because of this it was paramount to provide a clear working definition that combines the broad range of intrapreneurship captured by Neesen et al. (2019), with the repeat nature of serial entrepreneurship (Guerrero & Peña-Legazkue, 2019, Hyytinen & Ilmakunnas, 2007). In his seminal work on intrapreneurship, Pinchot (1985) explains the defining trait of the intrapreneur as figuring out how to turn an idea into a profitable reality, this served as our starting point. Before the data collection process, we landed on the following working definition:

Serial intrapreneurs repeatedly take new ideas and turn them into profitable realities within the organization.

Because our interview sample contained several respondents who do not work in profit-driven organizations, like a high school, the definition evolved to replace *profitable* with *valuable*.

Serial intrapreneurs repeatedly take new ideas and turn them into valuable realities within the organization.

The strength of our working definition lies in it being broad enough to envelop its diverse forms, which go back to the formative research by Pinchot (1985) and Hisrich (1990), while separating intrapreneurs from other employees with entrepreneurial skills. Employees who shoulder more responsibility, are autonomous, flexible, proactive, and innovative, have entrepreneurial skills according to Giunipero et al. (2005). However, this does not make them intrapreneurs.

One weakness that manifested over the interviews was that the definition might be overly broad. If intrapreneurship is, as Neessen et al. (2019) propose, characterized by activities that go beyond what is expected of the employee, then the serial intrapreneur definition fails to distinguish between people who act intrapreneurially while being expected to do so and those who go beyond

expectations. People who work with innovation or business development fall into this category. This is also true of many leadership roles.

The working definition served its purpose allowing us to examine the concept but might need to be reformulated in further research to tackle the weaknesses discussed above. Importantly it allowed us to differentiate between facilitators, serial intrapreneurs and other types of entrepreneurs.

5.4 What are the origins of serial intrapreneurs?

The literature largely views intrapreneurship on either an individual or organizational scale (Neessen et.al, 2019). Our findings suggest that, while both perspectives are central, they are not sufficient to explain the appearance of serial intrapreneurs. Serial intrapreneurs do not appear to show up as an exclusive result of internal factors of employees nor as a direct result of the entrepreneurial orientation, innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking behaviors (De Clercq et al., 2010), of the organization, it seems to be a combination of the two.

Traits and behaviors inherent to the person like innovativeness, drive, risk-taking, opportunity recognition, and networking as outlined by Neessen et al. (2019) are central to creating intrapreneurs, who can become serial intrapreneurs over time. Hernández-Perlines et al. (2022) and Dabic et al., (2021) name skillset, perception of capabilities, knowledge, and past experience as determinants of intrapreneurial behavior. In addition to these factors, we also found that a lack of contentment with the status quo to be a predictor of intrapreneurship. These traits and behaviors largely fall under the dimensions we have labeled person and circumstance, which cover inherent and developed traits respectively. We find the above mentioned to not be exclusive to intrapreneurs, but shared with entrepreneurs, leading us to conclude that they alone do not predict for serial intrapreneurship.

A repeating sentiment in our data is the idea that the entrepreneurial people will always find ways to create, and that it is up to the companies to facilitate them doing so while remaining employees. This reinforces what Garrett et al. (2017) outline in their paper on entrepreneurial spawning; entrepreneurial knowledge combined with lack of opportunities to use them in the company leads to them seeking opportunities elsewhere. We have also shown how intrapreneurs develop diverse skills, and as Lazear (2004, 2005) outlines in the “Jack-of-all-trades”-perspective, individuals with rounded skill-sets are more likely entrepreneurs (Åstebro & Thompson, 2011; Wagner, 2003).

Serial intrapreneurship happens when employees who have the prerequisite entrepreneurial traits find an environment that enables and motivates over time.

5.5 What perpetuates intrapreneurship into serial intrapreneurship?

The shift from intrapreneurship to serial intrapreneurship is a multifaceted process, driven by a confluence of factors that span individual characteristics, contextual nuances, and strategic compatibility. To understand the perpetuation of intrapreneurship into serial intrapreneurship, the interplay between person, environment, circumstance must be considered.

