CONSTRUCTION OF MIDDLE MANAGERS’ CORPORATE ENTREPRENEURIAL
IDENTITY IN SOUTH KOREA: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

A Dissertation

by

JIN LEE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of Texas A&M University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Chair of Committee, Jia Wang
Committee Members, Khalil Dirani
                             Laura M. Stough
                             Jane Sell
Head of Department, Mario Torres

August 2020

Major Subject: Educational Human Resource Development

Copyright 2020 Jin Lee
ABSTRACT

Among the various populations within an organization, middle managers are particularly pointed out as the key agents of corporate entrepreneurship, which is a vehicle to revitalize organizations, create new businesses opportunity, and foster an innovative mindset within an organization. The purpose of this study was to explore the process of Korean middle managers’ identity construction as a corporate entrepreneur. Despite the recent scholarly attention to entrepreneurs’ identity process, little attention has been paid to the process of identity construction of corporate entrepreneurs. Since identity explains the motivational aspect of why and how an individual behave in a certain way, an investigation of middle managers’ entrepreneurial identity construction can provide insights into how individuals are motivated and developed to be corporate entrepreneurs.

I adopted the constructivist grounded theory methodology, which is aligned with my ontological and epistemological perspectives. I interviewed 12 Korean middle managers who are currently holding a corporate entrepreneur position or have been working on a CE project in large corporations. Interview transcripts were used for constant comparative analysis.

The most significant contribution of this study is highlighting the unique process of middle managers’ corporate entrepreneurial identity construction in a context of large corporation. More specifically, my study is expanding the conceptual boundary of corporate entrepreneurship to the realm of entrepreneurial career development. The participants engaged in a CE activity seeking a good opportunity to learn knowledge and skills, establish a business network, and even test new ideas that might benefit their own business in the future. Thus, this
study reveals the continuum of organizational employees, corporate entrepreneurship, to entrepreneurship under the overarching entrepreneurial career concept.

My finding also brings the connection between entrepreneurial learning and identity construction of the corporate entrepreneurs. By embarking on corporate entrepreneurial activity, the participants gradually perceived and negotiated their new roles in the organizational context, and shaped their new sense of self as a corporate entrepreneur while they engage in a significant learning process.

Findings from this study also contribute to Human Resource Development (HRD) and career development literature by revealing the role of corporate entrepreneurship in entrepreneurial career choice. Findings demonstrate that becoming a corporate entrepreneur for a middle manager is not just a role transition; rather it is a career transition through an identity change and learning process. Further, findings from my study inform HRD professionals to better recognize and understand the motivation and learning process of corporate entrepreneurs in a large corporate setting. This expanded understanding of the process of corporate entrepreneurial identity construction can help HRD professionals to identify optimal interventions to foster corporate entrepreneurship in organizations and help middle managers address their career challenges.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes to my advisor, Dr. Jia Wang, for giving me her endless support, insightful guidance, and encouragement all the way through my Ph.D. journey and advocating for my success both in career and life. I also express my deepest appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Khalil Dirani, Dr. Laura Stough, and Dr. Jane Sell for their invaluable support, professional guidance, and flexibility.

I am especially thankful to my lovely wife, Yeojin Kim, for walking with me every single step along the way and being truly supportive, understanding, and endless patient throughout my entire study. She deserves to be recognized as a co-author of any of my academic achievement, including this dissertation.

I also wish to express my deepest gratitude and love to my wonderful 17-month old daughter, Riley Yul Lee. She is truly a gift and the biggest achievement in my life. Her smile was the ultimate cure and motivation through my dissertation writing.

I would like to thank my dad, my mom, and my brother, whose amazing support and prayer made this process possible.

My endless thanks to all the EAHR family, for their generous supports and encouragement in my work and life during my doctoral years.

Last but not least, thanks to my research participants for their generosity in sharing their life stories with me.
CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Dr. Jia Wang, Dr., Dr. Khalil Dirani of the Educational Administration and Human Resource Development Department at Texas A&M University, Dr. Laura M. Stough of Department of Educational Psychology at Texas A&M University, and Dr. Jane Sell of Department of Sociology at Texas A&M University.

All other work conducted for this dissertation was completed by the student independently.

Funding Sources

Graduate study was supported by a fellowship, doctoral research grant and graduate assistantships from College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and Research Questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Methodology and Methods</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundaries of the Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Concept of Corporate Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Corporate Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typology and Dimensions of Corporate Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences between Entrepreneurs and Corporate Entrepreneurs</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Entrepreneurship Development</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antecedents of Corporate Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models of Corporate Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifting Perspectives on Corporate Entrepreneurship Development</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Managers as Corporate Entrepreneurs</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Managers’ Role Conflict in Organizations</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial Identity</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity and Identity Construction</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructing Entrepreneurial Identities: Types and Triggers</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Entrepreneurs’ Identity</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context of the Study</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Profile</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Entrepreneurship in South Korea: Practice and Research</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER III  METHODOLOGY ........................................................................ 42

Social Constructivism .................................................................................. 42
Grounded Theory Methodology ................................................................. 43
Methods ...................................................................................................... 46
  Sampling Procedure ................................................................................. 46
  Data Generation ....................................................................................... 50
  Data Analysis ......................................................................................... 57
Trustworthiness ........................................................................................... 62
  Member Checking ................................................................................... 63
  Peer Debriefing ...................................................................................... 63
Reflexive Positionality: The Researcher’s Role ........................................ 65
Summary ..................................................................................................... 67

CHAPTER IV  FINDINGS ................................................................................ 68

Overview ..................................................................................................... 68
The Participants Profile .............................................................................. 68
  Type of Corporate Entrepreneurial Activity ........................................... 72
Categories and Subcategories .................................................................... 73
  Developmental Readiness ....................................................................... 75
  Having a Career Aspiration .................................................................... 78
  Being Triggered ...................................................................................... 81
  Being Engaged in a Corporate Entrepreneurial Activity ....................... 83
Changes Accompanying the CE Activity ................................................ 86
  Internalizing the Corporate Entrepreneur Role as a New Role .............. 89
  Becoming a Corporate Entrepreneur .................................................. 93
Theoretical Integration of Categories and Subcategories ......................... 96
  Storyline .................................................................................................. 99
Summary .................................................................................................... 102

CHAPTER V  DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION ............... 104

Discussion .................................................................................................. 104
  Discussion Point One: Corporate Entrepreneurship as an Entrepreneurial Career ......................................................... 105
  Discussion Point Two: Connecting Corporate Entrepreneurial Learning to the Process of Constructing Entrepreneurial Identity ......................................................... 109
  Discussion Point Three: Becoming a Corporate Entrepreneur and Defining an Entrepreneurial Self ......................................................... 113
Implications ................................................................................................. 117
  Theoretical Implications ....................................................................... 117
  Practical Implications ............................................................................ 120
  Research Implications ........................................................................... 122
Conclusion ................................................................................................. 124
REFERENCES .................................................................................. 128
APPENDIX A .................................................................................. 148
APPENDIX B .................................................................................. 149
APPENDIX C .................................................................................. 150
APPENDIX D .................................................................................. 153
APPENDIX E .................................................................................. 154
APPENDIX F .................................................................................. 155
APPENDIX G .................................................................................. 156
APPENDIX H .................................................................................. 157
APPENDIX I .................................................................................. 158
APPENDIX J .................................................................................. 159
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Concurrent Data Analysis Process</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Examples of Diagramming for Theoretical Coding</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Categories and Subcategories</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Participants’ Profiles</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Theoretical Codes of the Study</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I provide the background in relation to the topic of the study, and then discuss a gap in the previous literature and problems addressed in this study. I then present the purpose and research questions. Next, I briefly outline the research methodology and methods, and discuss the significance of the study. Finally, I describe the boundary of the study.

