

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 *Fortune* articles on Melanie Perkins 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

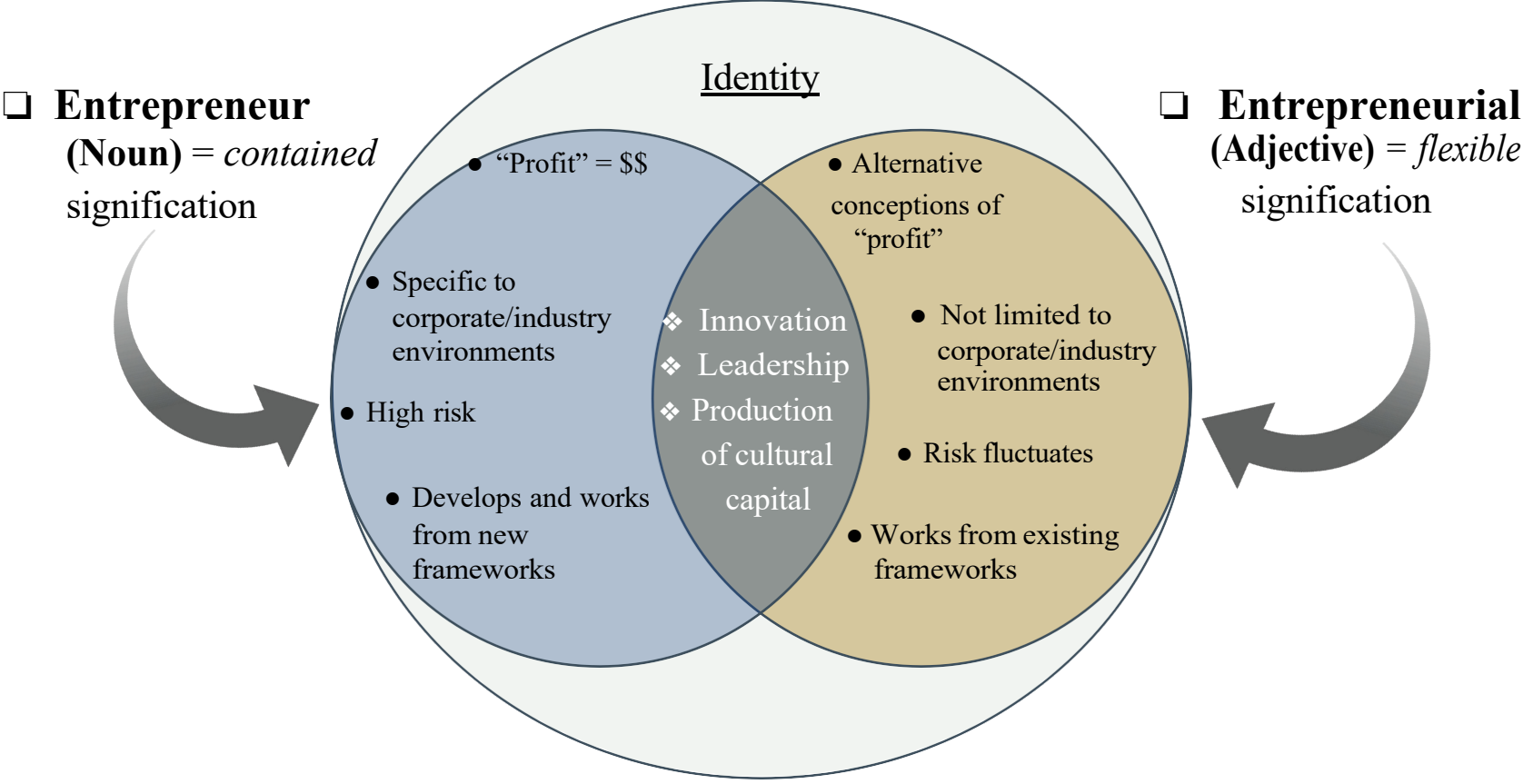
- An initial search on *Fortune* for “Canva” renders 104 results (ranging in relevance) dated August 18, 2016, to recent mentions in 2025.
- These entries are tagged in ‘Newsletters’, ‘AI’, ‘Tech’, ‘Commentary’, ‘Success’, ‘Leadership’, ‘Magazine’, ‘Finance’, ‘Conferences’, ‘Business Technology’, ‘Article Hub’, ‘Careers’, ‘Explainer’, and ‘Venture’, 15 of 31 different sections of the online *Fortune*.
- I reviewed and analyzed 15 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.