Personal factors linked to intrapreneurship as described by Hisrich (1990) and Neessen et.al (2019) are a necessity, but as our findings show these alone don't account for perpetuating intrapreneurship. The conducive environment plays a vital role in stimulating the progression from intrapreneurship to serial intrapreneurship. Companies that encourage intrapreneurship through openness, tolerance of failure and fostering innovative thinking (Santos-Vijande et al., 2022), can reap the benefits of continuous internal entrepreneurial activities, thereby promoting the phenomena of serial intrapreneurship. Respondents were asked explicitly if the most entrepreneurial employees will leave regardless, and the results were split. Those who say they will leave, do so because they think it is impossible for larger organizations to provide what is necessary to retain them, i.e freedom, resource access, autonomy, when it doesn't hit strategic short-term goals. Those who say they will not are more willing to entertain the possibilities that the organization can provide these.

The influence of external personal life circumstances and seemingly random elements such as exposure to inspiring leaders and private economy, also significantly shapes the trajectory of potential serial intrapreneurs. Circumstantial factors can either activate or negate intrapreneurial traits and behaviors, and hence, play a critical role in perpetuating intrapreneurship.

The manifestation of entrepreneurial traits and behaviors among employees is subject to the context, with the suitability of an intrapreneur to a company hinging on the strategic alignment of their ideas, interests, values, and goals with those of the organization. The phenomenon of serial intrapreneurship is thus not a given and may falter if the strategic compatibility does not exist. Motivation is a determinant of intrapreneurial behavior (Hernández-Perlines et al., 2022). We find that intrinsic motivations seem more important to perpetuating intrapreneurship

than extrinsic motivations, as the serial intrapreneurs we interviewed overwhelmingly draw motivation from their workplace engagement, values, and ideals, and wish to have a positive impact.

This is contrary to foundational literature on intrapreneurship which mentions ability to advance in the corporate setting and receiving corporate rewards as primary motives (Hisrich, 1990). We do see signs that intrapreneurs are extrinsically motivated by status, money and options and shares, but generally we find that acknowledgement, and being seen and appreciated, is a stronger extrinsic motivational source. High levels of engagement, strong match between employee goals and values and the organization's goals and values, and potential for impact are likely determinants of serial intrapreneurship. These have significant overlap with determinants for intrapreneurial behavior outlined by Hernández-Perlines et al. (2022).

Serial intrapreneurship in its nature entails repeatedly starting new projects. We find that the outcome and reception of an intrapreneurial project can have a reinforcing effect, creating the virtuous cycle of serial intrapreneurship, or it can have a stopping effect driving employees out of the organization through entrepreneurial spawning. We have seen examples of intrapreneurs becoming serial intrapreneurs because of how a project failing was handled masterfully by a leader, and of intrapreneurial projects stopping due to corporate rigidities when it was well on its way to becoming a success.

5.6 What differentiates serial intrapreneurs?

Serial intrapreneurs are a subcategory of entrepreneurs, and as we have discussed previously these have many overlapping qualities. Entrepreneurship consists of personal characteristics and traits of individual entrepreneurs, and their ability to innovate, create organizations, create value and growth, their uniqueness, and their ownership and management of organizations (Gartner, 1990). While creating, owning and managing organizations are mostly not applicable to serial intrapreneurs the rest certainly apply, and they have significant overlap. The links

between intrapreneurship, personal resources, and engagement as discussed by Gawke et al. (2017) are reinforced by our findings that serial intrapreneurs are as a whole highly engaged and resourceful individuals.

Our findings indicate that the entrepreneurial traits and behaviors of intrapreneurs described by Neessen et al. (2019) and Hernández-Perlines et al. (2022) can be found across the subcategories of entrepreneurs. There are however some we have found to be unique for serial intrapreneurs which specifically apply to personal characteristics and ability to innovate and create value and growth within organizations.

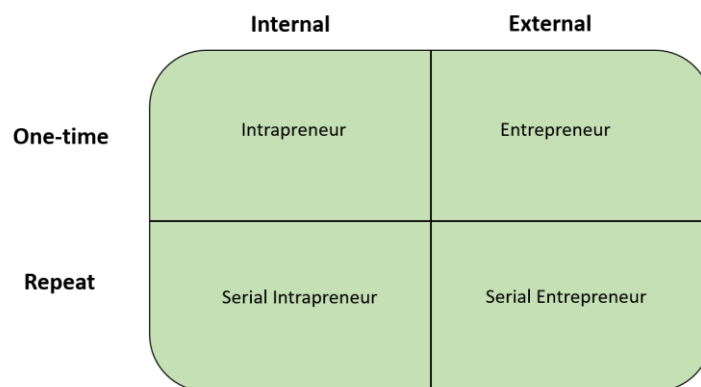


Figure 3: Entrepreneur subtype matrix

The differentiating characteristics of serial intrapreneurs we have discovered are their appetite for and perception of risk, and how they deal with internal politics.