Background of the Study

With the growing challenges and fierce competition in the marketplace, the call for building a competitive advantage through continuous innovation, creativity, and strategic management has become the key to sustainable growth of organizations. Established corporations are facing the rising demand to revitalize themselves and create an adaptive and innovative climate (Amberg & McGaughey, 2019; Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001). Having flexibility and agility at the organizational level is a prerequisite for corporations to compete with emerging rivals and survive in today’s dynamic and unpredictable economy (Covin & Slevin, 1991; Morris, Kuratko, & Covin, 2010).

Corporate entrepreneurship has been broadly defined as entrepreneurship in an established organization (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001, 2003) and is commonly understood as a way to revitalize organizations, create new businesses, launch new services or products, develop an innovative-mindset within an organization, and improve organizational performance (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003; Molina, & Callahan, 2009; Zahra & Covin, 1995). The idea of embedding entrepreneurship within existing firms has been viewed as one of the major strategic postures.
Traditionally, corporate entrepreneurship researchers focused on entrepreneurship at the firm level (i.e., Corbett, Neck, & DeTienne, 2007; Covin & Slevin, 1991; Zahara, 1993). However, a focus on the individual level of corporate entrepreneurship has recently grown (e.g., Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003, Burström & Wilson, 2015). Entrepreneurial individuals in an organization play a significant role in initiating corporate entrepreneurship. They seek new business opportunities and drive innovative activities through mobilization of resources using autonomous bottom-up processes. These efforts eventually help transform the organization (Burgelman 1983a; Rutherford & Holt, 2007).

Among the various populations within an organization, middle managers are considered the key agents of corporate entrepreneurship (e.g., Halme, Lindeman, & Linna, 2012; Hornsby, Kuratko, & Zahara, 2002; Morris, Davis, & Allen, 1994). Middle managers are positioned at the intermediate level of an organizational hierarchy, thus serving as mediators between bottom-level employees and top executives when the organization makes strategic decisions (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Radaelli & Sitton-Kent, 2016). Middle managers perform multiple roles in organizational contexts. In particular, due to their intermediate positions – leaders of a certain group and subordinates of top management – middle managers are expected to work as key change agents, mediators among diverse ranks, or managers who maintain the status quo of an organization (Harding, Lee, & Ford, 2014; Radaelli & Sitton-Kent, 2016).

In addition to corporate entrepreneurship, another focus of this study is entrepreneurs’ identity construction. In the entrepreneurial domain, it is recognized that “entrepreneurial activities are infused with meaning as a result of the expression of an individual’s identity” (Leitch & Harrison, 2016, p. 177). Because identities are the primary sources of individuals’ motivation and serve as strong driving forces of entrepreneurial actions, exploration and
development of entrepreneurs’ identities provide answers to two research questions: “Who is an entrepreneur?” and “What should he or she do?” (Anderson & Warren, 2011). Many types of entrepreneurs such as social entrepreneurs, self-employers, and academic entrepreneurs have been studied in terms of their identity construction (Lewis, 2016; Mallet & Wapshott, 2015; Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016). These entrepreneurs’ distinct processes of identity processes have been examined, and the findings have provided insights about how each type of entrepreneurial identity is activated, constructed, or changes based on the contextual factors.

In this study, South Korea (Korea, hereafter) is chosen as the research context. Korea’s economy has been led and developed by large corporations (Worldbank, 2018) that have grown rapidly over the past 70 years after the Korean War. However, with the recent low economic growth rate and strong competitors, many Korean corporations are experiencing difficulties in the global economy (Pasquier, 2016). In addition, due to the lack of innovativeness and entrepreneurial spirit that are inherently embedded in Korea’s mature, bureaucratic organizational structure, Korean companies are losing their competitiveness. Hence, in Korea, corporate entrepreneurship has recently emerged as an antidote for the organizational inertia and a means to revitalizing the corporations for sustainable growth. As a result, this topic has gained much interest from the academia, industry, and the national government (Lee & Park, 2017; Park, 2018).

In summary, the focus of my study – South Korean middle managers’ identity construction as corporate entrepreneurs – is based upon the confluence of three bodies of literature: corporate entrepreneurship, middle management development, and entrepreneurial identity construction.
Problem Statement

Although corporate entrepreneurship has been explored for three decades, there are still several gaps that exist in the literature. First, there is a lack of theoretical frameworks to explain individuals’ corporate entrepreneurial behaviors. While corporate entrepreneurship has been regarded as individuals’ entrepreneurship within individuals (Burgelman, 1983a; Morris et al., 1994, Pinchot, 1985), few empirical studies have examined this phenomenon from the lens of individuals’ behaviors (e.g., Holt, Rutherford, & Clohessy, 2007; Rutherford & Holt, 2007). Most studies have focused on corporate entrepreneurship as organization-level behavior. Rutherford and Holt (2007) argued that an organization cannot engage in any entrepreneurial behavior by itself; it is individuals who initiate and implement corporate entrepreneurship. Therefore, to understand corporate entrepreneurship, we must analyze this phenomenon at the individual level. This study is a step in this direction.

The second gap is that little attention has been paid to the process of identity construction of corporate entrepreneurs. Despite the vicarious streams of research on entrepreneurs’ identity, further studies are needed on the process of the identity construction of corporate entrepreneurs, both conceptually and empirically (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). Corporate entrepreneurs have distinct characteristics from other types of entrepreneurs in terms of their motivation, learning process, personal backgrounds, and affiliations (e.g., Hisrich, 1990; Honig, 1990; Smith et al., 2016); therefore, corporate entrepreneurship and its identity construction should be studied differently and independently from the category of general entrepreneurship. Furthermore, since an identity explains individuals’ self-referential meaning of “Who am I?” and “What should I do?” (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008), an investigation of entrepreneurs’ identity
construction can provide insights into how individuals are motivated and developed to be corporate entrepreneurs.

Another gap is the inconsistencies in the literature on middle managers’ roles, so discussion of middle managers’ roles is not conclusive (Harding et al., 2014). Especially in relation to this study, middle managers’ corporate entrepreneurial role can be perceived differently by individuals and organizations. Furthermore, for middle managers, who are key populations for corporate entrepreneurship, their entrepreneurial identity has never been explored (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). Therefore, a gap exists for both corporate entrepreneurship and identity development in theorizing about these individuals’ behaviors and development.

Finally, entrepreneurship researchers have pointed out that corporate entrepreneurship is a US-based concept, and more studies should be conducted in various contexts (Morris et al., 1994). In addition, the paucity of studies on middle managers’ corporate entrepreneurial behavior is often mentioned by researchers in Korea as well as other countries (Lee & Park, 2017; Hornsby, Kuratko, & Montagno, 1999). The limited knowledge about corporate entrepreneurship outside the US context has impeded our comprehensive understanding of corporate entrepreneurship.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

This study aims to uncover the process of identity work of corporate entrepreneurs in the context of South Korea. More specifically, this study investigates why and how middle managers engage in the identity work process of being corporate entrepreneurs. Hence, this study is guided by two overarching research questions: *Why do middle managers engage in corporate entrepreneurial activity, and How do they construct their corporate entrepreneurial identity in South Korea?*
Overview of Methodology and Methods

In this study, I adopted a grounded theory as the methodology. Given the topic of corporate entrepreneurial identity construction, which does not have any previous theories, the emerging design of grounded theory that aims to construct theories from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is particularly appropriate. Specifically, I utilized constructivist grounded theory presented by Charmaz (2014) because it is aligned with my paradigmatic positionality.

