

Abstract

In response to Welter et al.'s (2017) call for research to embrace entrepreneurial diversity, this project explores a broadened definition of entrepreneurial identity suggesting that the persona is – and should be – understood as separate from what it means to be an entrepreneur. Analysis of *New York Times* articles on Elizabeth Holmes renders empirical findings on the media's casting of entrepreneurial identity. The data was used to assess a 3-dimensional heuristic, derived from a multidisciplinary approach, probing understandings of variables that constitute entrepreneurial identity. In sum, the project attempts to bridge language used to articulate entrepreneurial research across fields.

Literature Review

Identity

- My work takes up an intersectional approach to identity offering an inclusionary space for all individuals (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins 1990).
- "Identity exists by how it is defined," (Saldaña, 2016).

Entrepreneurship

- There's a general disagreement on *what* entrepreneurship is and *how* to talk about it in relation to identity (Gartner, 1990; Essers et al., 2017; Elliot, 2011; Cerulo 1997).

Literacy

- A main quality of entrepreneurial identity, I argue, is the execution of literacy practices which people use in their daily transitions within their ascribed roles and chosen domains – at home, work, and with other outside third party organizations.
- In this work, I follow Barton's (1994) delineation of literacy as a social event, fostering thinking about this concept in terms of the ecology of literacy.

Transfer

- For this work, I take up a broad understanding of transfer that extends beyond reading/writing skills (Royer et al., 2005).

Methods

Research Questions

- How is entrepreneurial identity performed?**
 - What are the qualities of an entrepreneurial identity?
 - In what ways do entrepreneurial identities capitalize on the transfer and application of literacies across discourse communities/communities of practice?
- Can the cubed identity concept effectively describe entrepreneurial identities?**
 - Which cube panels are most directly represented in media portrayals of entrepreneurial identity?
 - How does this speak to the power dynamics that underlie the cube's presentation?

Data Collection

- An initial search on the *New York Times* for "Theranos" renders 176 results (ranging in relevance) dated July 9, 2010 to recent mentions in 2019.
- These entries are tagged in 'Dealbook', 'Technology', 'Business Day', 'Fashion', 'Health' and 'Op. Editorial' — 6 of 20 different sections of the online *Times*, including the homepage.
- I reviewed and analyzed 5 of these articles, one from each of the sections offered.

Coding Process



Entrepreneur vs. Entrepreneurial Archetype

Specification of these terms has a notable rhetorical impact on how they are understood.

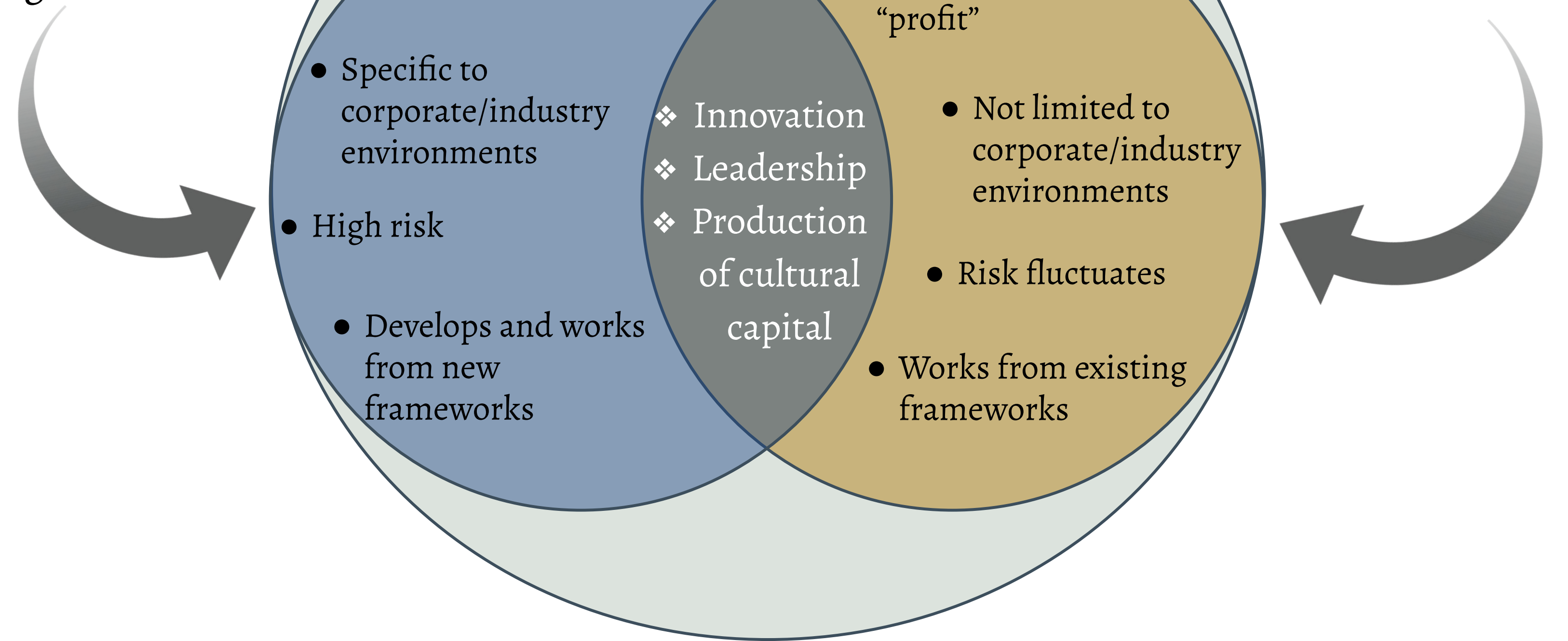
Entrepreneur (Noun) = contained signification