While high risk appetite can be linked with personality traits like low neuroticism and high extraversion (Oehler, A., & Wedlich, F. (2018), we also find that perception of risk is impacted by entrepreneurial confidence or perceived capabilities as Hernández-Perlines et al. (2022) puts it. Many of our respondents claim serial intrapreneurship seems inherently less risky than entrepreneurship. Therefore, we can say that intrapreneurs are likely to be, on average, less extraverted and more neurotic than entrepreneurs. However, in his early work on comparisons between intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs Hisrich (1990) describes both groups as moderate risk takers, indicating that they take on similar levels of

risk. We found data reinforcing this view among respondents who occupy the intersection between serial intrapreneur and serial entrepreneur, meaning that they have at times in their career been both. These do not consider intrapreneurship less risky, rather they point out that they carry different types of risk; Intrapreneurship carries with it the increased career risk, while entrepreneurship has more personal economic risk. The perception of these risks is driven by life events and experience which we see as part of the Circumstance dimension. Several respondents who had young families and as a result were more sensitive to instabilities in their private economy had become serial intrapreneurs because entrepreneurship was perceived as too risky. Several also expressed intentions of pursuing entrepreneurship when the kids are older. One respondent who has experience with serial entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship said that they perceived the risks in intrapreneurship higher than starting a company. This comes back to their experience, confidence, network, and resource access.

Effectively navigating the intra-organizational political landscape emerges as vital for long term intrapreneurial success. These capabilities seem to slot into what Hisrich (1990) identified as understanding the environment, creating options for management, building internal support and ting. Our data points to circumstantial and environmental factors as being integral to developing these skills. Most important of the circumstantial factors is career variance. As exposure to mentors and leaders who shepherd intrapreneurs through the choppy waters of the internal political landscape allow development of skills and confidence. Among environmental factors the emergent properties of the organization stand out. We find that the culture, corporate rigidity, and barriers to innovation, encapsulated by entrepreneurial orientation (Covin & Slevin, 1989), present at the organization lower the bar for intrapreneurship also allowing for development of skills to effectively navigate the political aspect of intrapreneurship.

Serial intrapreneurs seem to distinguish themselves from other types of entrepreneurs by having a higher tolerance for career risks than personal economic risks and by being adept at navigating the political game inherent with intrapreneurship over time. Though they distinguish themselves, we also detect a tendency for many serial intrapreneurs to freely transition between intrapreneurship and entrepreneurship.

5.7 Additional insights

The interview and analysis process led to many unexpected ideas. Several of these did not fit the research agenda and fall mostly outside the scope of the thesis. Nonetheless we discuss some of them briefly in the following section as they do have some implications for serial intrapreneurs and organizational leadership and show potential for further research.

5.7.1 - Context dependent importance of intrapreneurship

Serendipitously the interviews led us to questioning whether intrapreneurship, though it has many clearly defined advantages, might have varying levels of importance based on organizational context. Company size and stage seem to play a role, as well as whether they exist in a hostile or benign environment as examined by Covin and Slevin (1989) in their article that spawned the term entrepreneurial orientation. The variables that stick out in our data are what the key sources of innovations are for the company.

The origins of innovations are diverse (Hippel, 1988, Sinha and Srivastava, 2013). While employees are the driving force for innovations in some organizations, in others, external sources like changes in law or a technological paradigm change, or interactions with customers are more important. This would suggest that investing resources in fostering and retaining serial intrapreneurs have varying levels of importance based on the origin of innovations on a case-by-case basis. We see this clearly in our data, exemplified by the telecom company where several of our respondents had experience working; The company fits the description of a low entrepreneurial orientation company with a bureaucratic inflexible system. Despite being anything but fertile ground for innovations, they are pushed forth nonetheless by the paradigm change brought by developing broadband cellular networks, most recently 5G. In insurance, respondents report changes in law and interactions with customers as the driving forces of innovation. We don't claim intrapreneurship is unimportant in these industries, but that the value of intrapreneurs as a resource is context dependent.