I used individual interviews as the main vehicle to generate data. Corporate entrepreneurs who are (1) full-time employees in large corporations in Korea, (2) hold a middle manager position, and (3) currently engage in corporate entrepreneurial activities such as corporate venturing, strategic renewal, and/or innovative activities (i.e., new product or service development) were invited as potential participants. Recruitment started with my personal and professional networks using criterion-based sampling. I then employed theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to collect the most appropriate data for the theory building. Interviews were conducted using conference call software such as FaceTalk or FaceTime. Next, I analyzed the data using constant comparison analysis techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and continued with interviews until the categories and subcategories derived from the data reach saturation (i.e., no additional codes or categories emerge). I also collected supplementary documents such as internal corporate reports or web documents (Birks & Mills, 2015). To establish the credibility of the study, I employed member checking and peer debriefing techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Significance of the Study

The significance of my study can be found in its contributions to four bodies of knowledge: (1) corporate entrepreneurship development, (2) middle management development, (3) entrepreneurial identity, and (4) human resource development (HRD). First, this study...
explores corporate entrepreneurship at the individual level; therefore, it contributes to corporate entrepreneurship development theories. As stated, theories and models for corporate entrepreneurship development have mainly focused on organization-level entrepreneurship (Covin & Slevin, 1991; Hayton, 2005). Furthermore, very few studies explore corporate entrepreneurship at the individual level (Hornsby et al., 2002; Kuratko et al., 2005; Sambrook & Roberts, 2005). My study fills this void by providing a building block for theorizing individual-level corporate entrepreneurship development based on empirical evidence.

This study also sheds light on corporate entrepreneurship outside of the North American context. Researchers in entrepreneurship have continuously called for studies outside Western contexts (Bruton, Zahra, & Cai, 2018; Peredo, Anderson, Galbraith, Honig, & Dana, 2004). An alternative to the dominant the US-based model of entrepreneurship provides more culturally diverse and contextually distinct perspectives to better reflect the various aspects of entrepreneurship around the world (Bruton et al., 2018). In particular, corporate entrepreneurship has been described as being strongly grounded in the US context (Hornsby et al., 1999; Morris et al., 1994). Thus, exploring corporate entrepreneurship in Korea can add insights to the corporate entrepreneurship in different contexts and cultures, and extends our understanding of the corporate entrepreneurial behavior.

This study also has methodological implications for corporate entrepreneurship research. The existing research on corporate entrepreneurship has heavily relied on quantitative, correlational approaches which may not capture the dynamic process of corporate entrepreneurship (Haase, Franco, & Félix, 2015; Russell, 1999). The skewed methodological approaches in the literature limits our understanding of the corporate entrepreneurial process. By using a qualitative grounded theory methodology, I can expand our understanding of the
corporate entrepreneurial processes and provide new interpretations of the phenomena, and ultimately enrich the human discourse on entrepreneurship (Leitch & Harrison, 2016).

The second contribution of this study is that it contributes to theorizing on middle management development. By uncovering the process of corporate entrepreneurial identity construction of middle managers, this study suggests ways middle managers can develop as corporate entrepreneurs, and how they can manage their roles and role identities, both of which are still vague ideas (Harding et al., 2014). The findings of this study can expand our knowledge of middle managers’ identity development, role management, and entrepreneurial behaviors.

Entrepreneurial identity literature can also benefit from this study. This study adds insights on corporate entrepreneurs’ identity construction, which has not been conceptually discussed and empirically investigated (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). Findings from this study can fill the gap identified in entrepreneurial identity literature with the inquiry of corporate entrepreneurs’ identity construction. In particular, the phenomenon is distinct from other types of entrepreneurs in terms of motivational and contextual aspects (e.g., Hisrich, 1990; Smith et al., 2016).

Finally, the findings from this study contribute to the field of HRD by providing insights on how to develop corporate entrepreneurs and middle managers in organizations. Literature on corporate entrepreneurship development has called for further studies at the individual level (Boon, Van der Klink, & Janssen, 2013; Gawke, Gorgievski, & Bakker, 2017). Although human resources are essential elements for fostering corporate entrepreneurship within an organization (e.g., Gawke et al., 2017; Monsen, Patzelt, & Saxton, 2010; Pinchot, 1985), efforts to develop corporate entrepreneurs have mainly relied on the business school curricula. (Byrne, Delmar, Fayolle, & Lamine, 2016). In terms of management development, organizations are concerned
about how to prepare new managers for the upcoming hypercompetitive world where more agile, 
innovative, and adaptive managerial behaviors are required (Hill, 2004). As Hill (2004) argued, 
becoming a manager in this new era means “evolving a new professional identity” (p. 121); 
therefore, this study contributes to HRD by providing insights on the process of how middle 
managers construct their corporate entrepreneurial identity as a new professional identity.

**Boundaries of the Study**

This study is situated within the following boundaries:

- I focus only on corporate entrepreneurs who are working for large companies, not other 
types of entrepreneurs such as social entrepreneurs or self-employers.
- I target Korean corporate entrepreneurs, not corporate entrepreneurs from other countries. 
Because corporate entrepreneurship has recently gained intense attention from both 
academia and industry in Korea, exploring corporate entrepreneurship in current Korea 
may capture the unique aspect of the phenomenon.
- I specifically focus on middle managers in organizations due to their significance as 
corporate entrepreneurs reported in the literature; any other ranks (e.g., top executives, 
line managers, or new employees) are excluded.
- The research question focuses only on identity construction of corporate entrepreneurs, so 
middle managers who are not currently holding the position or have aspirations to 
become corporate entrepreneurs are excluded.

Considering these boundaries, any applications to other contexts or interpretations of the 
study results in different conditions should be done with caution. Nevertheless, professionals 
from different countries with similar cultural, economic, and institutional contexts can benefit 
from the findings of the study vis-à-vis corporate entrepreneurs’ identity construction.
Definition of Terms

In this section, I provide definitions of key terms used in the study:

Entrepreneurship: all the functions, activities, and actions associated with the perceiving of opportunities and the creation of organizations to pursue them (Bygrave & Hofer, 1992).

Corporate entrepreneurship: an individual or group of individuals’ entrepreneurship within an established organization (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001), which is the process of creating a new venture or business, or provoking strategic renewal or innovation in a product, service or systems of the organization (e.g., Guth & Ginsberg, 1990; Sharma & Chrisman, 1999).

Middle manager: “Organization members who link the activities of vertically related groups and who are responsible for at least sub-functional work flow, but not the work flow of the organization as a whole” (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, p. 157).

Identity: “A self-referential description that provides contextually appropriate answers to the question ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Who are we?’” (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 327).


Summary

This dissertation project focuses on a group of Korean middle managers and their process of identity construction as corporate entrepreneurs. By employing a constructivist grounded theory approach, I will explore the experiences of Korean middle managers in relation to their corporate entrepreneurial behaviors. This study contributes to the field of corporate entrepreneurship, middle management development, entrepreneurial identity, and HRD. The chapter concludes with the significance of the study, boundary of the study, and definitions of the key terms.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews three bodies of literature: corporate entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial identity, and the research context. Specifically, I begin this chapter with an overview of the conceptual exploration of corporate entrepreneurship including definitions, characteristics, models, and attributes. Then, the roles of middle managers vis-à-vis corporate entrepreneurship and their role identity are discussed. In addition, I synthesize the findings and arguments from entrepreneurial identity studies, particularly focusing on the types of entrepreneurs and the identities, and the triggers of entrepreneurs’ identity work. Next, this section highlights both of the links and voids between the current literature on corporate entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial identity. Finally, I provide an introduction of the Korean economy and business context.