- "Profit" = \$\$
- Specific to corporate/industry environments
- High risk
- Develops and works from new frameworks

Identity

- Alternative conceptions of "profit"
- Not limited to corporate/industry environments
- Risk fluctuates
- Works from existing frameworks

Entrepreneurial (Adjective) = flexible signification



Contribution

- This project offers a 3-dimensional heuristic that probes a nuanced understanding of the qualities and performance of entrepreneurial identity.
- Each panel of the cube represents the qualities that constitute the entrepreneurial identity profile.
- Application of the cube concept dictates that what can be observed and analyzed about entrepreneurial identity, from any situation, is only that information which pertains to the panel that is forward-facing, depending on the angle.
- The greatest strength of this heuristic is that it places attention on the inherent socio-cultural power dynamics at play that foreground certain facets of entrepreneurial identities in context while hiding others.

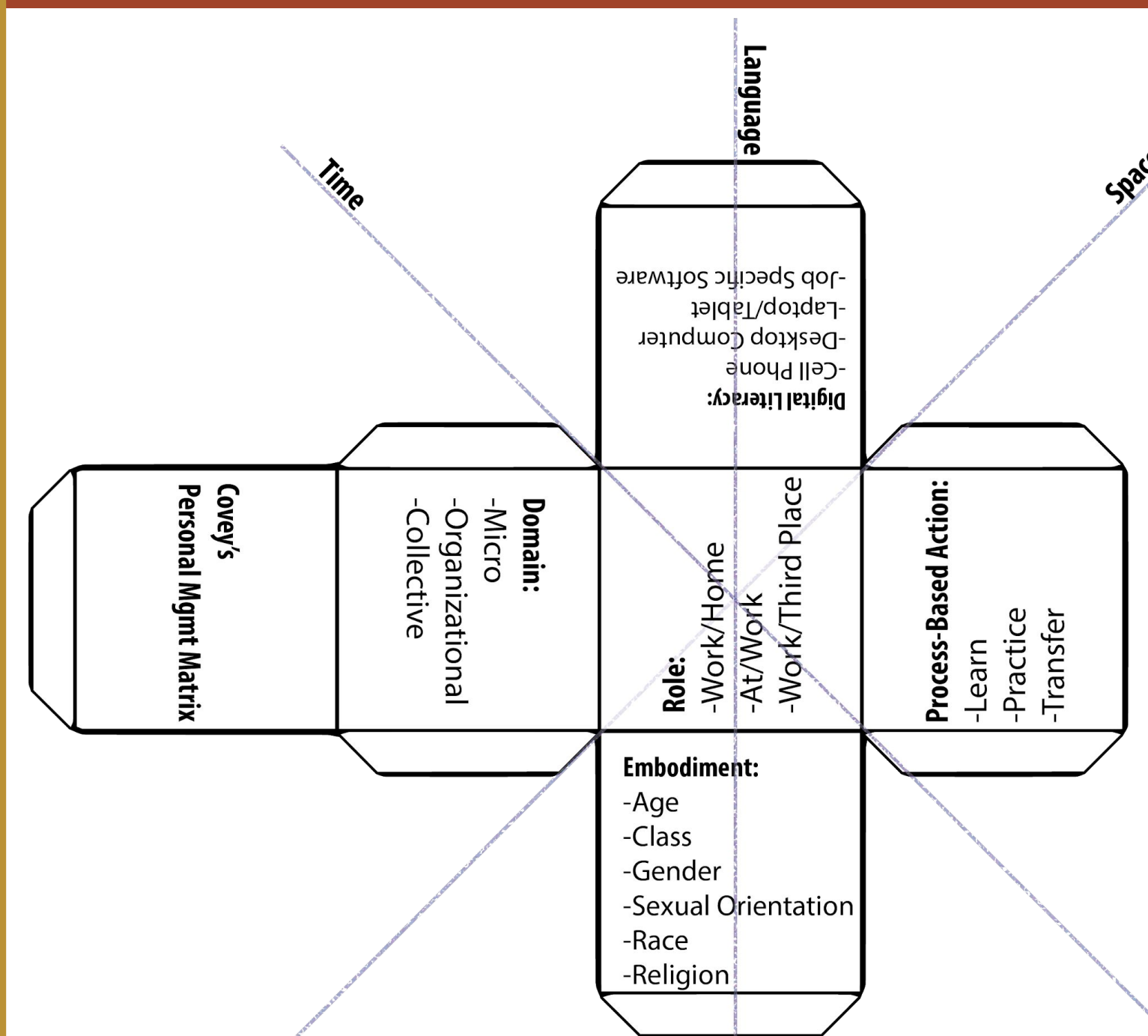
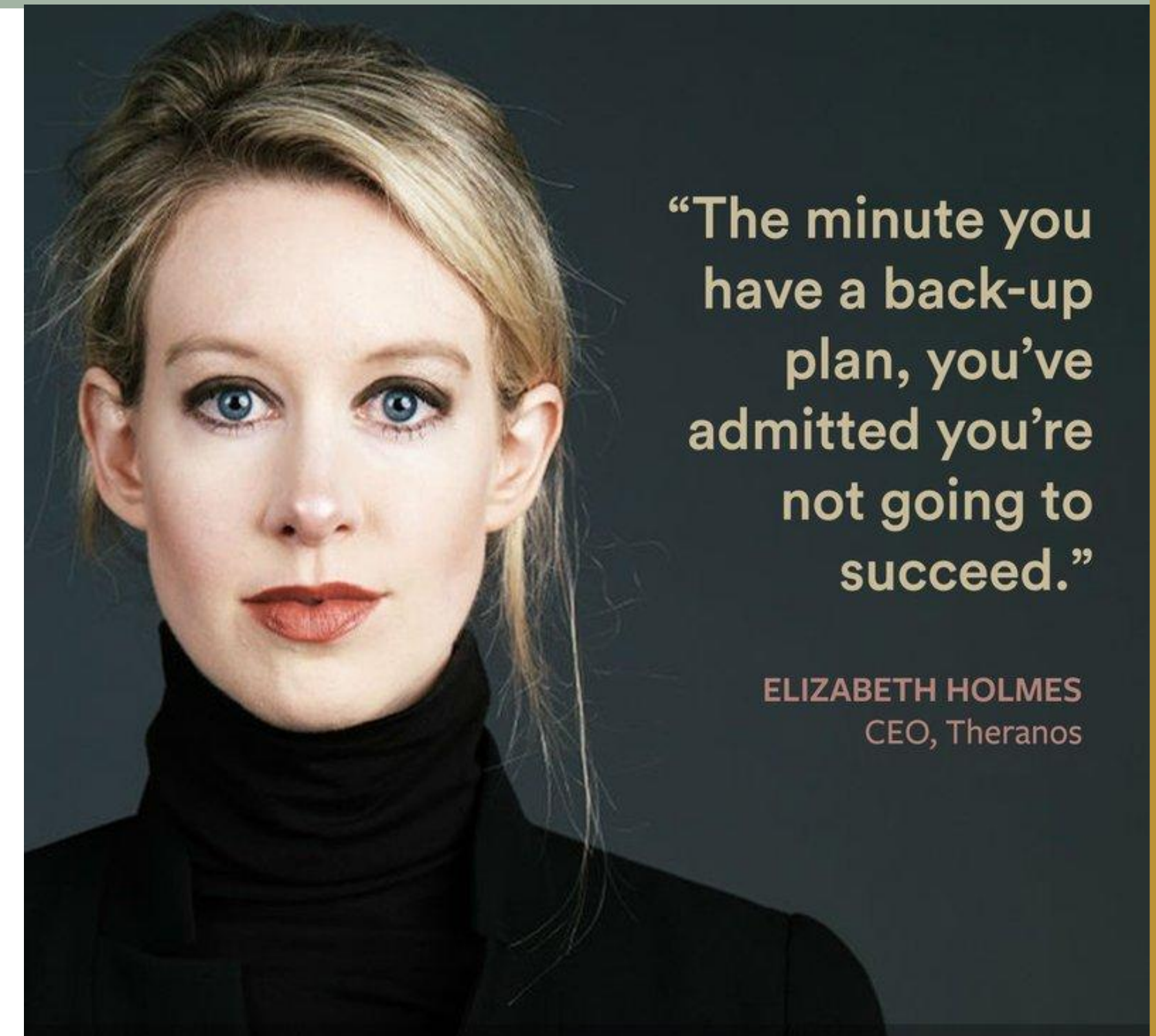