The context dependent importance of serial intrapreneurs traces back to organizational ambidexterity (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013) and the explore vs exploit dilemma (March, 1991). Being able to explore new opportunities without disrupting vital activities that keep the organization going is a difficult task that often leads to tension. This links back to the strategic fit of the intrapreneur's ideas. Using Barney's (1991) resource-based view approach you would say that the intrapreneurial nature of employees can be a source of competitive advantage if it is valuable and can be organized to capitalize on this value.

5.7.2 - Forming vs seeking

Some serial intrapreneurs report their inclination to act intrapreneurially as being contingent on their workplace context, whereas others argue that serial intrapreneurs create a context that suits them. Some also seem to value the sense of order and predictability offered within more structured working environments.

While serial intrapreneurs, like intrapreneurs, are unarguably impacted by the entrepreneurial orientation of their parenting organization (Santos-Vijande et al., 2022), some seem to be much less so than others. Some seek a context in which to be a serial intrapreneur, others make it. We find that these assertive serial intrapreneurs create time for experimentation where none is given, pursue ideas despite lack of leadership support and see barriers as opportunities for creative problem solving.

Context forming or seeking is an interesting point of contention in our findings, which ultimately points to the heterogeneity of serial intrapreneurs as a group.

6. Implications

Here we seek to provide recommendations for leadership and intrapreneurs.

Our findings have implications for intrapreneurs and leadership. While we can make some recommendations, it is important to note that we have been unable to uncover every aspect of serial intrapreneurship and that there likely exist significant case specific factors within each organization that must also be considered.

6.1 Recommendations for leadership

While some will inevitably leave, we find that many potential serial intrapreneurs can be retained if they are properly facilitated. Clearly, this means working toward a high degree of entrepreneurial orientation (Covin & Slevin, 1989) within the organization and providing opportunities for intrapreneurship (Garrett et al., 2017), which are basic requirements for intrapreneurship. However, in order to specifically cater to repeat intrapreneurship leadership needs to keep in mind the factors differentiating serial intrapreneurs.

As a key differentiating factor for serial intrapreneurs, the willingness and ability to navigate the internal political landscape plays a central role in whether intrapreneurs will stay and keep innovating, or stop, or leave. We have seen leaders take a central role in developing skills and confidence of the intrapreneurial employee. By effectively shepherding entrepreneurial employees through the internal political workings of the organization they can be sheltered from the resistance that leads to many intrapreneurs quitting, while also showing them how to do it themselves in future projects. This could allow employees to develop the desirable skill set of an intrapreneur, while setting them up for longevity by bypassing some of the mechanisms that drive intrapreneurs out.

The second prominent differentiating factor we discovered was the differential perception and tolerance of risk. As a leader of intrapreneurs, working to reduce the perceived risks to the intrapreneur will likely result in increased rates of serial intrapreneurship. We find that serial intrapreneurs take on increased career risks, and that they are more sensitive to financial risks than their entrepreneur counterparts. Reducing perceived career risks could increase the

number of entrepreneurially inclined employees trying their hand at intrapreneurship, and eventually serial intrapreneurship.

Though we have argued that serial intrapreneurship has many benefits it is important to keep in mind how important these innovative employees are in the organization. Are intrapreneurs a valuable resource that can be effectively leveraged? This will depend on how dynamic the environment surrounding the organization is. If the company operates in a stable environment, intrapreneurship, and serial intrapreneurship, as a driver of innovativeness, could be less important.

6.2 Implications for intrapreneurs

In order to find success as a serial intrapreneur, it is paramount to find an organization where that have a high level of internal motivation to work. The organization should be an asset to reaching personal goals, and the resources should have potential to be leveraged in such a way as to increase impact.

The definition of serial intrapreneurship hinges on the idea of creating value, we have come to believe agreement with leadership about what is valuable increases chances of success.

Some other key hallmarks to look for in an environment where a serial intrapreneur can thrive are that it acknowledges entrepreneurial behavior, and coworkers and leadership can be motivated to be a part of intrapreneurial projects.

Finally, a piece of advice from (nearly) all the serial intrapreneurs we talked with: don't be afraid to ask for forgiveness rather than permission!