The Concept of Corporate Entrepreneurship

Corporate entrepreneurship has been considered a means to revitalize an existing organization by creating a new business, launching a new service or product, leveraging a strategic change, fostering an innovative mindset within the organization, and/or engaging in corporate venturing (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003; Burgelman 1983b; Morris et al., 2010; Pinchot, 1985; Zahara, 1993). The term corporate entrepreneurship might sound like an oxymoron in that entrepreneurship is generally seen as starting a new business or creating a firm, which looks impossible for established organizations. However, it has been considered a strong antidote to inertia, bureaucracy, and lack of innovation (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001, 2003; Thornberry, 2003; Zahra, 1993), which can also apply to a corporate setting. Indeed, corporate entrepreneurship is
essential for organizations pursuing “frame-breaking changes” (Stopford & Baden-Fuller, 1994) and a catalyst for organizational growth. In the following sections, the definitions, characteristics, dimensions, models, and attributes of corporate entrepreneurship are examined in detail.

**Definitions of Corporate Entrepreneurship**

The concept of *corporate entrepreneurship* has evolved over the last four decades as one of the alternative concepts of entrepreneurship (Hornsby et al., 2002; Stopford & Baden-Fuller, 1994). Similar to many concepts in social and behavioral sciences, the varying definitions of *corporate entrepreneur* reflect its elusive nature. For example, Burgelman (1983b) suggested that corporate entrepreneurship is the process of diversification facilitated through internal development. Guth and Ginsberg (1990) encompassed the conceptual boundary of corporate entrepreneurship as the two types of phenomena and processes: internal innovation or venturing, and organizational transformation through strategic renewal. Similarly, Zahra (1993) also defined corporate entrepreneurship as “a process of organizational renewal that has two distinct but related dimensions: innovation and venturing, and strategic renewal” (p. 321). These perspectives mainly consider corporate entrepreneurship as a firm-level behavior (Covin & Slevin, 1991). Other researchers claimed that corporate entrepreneurship is about employees’ bottom-up initiatives in the organization to create innovation without being asked or getting permission from top management (Pinchot, 1985; Vesper, 1984).

Definitions of corporate entrepreneurship also vary according to the scope. Some researchers limit the scope of corporate entrepreneurship by excluding small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and focusing only on corporations as the context (e.g., Burgelman 1983a; Kuratko, Hornsby, Naffziger, & Montagno, 1993; Zahra, 1993). Conversely, others show a
narrower perspective by only regarding new venture creations within organizations as corporate
trepreneurship (e.g., Kanter & Richardson 1991).

Despite these variations, corporate entrepreneurship broadly refers to a process of
embracing entrepreneurial efforts by the development and implementation of new ideas into the
organization to achieve profitable growth, strategic renewal, innovation and change in services,
products, and internal systems (Burgelman 1983b; Covin & Slevin, 1991; Guth & Ginsberg
1990; Hornsby, Naifeziger, Kuratko, & Montagno, 1993; Hornsby et al., 2002; Stopford &

In addition to variations in the definitions, several synonyms of corporate
entrepreneurship (intrapreneurship and corporate venturing) have been presented, which
aggravate the definitional confusion. These terms have been frequently and interchangeably used
in corporate entrepreneurship literature. The mixed uses of these terms make this concept
confusing within the field.

**Intrapreneurship.** The first and most frequently used synonym of corporate
entrepreneurship is intrapreneurship (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001; Carrier, 1996; Pinchot 1985)
which refers to entrepreneurship within a firm or organization. After Pinchot (1985) coined the
term *intrapreneuring*, the concept of intrapreneurship has been used as an equivalent term to
corporate entrepreneurship. Among the other definitions of intrapreneurship, perhaps the most
widely accepted definition is the one proposed by Antoncic and Hisrich (2001):

Intrapreneurship is defined as entrepreneurship within an existing organization. It refers
to a process that goes on inside an existing firm, regardless of its size, and leads not only
to new business ventures but also to other innovative activities and orientations such as
development of new products, services, technologies, administrative techniques, strategies, and competitive postures. (p. 498)

While both corporate entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship have often been used indistinctly in many studies, there have also been attempts to decouple the concept of intrapreneurship from corporate entrepreneurship (Antonicc & Hisrich, 2003). Intrapreneurship often refers to a broader sense of entrepreneurship within existing firms including small- and medium-sized firms (SME) and ventures, and even public institutions (Nielsen, Peters, & Hisrich, 1985) or universities (Hornsby & Johnson, 1991; Perlman, Gueths, & Weber, 1988) whereas corporate entrepreneurship tends to imply entrepreneurship within large firms (Antonicc & Hisrich, 2001, 2003; Thornberry, 2003). In addition, while many corporate entrepreneurship studies focus on firm-level entrepreneurial behaviors (e.g., Covin & Slevin, 1991; Zarah, 1993; Zahra, Jennings, & Kuratko, 1999), intrapreneurship is more often used to describe individual-level entrepreneurial behaviors within established firms (e.g., Holt et al., 2007; Molina & Callahan, 2009; Rutherford & Holt, 2007).

**Corporate venturing.** Corporate venturing is sometimes used as equivalent to corporate entrepreneurship, unlike intrapreneurship that has mostly been equated with corporate entrepreneurship, (Burgelman, 1983b; Garud & Van De Ven, 1992; Kanter & Richardson 1991; MacMillan, Block, & Narasimha, 1986). However, corporate venturing has mostly been used in recent studies as a hyponym, or a vehicle for the manifestation of corporate entrepreneurship (e.g., Kuratko & Morris, 2018; Shankar & Shepherd, 2018). Corporate venturing refers to a firm’s entrepreneurial endeavors to enter a new business or market by internally grouping individuals or small teams in the organization (Hornsby et al., 1993; Stopford & Braden-Fuller, 1994; Zahara, 1996). The outcome of corporate venturing is usually a new business unit or an
organization within the corporate organization (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999), which ultimately becomes a subsidiary. Thus, in general, corporate venturing is considered a dimension of corporate entrepreneurship rather than a parallel concept.

**Typology and Dimensions of Corporate Entrepreneurship**

As an attempt to reconcile variations in definitions and types of corporate entrepreneurship, Sharma and Chrisman (1999) provided a hierarchy of the terminology in corporate entrepreneurship. Under the umbrella term, entrepreneurship, two branches emerge: independent entrepreneurship and corporate entrepreneurship. *Independent entrepreneurship* refers to the “process whereby an individual or group of individuals, acting independently of any association with an existing organization, create a new organization” (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999, p. 18). Whereas independent entrepreneurship is mainly about creating a new organization, corporate entrepreneurship is always associated with the changes within existing organizations.

Corporate entrepreneurship is generally divided into three sub-concepts: strategic renewal, innovation, and corporate venturing. Strategic renewal pertains to “the corporate entrepreneurial efforts that result in significant changes to an organization's business or corporate level strategy or structure” (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999, p. 19). It consists of three subprocesses: competence deployment, competence modification, and competence definition (Floyd & Lane, 2000). First, *competence deployment* is the process of allocating resources to a business to enter new market arenas or reinforce the firm’s position in an existing market. *Competence modification* is the process of recognizing the need for change, questioning the status quo of an organization's current strategy and/or competencies, and encouraging emergent, adaptive behavior. Finally, *competence definition* is the process of experimenting with new skills and exploration of new market opportunities. The degree of change required for each subprocess
increases from deployment (utilization of current resources) and modification (revision of the current strategy) to definition (exploration of new strategy) (Floyd & Lane, 2000).

Innovation can be found in the forms of new products and services, and changes in internal systems such as a policy, structure, process, and/or business model (Kuratko & Audretsch, 2013). These innovations differentiate an organization to make it more competitive than its competitors. Innovation can be executed in two different ways: (1) corporate entrepreneurs transform an organization itself and (2) they enhance the products or internal processes of the organization.