Contribution

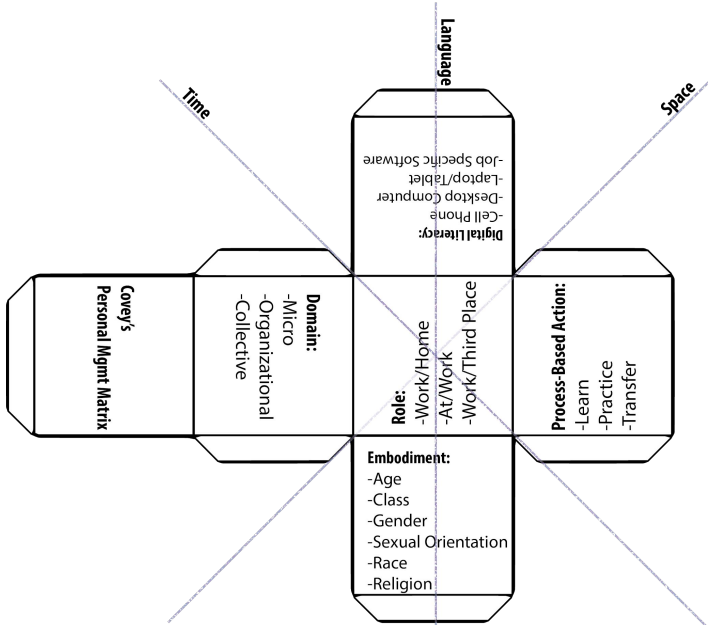


Figure 1. A 3-Dimensional model of entrepreneurial identity variables

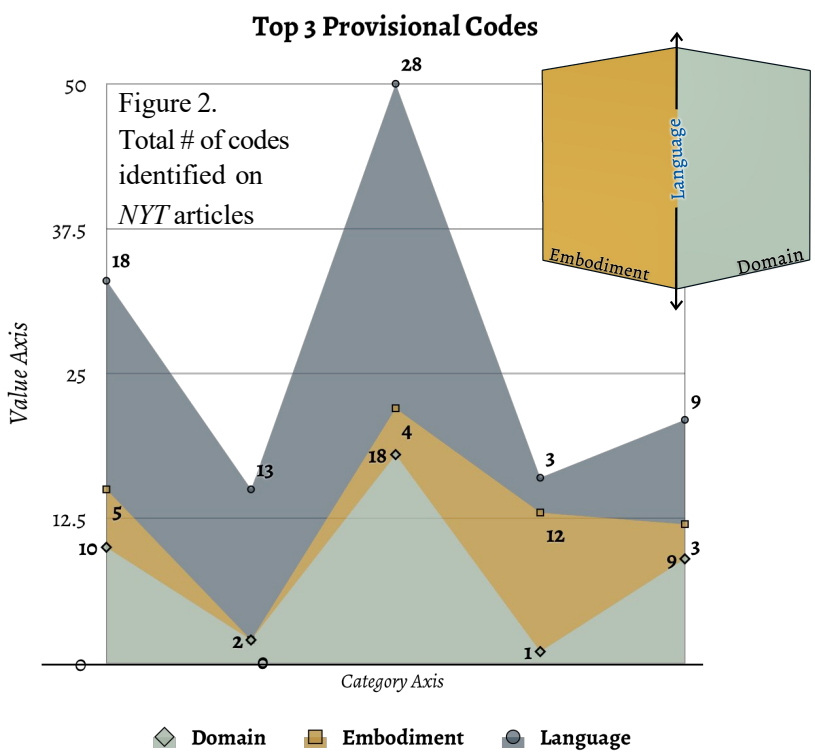
- This project offers a 3-dimensional heuristic that probes a nuanced understanding of the qualities and performance of entrepreneurial identity.
- Each panel of the cube represents the qualities that constitute the entrepreneurial identity profile.
- Application of the cube concept dictates that what 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.

Case Study: Melanie Perkins

- In 2007, Melanie Perkins, a university professor teaching graphic design in Australia, was frustrated with the inaccessible nature of design tools available online, many of which required over a semester of classes to fully understand.
- Six years later, as co-founder and CEO, Perkins launched Canva, a communications software that allows users to design and edit graphics, presentations, and videos in an easy-to-use and intuitive web-based tool.
- Canva is valued at \$25 billion (as of 2024) and continues to evolve and grow on the premise of scalability, simplicity, and constant innovation.



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.

*Adapted in 2025 for educational purposes