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the phenomenon of serial intrapreneurs. Through an exploratory study examining intrapreneurs, serial entrepreneurs, and facilitators, we found evidence of serial intrapreneurs fitting the following working definition:

Serial intrapreneurs repeatedly take new ideas and turn them into valuable realities within the organization.

Serial intrapreneurs have their origin in the same factors that select for intrapreneurship as outlined by Neessen et al. (2019) and Hernández-Perlines et al. (2022). We also found that when environment and circumstance, and their interplay with inherent personal factors, allow intrapreneurs to pursue opportunities within their organization, they are likely to become serial intrapreneurs.

The key contributions made by this paper are the identification of two unique factors of serial intrapreneurs which seem to differentiate them from serial entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs. First, the willingness to repeatedly engage with internal politics of the organization and the adeptness at doing so. Second, a different perception and sensitivity to career and economic risks. We find serial intrapreneurs are more resistant to the forces that drive other employees with entrepreneurial skill sets to seek opportunities elsewhere.

After investigating serial intrapreneurship, we believe this concept should be of further interest to academics and practitioners alike. Serial intrapreneurs appear to have significant impact on organizational innovativeness and performance. By further increasing the understanding of serial intrapreneurs we believe they can be more effectively facilitated and leveraged, retaining, and motivating them to boost organizational performance over time.

7.1 Limitations

The contributions made to the topic by this paper are not exhaustive but aims to shed some light on an area we believe has not gotten the attention it deserves in the study of entrepreneurship. The thesis is limited by our choice of research design as well as the scope of our sample. Being exploratory in nature, our findings are not generalizable, further research is needed to validate our findings and to explore how different externalities might impact intrapreneurs and potential intrapreneurs. The study relies on self-assessment, and as a result we are unable to verify the claims made by respondents directly. We have no evidence that they actually behave as reported. We can however see the patterns from across sources which allow for some confidence in the accuracy of our results (Singleton & Straits, 2018).

In order to create a representative sample, we made significant efforts to include interview subjects with diverse demographics from across industries, public and private sectors. We interviewed intrapreneurs as well as people with experience working with intrapreneurs, in order to get both sides of the story. Even still, we must recognize that intrapreneurs show up anywhere people work in organizations and that we could not possibly cover all of these in our thesis.

While our sample has varying origins, it is largely Eurocentric, with most being native to Norway. Most also currently work in Norway and have the bulk of their work experience, and as an extent their experience with intrapreneurship, in Norway. If cultural factors have significant impact on intrapreneurial inclinations of employees, we would have been unable to detect them as a result.

7.2 Further research

The differential traits, behaviors, and outcomes of serial intrapreneurs is fertile ground for further research. As our study is exploratory and thus limited in scope, the insights would need to be verified. The key findings of differential adeptness at navigating and tolerance for internal politics, as well as different risk awareness and perception also needs to be validated.

We have indications that serial intrapreneurs more frequently pursue intrapreneurial opportunities and are more successful at doing so. Serial entrepreneurs are significantly different from entrepreneurs in that they are more likely to transition from paid employment to entrepreneurship (Dabic et al., 2021) and are more successful when they do (Lafontaine & Shaw, 2016, Lazear, 2005, Kirschenhofer & Lechner, 2012). If this same pattern holds true for serial intrapreneurs, as indicated by our data, it would prove the need for further research on the topic.

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Appendix:

Appendix 1: Intrapreneur comparison table (Hisrich, 1990, p. 218)

Comparison of Entrepreneurs, Intrapreneurs, and Traditional Managers

Trait	Traditional managers	Entrepreneurs	Intrapreneurs
Primary motives	Promotion and other traditional corporate rewards, such as office, staff, and power.	Independence, opportunity to create, and money.	Independence and ability to advance in the corporate setting receiving the corporate rewards.
Time orientation	Short run—meeting quotas and budgets, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and the annual planning horizons.	Survival and achieving 5 to 10-year growth of business.	Between entrepreneurial and traditional managers depending on urgency to meet self-imposed and corporate timetables.
Activity	Delegates and supervises more than direct involvement.	Direct involvement.	Direct involvement more than delegation.
Risk	Careful.	Moderate risk taker.	Moderate risk taker.
Status	Concerned about status symbols.	No concern about status symbols.	Not concerned about traditional corporate status symbols—desires independence.
Failure and mistakes	Tries to avoid mistakes and surprises.	Deals with mistakes and failures.	Attempts to hide risky projects from view until ready.
Decisions	Usually agrees with those in upper management positions.	Follows dream with decisions.	Able to get others to agree to help achieve dream.
Who serves	Others.	Self and customers.	Self, customers, and sponsors.
Family history	Family members worked for large organizations.	Entrepreneurial small-business, professional, or farm background.	Entrepreneurial small-business, professional, or farm background.
Relationship with others	Hierarchy as basic relationship.	Transactions and deal making as basic relationship.	Transactions within hierarchy.