Strategic renewal usually accompanies a certain degree of innovation in that it requires changes within the organization or the relationship between organizations and external environments (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999). In accordance with this relationship, strategic renewal and innovation are often bound together and labelled strategic entrepreneurship (Kuratko & Audretsch, 2013).

As previously stated, corporate venturing refers to a company’s entrepreneurial efforts by organizing an independent business unit that may create new business organizations within or outside of the parent organization (Kuratko & Audretsch, 2013; Sharma & Chrisman, 1999). Corporate venturing is then partitioned into the following two types: external and internal corporate venturing (Kuratko & Morris, 2018). External corporate venturing results in the creation of organizational entities outside of the parent organization such as joint ventures or spin-offs. In contrast, internal corporate venturing pertains to the activities establishing organizational entities within the parent company such as skunkworks (i.e., an independent, small, hand-picked entrepreneurial team that is removed from their original work routines to pursue a specific new task) (Bommer, DeLaPorte, & Higgins, 2002).
Although the concept of corporate entrepreneurship has been described by numerous researchers over the past four decades, and researchers have attempted to delineate the conceptual boundaries, the definitional and terminological consensus of corporate entrepreneurship and similar concepts have not been clearly established yet. Furthermore, despite the explicit endeavors to differentiate corporate entrepreneurship from other notions (i.e., intrapreneurship or corporate venturing) (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003; Burgelman, 1983), those terms are used interchangeably without clear distinctions (e.g., Kuratko, Montagno, & Hornsby, 1990; Nielsen et al., 1985; Rule & Irwin, 1988). Thus, corporate entrepreneurship remains a contested concept (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999).

The definitional variations are not surprising given that even entrepreneurship, the parent concept of corporate entrepreneurship, has had different meanings depending on the researchers’ perspectives (Gartner, 1988). However, a clearly stated definition instigates scientific understanding and explanation of a phenomenon (McKelvey, 1982). In addition, a clear and concrete definition helps researchers build on each other’s work, and guides practitioners to apply the knowledge and principles to specific circumstances (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999).

Therefore, in reference to the broadest definition of Antoncic and Hisrich (2001, 2003) and other researchers’ classification of the dimensions of corporate entrepreneurship (e.g., Guth & Ginsberg, 1990; Sharma & Chrisman, 1999; Zahra, 1995, 1996), corporate entrepreneurship in the present study is defined as follows:

Corporate entrepreneurship refers to an individual or a group of individuals’ entrepreneurship within an established organization. It is the process of creating a new venture or business, or provoking strategic renewal or innovation in a product, service or system of the organization.
Differences between Entrepreneurs and Corporate Entrepreneurs

Delineating the concept of corporate entrepreneurship from its parent concept—entrepreneurship—provides a clearer understanding of the concept of corporate entrepreneurship. While there are similarities in common between entrepreneurs and corporate entrepreneurs, the two types of entrepreneurs are different in terms of context, motivation, and learning strategies (Hisrich, 1990; Honig, 1990; Luchsinger & Bagby, 1987; Smith, Rees, & Murray, 2016). In addition, corporate entrepreneurship has three sub-dimensions (i.e., corporate venturing, strategic renewal, and innovation) as its manifestation (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999).

While both entrepreneurs and corporate entrepreneurs bring new ideas into the market and pursue sustainable and profitable businesses (Hisrich, 1990), significant contextual differences have been identified by previous researchers (e.g., Hisrich, 1990; Luchsinger & Bagby, 1987). Entrepreneurs are usually considered self-employed individuals or independent innovators, and have their own organizations and are usually top executives of those organizations. Hence, entrepreneurs are more likely to be exposed to riskier situations but have greater control over their environment than corporate entrepreneurs (Hisrich, 1990). In contrast, corporate entrepreneurs are employed in existing organizations that have more structural and procedural constraints. However, corporate entrepreneurs usually face less financial risk than entrepreneurs (Smith et al., 2014). With support from the organization, they easily have access to the required labor and material resources. Furthermore, it is not difficult to accept that the consequences of business failure generally fall solely on the shoulders of entrepreneurs, but corporate entrepreneurs also face risk. For example, they may be laid off if the parent company does not tolerate business failure.
Another interesting finding is that entrepreneurs tend to have a family background of entrepreneurship from childhood (Hisrich, 1990). For example, the firstborn in a family that runs a family business tends to be an entrepreneur (Schenkel, Yoo, & Kim, 2016). Although corporate entrepreneurs may not have been raised in this type of environment, they are also affected by a supportive entrepreneurial climate representing strong networking, teamwork, sponsorship, and numerous mentors (Hisrich, 1990; Turró, Urbano, & Peris-Ortiz, 2014).

Honig’s (2001) longitudinal study discovered the differences in learning strategies adopted by entrepreneurs and corporate entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs typically employed random strategies to seek business opportunities, whereas corporate entrepreneurs tended to exploit research and development (R&D) strategies. Furthermore, entrepreneurs actively make use of external networking in their learning process, but corporate entrepreneurs focus on the utilization of internal networking. Honig (2001) also concluded that entrepreneurs utilize more flexible and adaptive learning strategies that are more fitting to dynamic business environments. However, corporate entrepreneurs’ learning strategies intend to stimulate organizational consensus.

In sum, previous studies have demonstrated that entrepreneurs and corporate entrepreneurs are distinct populations, despite some commonalities (e.g., introducing new ideas to change the status quo and evoking a competitive advantage by exploiting and exploring resources). In particular, they have different motivations, contexts, and learning orientation. Hence, corporate entrepreneurs are not merely a sub-concept of entrepreneurship but are an alternative form of entrepreneurship (Thornberry, 2003). This conclusion leads to the belief that developing corporate entrepreneurs requires different approaches from entrepreneurship.
Corporate Entrepreneurship Development

To cultivate corporate entrepreneurship or entrepreneurs, researchers have explored the attributes affecting the emergence and development of corporate entrepreneurs. Corporate entrepreneurship is fostered by multiple factors. In this section, the antecedents of corporate entrepreneurship and the models explaining its emergence and development are discussed. This section ends with a description of the recent shift in the perspectives on corporate entrepreneurship development.

Antecedents of Corporate Entrepreneurship

Studies on corporate entrepreneurship have evolved into three streams: individual, organizational, and cultural factors (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003; de Villiers-Scheepers 2012; Rutherford & Holt, 2007; Hornsby et al., 2002; Zahra, 1993; Zahara & Covin, 1995). Specifically, the initial focus of research was placed on entrepreneurial individuals’ characteristics and identification of such individuals in organizations (Holt, et al., 2007; Rutherford & Holt, 2007). The next streams involved studies emphasizing organizations’ characteristics such as internal culture, sponsorship, or process (e.g., Hornsby et al. 2002). More recently, with the growing interest in the relationship between socio-cultural factors and entrepreneurial activity (Thornton, Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2011), the contextual and institutional attributes were investigated.

Individual factors. Individual characteristics such as a positive affect and efficacy have been found to be positively associated with the corporate entrepreneurial behaviors of individuals (Rutherford et al., 2007). However, the Big Five Personality traits do not show any significant relationship with corporate entrepreneurship, as revealed by Holt et al.’s (2007) study. Motivation can also foster corporate entrepreneurship by positively affecting knowledge sharing
and organizational learning, which eventually become the driving forces of innovation (Turner & Pennington, 2015).

Individuals’ competency and resources are additional factors facilitating corporate entrepreneurship. Individuals’ knowledge, specific technical expertise, and personal networks have positive relationships with corporate entrepreneurship (Urbano, Alvarez, & Turró, 2013; Urbano, D & Turró, 2013). Whereas Honig (2001) identified a negative correlation between prior venture engagement and becoming a corporate entrepreneur, a positive effect of the entrepreneurial experiences on corporate entrepreneurship was found in Urbano et al.’s (2013) study. Contrary to the theoretical assumption that employees’ dissatisfaction with organizational systems evokes corporate entrepreneurial behavior, Antoncic and Antoncic (2011) found that the general satisfaction level of employees (i.e., job satisfaction, relationship with colleagues and organizational culture) positively affects corporate entrepreneurship.