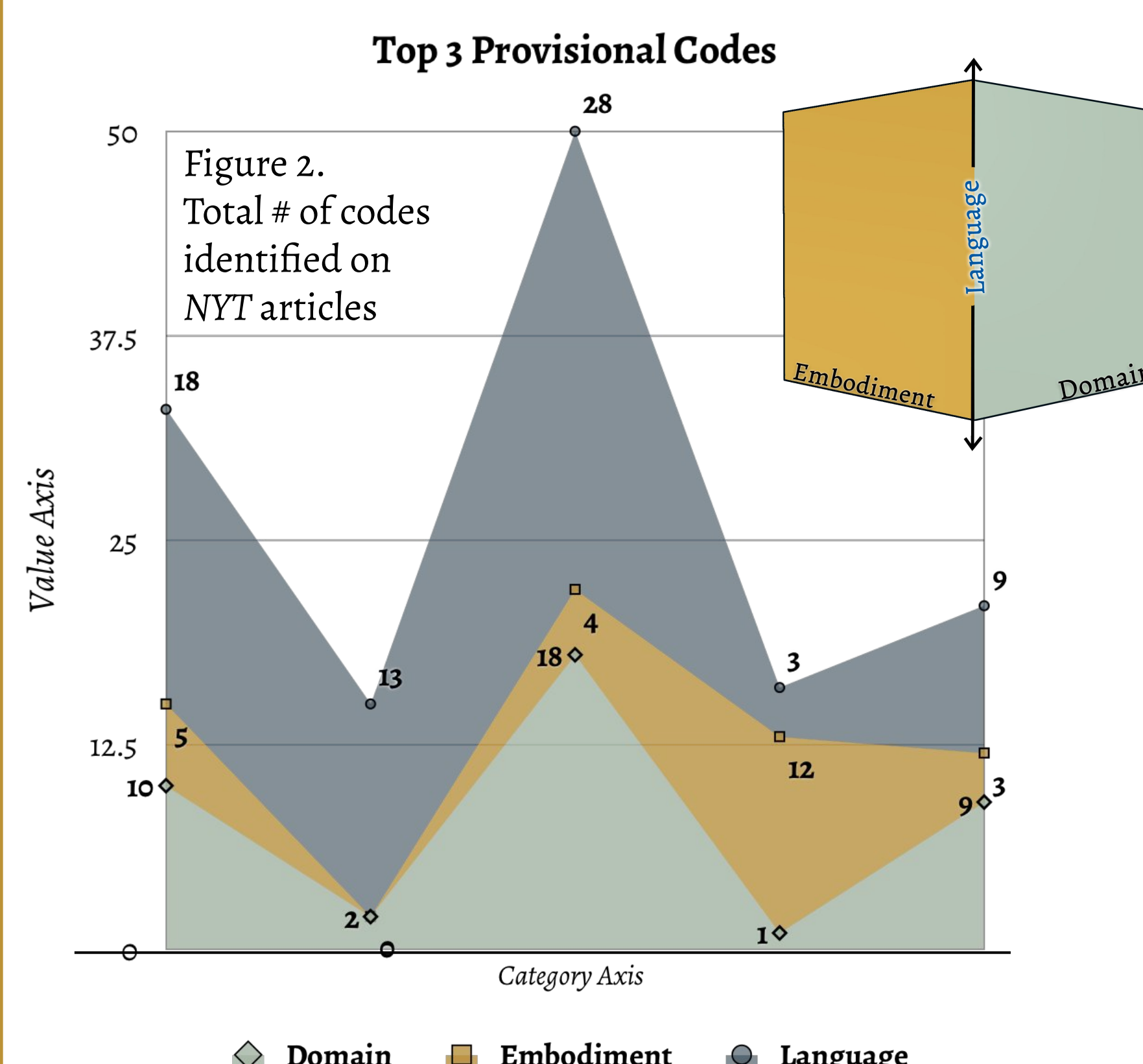
Figure 1. A 3-Dimensional model of entrepreneurial identity variables

Case Study: Elizabeth Holmes

- At nineteen years old Elizabeth Holmes dropped out of Stanford, fashioned herself as the biomedical version of Steve Jobs, and began her own startup company — Theranos.
- Established in 2003, the startup sought to make blood testing convenient, promising clients the production of a hypodermic needle that could be drawn from home and also uploaded to perform a full range of blood tests in walk-in clinics.
- Holmes and Theranos raised hundreds of millions of dollars from investors, but the promises of revolutionary technology were built on a foundation of lies.



Findings



- The media's casting of entrepreneurial identity foregrounds a priority on language, embodiment, and domain.
- As a result, panels including Covey's matrix, digital literacy, role, and the process-based trajectory remain hidden; alternate forms of data collection are required to test the validity of these panels on the proposed heuristic.
- During the coding process, a new category emerged. It may be worthwhile to explore revision of the cube's panels to include a side dedicated to the product, service, and/or consumable capital produced by the participant under observation.