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

1. Background with entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship.
 - a. What is your background with entrepreneurial or intrapreneurial work?
 - b. Can you tell me about a recent innovative project you either started or helped bring to fruition?
 - c. Would you categorize yourself as a serial intrapreneur? Defined as someone who repeatedly works toward turning new ideas into profitable realities within an organization.
 - i. Why/why not.
 - d. Is having a creative outlet and/or having room to innovate at work important to you?
 - e. Is innovation or related tasks a part of your current job description?
2. Staying or leaving.
 - a. Did you ever consider starting your own company?
 - i. Why or why not?
 - b. Do you have examples of past co-workers or acquaintances that were/are particularly entrepreneurial?
 - i. Why do you think they were entrepreneurial?
 - ii. Did they end up staying with their employer or leaving?
 - iii. Do you know why?
3. State of entrepreneurial leadership at current place of work
 - a. What measures does your employer have in place for promoting innovative behavior?
 - b. Which of these are true about your place of work:
 - i. *Experimentation is encouraged*
 - ii. *We have a grand challenge to work toward*
 - iii. *There is widespread understanding of innovation and design thinking principles.*
 - iv. *We have enough unstructured time to pursue new possibilities.*
 - v. *Barriers for innovation are dealt with.*
 - vi. *Decisions are made based on data, not HiPPOs. (highest paid person's opinion)*

- c. What measures does your employer have in place for retaining innovative employees?
 - d. Where do you think most new innovations come from at your current place of work? This can be any type of innovation: process, product or service.
- 4. Differences between entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs
 - a. Which personality traits and other internal factors distinguish an entrepreneur from an intrapreneur.
 - b. Do you think internal or external factors are more important in distinguishing intrapreneurs from entrepreneurs?
- 5. Past experience, intrapreneurial learning as a gateway to serial intrapreneurship.
 - a. Can you recall a formative experience with innovation, intrapreneurship or entrepreneurship?
 - i. How do you think it impacted your behavior?
 - b. Past experience with entrepreneurship has proven to increase the odds of an individual starting a business. In your experience, is this also true of intrapreneurship?
 - c. What do you think keeps intrapreneurs innovating?
 - d. What stops them?
- 6. Can organizations hang on to creative talent?
 - a. Do you agree with the statement “The most innovative people will leave the company eventually regardless.”
 - i. If yes; Why do you think they will leave?
 - ii. If no; What can be done to keep them in the company and keep them innovating?
 - b. What do you think about the statement “Restrictions breed creativity.” in the context of intrapreneurship.
 - c. What do you think about the statement “It’s better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission.” in the context of intrapreneurship.
- 7. Can anyone become an intrapreneur?

Appendix 3: Overview of respondents

All respondents are anonymous and have been given code names based on their backgrounds. (For example **ME** works in the **M**aritime industry and has an **E**ngineering background.)

***ME:** Maritime industry, renewables engineer and founder of an internal startup,*

A mechanical engineer by trade, they have experience from engineering and energy systems. Today they run an internal startup while simultaneously working as a renewables engineer. The startup had its origin in an internal innovation competition. ME views themselves as a serial intrapreneur, but argues for its context dependency.

***IBD:** Insurance industry, leader strategy and business development.*

12 years of experience working with varying forms of innovation. Employed by a corporate player in insurance and financial services. The organization operates in life insurance, damage insurance, asset management, and banking, aimed at both consumer-, corporate-, and public customers. IBD has overall responsibility for strategic business development. Their view is that risk averseness is central in differentiating entrepreneurs from intrapreneurs.

***CL:** Consulting industry, leadership - department head and partner.*

CL has many years experience in the petrochemistry-industry. They are head of operations and a senior partner at the Norwegian branch of one of the big consulting companies. CL has extensive experience being an intrapreneur on multiple levels. They view the freedom given to push boundaries and focus on innovation as paramount for their lasting loyalty to the organization.