A reciprocal relationship between work engagement and corporate entrepreneurship was found in Gawke et al.’s (2017) study. Their study showed that corporate entrepreneurship strengthens individuals’ work-related personal resources (i.e., optimism, ego-resilience, and self-efficacy). Personal resources were then positively associated with work engagement in by many studies, and then work engagement strengthened corporate entrepreneurship.

**Organizational factors.** Organization-level factors are the most frequently examined in the corporate entrepreneurship literature. Hornsby et al.’s (2002) five constructs are the most frequently mentioned: management support, rewards and reinforcement, work discretion, time availability, and organizational boundaries. Top management support and rewards, and reinforcement are the salient organizational factors encouraging individuals’ corporate entrepreneurial intentions (de Villiers-Scheepers, 2012). In particular, having a supportive senior
sponsor or encouragement from top management in the organization is a critical prerequisite to success for corporate entrepreneurs (Smith et al., 2014).

In addition to Hornsby et al.’s study, Holt et al. (2007) called the five constructs process factors, and then added context factors as another dimension of organizational factors. At the context level, members’ perceptions of the organization’s learning orientation and memory orientation lead to corporate entrepreneurial behaviors because they can disseminate and translate their ideas more actively in that climate (Holt et al., 2007). Similarly, Rutherford and Holt (2007) explored other contextual factors such as the communication climate, perceived organizational support, and perceptions of co-workers. These factors reflect cultural aspects of the organization. With a corporate entrepreneurship culture that is encouraging, adaptive, and learning-oriented, the increased autonomy and empowerment can give individuals a sense of belonging with the freedom to be corporate entrepreneurs (e.g., García-Morales et al., 2014; Haase et al., 2015). In addition, Burström and Wilson (2015) coined the term, *intrapreneurial ambidexterity* which comprehensively explains a firm’s organizational efforts to build corporate entrepreneurship. Intrapreneurial ambidexterity is defined as “the organizations capability to infuse and support corporate entrepreneurial processes, and the capabilities of individuals to perform team-based development processes” (p. 1173). With this concept, they argued that organizational renewal should be understood as the negotiation between the individuals and the organization.

Internal marketing is also a positive factor for fostering corporate entrepreneurship (Zampetakis & Moustakis, 2007). Internal marketing refers to the firm’s organizational efforts in terms of human resource interventions. From this perspective, Zampetakis and Moustakis (2007)
revealed that job rotation, training factors, and job security have a positive impact on corporate entrepreneurship.

**Cultural factors.** Recent studies on antecedents of intrapreneurship revealed that contextual and cultural factors should be also be considered for the development of corporate entrepreneurship (Holt et al., 2007). At the contextual level, individuals’ perceptions of the organization’s learning-oriented culture lead to corporate entrepreneurial behaviors because they can disseminate and translate their ideas more actively in that climate (Holt et al., 2007). Furthermore, factors such as the communication climate, perceived organizational support, and perceptions of co-workers reflect the organization’s cultural aspects that facilitate intrapreneurial behaviors (Rutherford & Holt, 2007).

de Villiers-Scheepers (2012) investigated the effects of different institutional factors. The increased dynamism, technological opportunity, and demand for a new product can act as facilitators for entrepreneurial behaviors. In contrast, unfavorable changes and competitive rivalry work as hostile factors on the corporate entrepreneurship behaviors of individuals. Turró et al. (2014) also explored the impact of informal factors (entrepreneurial culture and media exposure) and formal factors (venture creation procedures and credit) on corporate entrepreneurial behaviors.

**Models of Corporate Entrepreneurship**

Hornsby et al. (1993) suggested an interactive model of the corporate entrepreneurship process. Through their comprehensive review of the extant literature of corporate entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship, they formed the first model of the corporate entrepreneurial process. Their model focuses on the role of internal factors of an organization in corporate entrepreneurship development. Specifically, their model explains that corporate
entrepreneurship can be facilitated by interactions between individual and organizational factors. The organizational level constructs affecting the corporate entrepreneurial process include management support, work discretion, appropriate rewards and reinforcement, time availability, and organizational boundaries. First, management support refers to expectations and encouragement from the senior management in terms of accepting innovative ideas, supporting experimental projects, and/or providing resources for those activities (Hornsby et al., 1993). Second, autonomy and work discretion are the extent to which employees are empowered, which gives rights to individuals to make decisions and proceed in autonomous ways. By making their own decisions and reducing the fear of being criticized, employees are motivated to commit to innovative experimentation. Following this, appropriate rewards and reinforcement motivate individuals to engage in corporate entrepreneurial behaviors. Another necessary factor is time availability, (i.e., the time to incubate innovative ideas). By removing time constraints, organizations allow employees to work on long-term problem solving. Lastly, organizational boundaries are perceived as either real or imagined. These perceptions on their work, jobs, and organizational boundaries prevent employees from having a broad perspective. Thus, organizations should relax these boundaries and make them more flexible.

Hornsby et al. (1993) also claimed that organizational factors meet individual factors such as risk-taking propensity, the desire for autonomy, need for achievement, goal orientation, and internal locus of control. These individual traits and characteristics are based on the existing literature on traditional entrepreneurship, and are most commonly mentioned as characteristics of entrepreneurs.

When the individual and organizational characteristics interact with, and meet the “precipitating events,” corporate entrepreneurial behaviors are evident. The precipitating events
refer to some types of organizational or environmental changes such as market share instability, mergers and acquisitions, or increasing demand for new businesses. Researchers have provided several propositions derived from these relationships. For example, if an organization needs to develop a new technology (precipitating event), if there is a high degree of managerial support for innovation (organizational characteristic), and if individuals with a high level of risk-taking propensity are participating in those processes, then the individuals are likely to engage in corporate entrepreneurial activities. After making decisions to act as corporate entrepreneurs, the individuals develop business plans for the next move.

Adopting Hornsby et al.’s (1993) interactive model, Kuratko et al. (2005) built a different version of a corporate entrepreneurship model specifically targeting middle managers. With their desire to climb their organizations’ hierarchical ladder, middle managers focus on effective translations of the strategies developed by senior managers into operational plans. Hence, middle managers’ role as corporate entrepreneurs is especially crucial for organizational innovation.

Kuratko et al. (2005) explained the relationship between organizational antecedents and middle managers’ corporate entrepreneurial behaviors. With the five major organizational antecedents, middle managers “endorse, refine, and shepherd entrepreneurial opportunities and identify, acquire, and deploy resources needed to pursue those opportunities” (p. 706), all of which are considered entrepreneurial behaviors. In other words, middle managers seek innovative, new and feasible opportunities with organizational support, and realize the innovations allocating and utilizing the resources. This model has a similar assumption to Hornsby et al.’s (1993) model, but it is significant since it specifically focuses on middle managers as change agents.
Russell (1999) contended that corporate entrepreneurship is a dynamic social process. He criticized previous studies’ heavy reliance on correlational and cross-sectional studies because they cannot fully capture the dynamic process of corporate entrepreneurship. Thus, it limits our understanding of the corporate entrepreneurial process. Using a cognitive mapping approach, he combined the strategic, environmental, and organizational cultural variables into a model of the corporate entrepreneurial process. His model emphasizes the function of an entrepreneurial strategy (i.e., the extent to which an individual takes risks, resource allocation method, and propensity to compete with rivals), organizational norms (e.g., the degree of valuing creativity, encouraging climate for innovation, or tolerance to failure), and the central/decentral and formal/informal organizational structure. In addition, the model suggests that corporate entrepreneurship can be fostered by the dynamic and interactive process of organizational and environmental variables.

Despite the increasing attention given to corporate entrepreneurship and its development, there is still no universal, grand theory or solid theoretical basis for corporate entrepreneurship development. Furthermore, the lack of empirical examination of the models and theories of corporate entrepreneurship development needs further attention. For instance, as Hornsby et al. (1993) acknowledged, the causality among the individual, organizational characteristics and precipitating events has not been examined. Sambrook and Roberts (2005) also pointed out that none of the existing models of corporate entrepreneurship development has been empirically tested.

**Shifting Perspectives on Corporate Entrepreneurship Development**

Two contradictory perspectives of corporate entrepreneurship have led to two streams of research and practice. The perspectives are a) corporate entrepreneurship as a firm-level behavior
with top-down initiatives (e.g., Burgelman, 1983a; Covin & Slevin, 1991; Zahara, 1993; Hayton, 2005) and b) individual-level behavior with bottom-up and autonomous behaviors (e.g., Kuratko et al., 2005; Pinchot, 1983; Rutherford & Holt, 2007; Stopford & Baden-Fuller, 1994; Vesper, 1984).

First, the firm-level, top-down perspective posits that corporate entrepreneurship is initiated and driven by top management, and organizational-level processes such as diversification or creating ventures are considered the vehicles (Russell, 1999; Zahra, 1995, 1996). From this perspective, after corporate entrepreneurship is developed based on the strategic plan of top management, it is translated by middle managers and then confirmed by operating, front-line managers (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Radaelli & Sitton-Kent, 2016; Schmitt, Raisch, & Volberda, 2018). The top-down approach has a somewhat macro-level perspective and considers the CEO to be the agent of corporate entrepreneurship. Hence, researchers’ major interests are related to executives’ strategic interactions between the firm and the external environment. For example, Antoncic and Hisrich (2001) revealed how CEOs in the US and Slovenia react to increased dynamism, industrial growth, demands for new products in the market, and favorability to entrepreneurial activities.

Other researchers have provided evidence showing that members in the lower-level hierarchy of organizations—particularly middle managers—are the key players in corporate entrepreneurship development (e.g., Holt et al., 2007; Kuratko et al., 2005; Rutherford & Holt, 2007). Burström and Wilson (2015) also emphasized individuals’ collective behaviors in that organizational transformation or strategic-renewal can be achieved by collective activities of highly motivated individuals, not by specific individuals or groups of people who champion innovative ideas. These researchers argued that corporate entrepreneurship, regardless of its form
(i.e., innovation, strategic renewal, or corporate venturing), is initiated, driven, and achieved through the autonomous process from the bottom (Burgelman, 1983b; Morris et al., 1994; Rutherford & Holt, 2007).

Traditionally, the top-down, firm-level approach was relatively dominant in the field. However, more recently, researchers have been more inclined to focus on individuals’ collective, autonomous behaviors from the bottom of the organizational hierarchy. According to Rutherford and Holt (2007), focusing on the individual level is especially meaningful for two reasons. First, any entrepreneurial activities within an organization are carried out by individuals, not by the organization itself. Furthermore, even though organizational-level or company-wide analyses can give significant insights, the fundamental unit of analysis starts at the individual level.

In sum, the key population and perspectives of corporate entrepreneurship has shifted from the top-down and organizational approach initiated by the CEO or senior executives to middle- or lower-level employees’ autonomous and collective behavior. Among the newly highlighted entrepreneurial population within organizations, middle managers have particularly stood out as the central axis of corporate entrepreneurs in conjunction with the advent of an uncertain and dynamic business environment (Fulop, 1991; Geisler, 1993; Hornsby et al., 2002; Kuratko et al., 2005; Radaelli & Sitton-Kent, 2016; Ren & Guo, 2011).

**Middle Managers as Corporate Entrepreneurs**

Middle managers are highlighted as the key agents in corporate entrepreneurship literature (e.g., Burström & Wilson, 2015; Fulop, 1991; Geisler, 1993; Hornsby et al., 2002; Morris et al., 1994). Due to their ambiguous position in the organizational hierarchy, middle managers are often considered mediators between the top managers and the execution of strategic decision-making (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Radaelli & Sitton-Kent, 2016). Thus, middle
managers facilitate corporate entrepreneurial activities by gaining top management sponsorship and then actively participating in corporate entrepreneurial activities.

**Middle Managers’ Role Conflict in Organizations**

Many studies have revealed the process of corporate entrepreneurship development. These attempts, however, have been criticized because the models have not been empirically examined (Hornsby et al., 1993; Kutratko et al., 2005), or they have ignored the impact of organizational culture on corporate entrepreneurship (Sambrook & Roberts, 2005). For instance, Urbano and Turró (2013) contended that if individuals have knowledge and experiences as entrepreneurial resources, they are likely to become corporate entrepreneurs in their organizations. This traditional resource-based view (RBV) on entrepreneurship research presumes that individuals are likely to engage in innovative activities when there are ample resources and time available. More importantly, for middle managers, playing the role of corporate entrepreneurs is somewhat taken for granted in the literature.

These perspectives of corporate entrepreneurialism, however, are in stark contrast to the studies on middle managers’ roles and role identity. Middle managers have multiple roles according to the circumstances, so findings on what they *should* do, *can* do, and *actually* do are still inconclusive (Harding et al., 2014). Due to these inconsistencies in literature, the perceptions of middle managers’ roles are not as clear as expected. Middle managers can be seen either as “vital and loyal lynch-pins between senior management and junior staff or they obstruct the implementation of change and are a problem to be addressed” (Harding et al., 2014, p. 1216).

Differences between managers and corporate entrepreneurs make researchers and practitioners skeptical about the traditional approach for developing corporate entrepreneurs that focuses on management training and action-learning projects, because this approach might not
effectively help managers become corporate entrepreneurs (Thornberry, 2003). Pinchot’s (1985) summarized the differences between traditional managers and corporate entrepreneurs in terms of their attitudes toward organizations, primary motivation, the decision-making process, and problem-solving style. For example, whereas managers have a tendency to adhere to organizational systems and regulations, corporate entrepreneurs try to break the status quo. Furthermore, managers typically solve problems using existing rules of the system whereas corporate entrepreneurs often bypass the systems. In addition, managers usually follow the organizational hierarchy when it comes to managerial decision-making but corporate entrepreneurs are good at negotiations and transactions. Thus, the roles of traditional managers are sometimes not preferred or perceived as desirable by corporate entrepreneurs, and vice versa.

These differences in the perceived roles can create role conflict for managers who are supposed to act as corporate entrepreneurs.

To reconcile this conflict, middle managers should clearly understand their role expectations as corporate entrepreneurs from the organization and behave in a way that fulfills these expectations. As Shepherd and Haynie (2009) suggested, resolving the role identity conflict of entrepreneurs can expedite the entrepreneurial process. Thus, if middle managers experience identity conflict between their perceived roles and expected roles by others, their corporate entrepreneurial behaviors may not be manifested, or even worse, they may leave the organization due to the stress that comes with role ambiguity and conflicts (Jackson & Schuler, 1985).

Answering the questions “Who am I?” and “What should I do?” is a critical prerequisite for middle managers to act as corporate entrepreneurs. In general, corporate entrepreneurs are not officially labelled, so it is difficult to identify who is a corporate entrepreneur (Geisler, 1993). Thus, if their corporate entrepreneurial identity is activated, they will likely act to fulfill
their own role expectations and those of others. Otherwise, they will stay in their current roles and positions. Therefore, it is worth exploring middle managers’ perceptions of their role, namely, their corporate entrepreneurial role identity and the process of its construction.