***TSE:** Telecom industry, software engineer and co-founder of startup.*

TSE has extensive experience from the telecom industry, with experience from leading American and Norwegian companies. They also have experience developing educational systems. After their corporate career, they have co-founded start-ups. They argue one thing which separates intrapreneurs from entrepreneurs, is their ability to be politicians and thrive in a structured environment.

***CL2:** Consulting industry, leadership, co-founder fintech startups.*

CL2 has a consulting background that led to starting as an entrepreneur. Their lean start-up company grew for 5 years before they started working with their current employer as innovation chief. They have been developing a fintech for clustering mortgages as a side project since the start of the pandemic.

***ET:** Youth/Education, teacher.*

ET is a teacher at a high school in Norway. With decades of experience in education, ET has a strong background in teaching and curriculum development. They are passionate about creating a supportive learning environment that fosters students' growth and development.

***SL:** Software industry. Leadership - Founder.*

SL is the CEO and founder of a software company based in Norway, that develops and employs industrial data platforms and applications. With over 20 years of experience in the technology industry, SL has a comprehensive background in software development, leadership, and intrapreneurship. They argue facilitation by leaders is the key enabling factor to intrapreneurship.

***TE:** Telecom industry, business owner and founder, visionary.*

TE is CEO and founder of a highly innovative broadcasting company who have received several awards for their novel approach to broadcasting various forms of entertainment. They have over 15 years of experience in tech/software development, and are passionate about developing innovative software solutions. TE employs exclusively people who fall into the serial intrapreneur category.

TL: *Telecom industry, co-founder and leadership.*

President at a broadcasting company in Norway, TL recently worked as an executive producer in collaboration with international brands in the entertainment industry. TL argues that autonomy and freedom are the enabling factors for innovative behavior.

TM: *Telecom industry, management.*

Working with an accelerator in Norway as an experienced startup advisor and mentor with over 10 years of experience in the telecom and internet industry. TM has a deep understanding of the challenges faced by early-stage companies and also has extensive experience with intrapreneurship from innovation initiatives in Norwegian telecom. Argues for culture being the enabling factor for intrapreneurial behavior in structured environments.

SBO: *Software industry, founder and business owner.*

Founder and CEO of a software development company based in Oslo, Norway. Over 10 years of experience in the software industry. Background in developing high-quality payment solutions for a variety of clients in personal mobility segments. They are passionate about solving complex problems through innovative technology and collaborating with teams to achieve project success. Entrepreneurial opportunity was the defining factor in them transitioning from intrapreneur to entrepreneur.

GE: *Greentech industry, engineer, leadership.*

An experienced research and innovation professional with a background operating at the intersection of industry, business, and scientific research. 10+ years of experience from a large player in the Norwegian oil and gas industry, currently working as CTO in a GreenTech company founded recently. They argue that an innovation department can be an enabling factor in intrapreneurship.

SSD: Software industry, software developer.

SSD is a principal software developer at a major international tech organization. Over 25 years in telecom and software industries, background in research and development. SSD shared their experience with how the emergent properties of the organization often counteracts intrapreneurship and innovation initiatives.

EC: Youth/Education, coach.

EC is a dedicated coach and leader at a youth sports club. EC is passionate about helping young athletes develop their skills and achieve their goals. They are known for leadership skills and ability to motivate and inspire their team. They argue for rigid structures and cumbersome processes being a disabling factor for intrapreneurship and innovative behavior.

SSE: Software industry. Serial entrepreneur.

SSE is a business executive and serial entrepreneur who currently works at a software company in Norway following their acquisition of his latest startup. With over 25 years of experience in the software industry, SSE has a proven track record of starting and building successful businesses. SSE has worked in large corporations and startups. Argues that failure management is key to creating a culture where intrapreneurship can flourish, and that intrapreneurship is dependent on company size. While entrepreneurship is hard work, they feel it is easier for them to be an entrepreneur - given their experience starting companies - than to be an intrapreneur.

CF: Construction industry. Finance, leadership.

CF is a financial professional currently working in the construction industry. CF is committed to driving growth and innovation, and has a track record of intrapreneurship. Their ideas have been realized and have generated significant savings. Now they are being implemented across the whole operation. They argue for the industry dependency of intrapreneurship explaining that some industries are more prone to intrapreneurial behavior.