**Entrepreneurial Identity**

The recent influx of social psychological theories and perspectives in the field of entrepreneurship have called for a shift in the focus of entrepreneurship research from exploring the fixed traits or competencies of entrepreneurs to situated, interactive, and meaning-making experiences of entrepreneurs in a specific context (Gill & Larson, 2014; Hjorth, Jones & Gartner, 2008; Leitch & Harrison, 2016; Lewis, 2016; Thornton et al., 2011). This new stream of research also requires a change in the traditional and fundamental assumptions on entrepreneurship: it is not merely about economic growth, but is also about how it shapes and is shaped by society (Steyart & Katz, 2004). In accordance with these new perspectives, there has been growing interest in the process of construction, development, and change in entrepreneurs’ identities, namely identity work (Alvesso et al., 2008; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

**Identity and Identity Construction**

Identity is “a self-referential description that provides contextually appropriate answers to the question ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Who are we?’” (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 327). Especially the social constructionist approach disapproves of the essentialist view on identity (Cerulo, 1997) which means that an identity is a by-product of continuous negotiations through “linguistic exchange and social performance” (p. 387). Therefore, an individual’s identity is not a fixed, innate, unified concept. Rather, it is emergent, dynamic, fluid, developable and multifaceted (Cerulo, 1997; Hytti, 2005; Kreiner et al., 2006; Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Watson, 2008). These processes of individuals’ managing, negotiating, and reflexively defining self is called
identity work (Alvesson et al., 2008). According to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), identity work can be understood as the following:

Identity work refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness. Identity work may either, in complex and fragmented contexts, be more or less continuously on-going or, in contexts high on stability, be a theme of engagement during crises or transitions. More generally, specific events, encounters, transitions and surprises, as well as more constant strains, serve to heighten awareness of the constructed quality of self-identity and compel more concentrated identity work. (p. 1165)

Thus, identity work is “the ongoing mental activity that an individual undertakes in constructing and understanding of self” (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 15). Studies on identity work have focused on agents’ behavior to create a coherent sense of self corresponding to their multiple roles, positions, and other structural encounters in and out of work. (Kuhn, 2006).

Although entrepreneurs have received intense scholarly attention as key players in economic growth, until recently, scant attention has been paid to entrepreneurs’ identity (Gill & Larson, 2014). However, the recent combination of social psychological theories and entrepreneurship research has shifted the focus of entrepreneurship research from exploring entrepreneurs’ traits or competencies to the situated, interactive, and meaning-making experiences of entrepreneurs in a specific context (Gill & Larson, 2014; Hjorth, et al., 2008; Leitch & Harrison, 2016; Lewis, 2016; Thornton et al., 2011). In particular, there has been growing interest in the relationship between the construction and change of entrepreneurial identity.
Because an identity provides answers to the fundamental ontological questions of becoming oneself (i.e., Who am I?) and the roles (i.e., What I have to do?) of oneself, inquiries on the processes of identity construction and change are significant research arenas to help us understand the underlying drives of an individual’s behaviors. In the same vein, entrepreneurial identity as a research topic deserves more attention from academia because it can provide insights into the fundamental questions of “Who are entrepreneurs?” and “What should entrepreneurs do?” (Anderson & Warren, 2011). These questions ultimately lead us to the career choices of entrepreneurs by uncovering the motivation and relevant attributes. In so doing, the subsequent, and more important question to entrepreneurship educators, human resource development professionals, and policy makers, is “Why, and how do they become entrepreneurs?” (e.g., Mills & Pawson, 2012; Watson, 2009; Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016).

Consequently, exploration of entrepreneurial identity and its construction, fortification, revision and change can shed light on the underlying mechanisms of entrepreneurs’ motivation, their firm creation initiatives, and further, how their identity construction can be facilitated (Anderson & Warren 2011; Shepherd & Haynie 2009).

Constructing Entrepreneurial Identities: Types and Triggers

The entrepreneurial identity of an individual is perceived, defined, and conceptualized in different ways depending on the type of entrepreneur. Existing studies on entrepreneurial identity have focused on various types of entrepreneurship and populations, and their identity work ranging from student entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs, gender identity of female entrepreneurs, and even mumpreneurs and olderpreneurs (e.g., Duberley & Carrigan. 2013; Grimes, Gehman, & Cao, 2018; Lewis, 2016; Mallet & Wapshott. 2015; Nielsen & Gartner,
Each type of entrepreneur has distinguishable processes of identity work based on various triggers, circumstances, and the meaning-making process.

The triggers of identity work of entrepreneurs can be categorized as follows: a) a life-changing event, b) individuals’ values and beliefs, and c) circumstantial triggers. First, life-changing and distressing events such as natural disasters, death of family members, lessons from significant others (e.g., parents), and having a disability are strong triggers (Driver, 2017; Jones, Latham, & Betta, 2008; Kašperová, Kitching, & Blackburn, 2018; Lewis, 2016) to become entrepreneurs by reflexively thinking about the meaning of life. For example, Lewis’s (2016) case study shows a traumatic experience of a natural disaster that led a college student to become a social entrepreneur to help people in similar situations. Being disabled from an accident or disease also causes entrepreneurial initiatives because disabilities reduce the probability of employment (Kašperová et al., 2018). Individuals in these hardships try to overcome the situation and may become entrepreneurs through the process.

Values and beliefs are frequently mentioned attributes of becoming entrepreneurs (Rauch & Frese, 2007). Passion, self-actualization, pursuing autonomy, a sense of achievement, and self-expression trigger the desire to be entrepreneurs (Gill & Larson, 2014; Karhunen, Olimpieva, & Hytt, 2017; Larson & Pearson, 2014; Nielsen & Lassen, 2012; Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016). In Duberley and Carrigan’s (2013) study, women entrepreneurs often become entrepreneurs to pursue a balance between work and life or try to have more time for their children. A commercial motivation is not surprising, but pursuing a certain type of life style instead of interest in money can be a strong motivation and trigger the desire to become an entrepreneur. Another example is living in a place that is quiet and peaceful but is difficult hard to find a job requires individuals to make their living by building their own business (Gill & Larson, 2014; Larson & Pearson, 2014).
Becoming an entrepreneur is also highly circumstantial. Another basic trigger is recognizing vulnerability such as being laid off because of an economic recession or aging, minority status in other counties, or working in poor conditions (Down & Reveley, 2004; Fenwick, 2002; Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018; Hytti, 2005; Mallet & Wapshott, 2015). Through interviews with 109 female entrepreneurs, for instance, Fenwick (2002) revealed that women start their enterprises because of a desire to escape from dissatisfaction with work conditions, a glass ceiling, and limited career opportunities. Sometimes, a sudden inheritance can also guide an individual to become an entrepreneur (Bredvold & Skålén, 2016; Watson, 2009).

In a nutshell, identity work of an entrepreneur varies across the types of entrepreneurship, populations, and triggering events. In line with the conclusions deduced from prior studies, it can be assumed that the identity work of corporate entrepreneurs requires a unique approach to give a more persuasive explanation of the phenomenon. Based on its unparalleled position among other types of entrepreneurs, distinctive motivational, contextual, and circumstantial triggers should be identified in the process of corporate entrepreneurial identity construction.

**Corporate Entrepreneurs’ Identity**

Despite the recent proliferation of academic attention on entrepreneurial identity, corporate entrepreneurship as a locus of identity work has received little interest from scholars (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). Perhaps this is because it is in the embryonic state of entrepreneurial identity research, or because corporate entrepreneurship is simply being considered a subset of general entrepreneurship (Brockhaus, 1994; Stopford & Baden-Fuller, 1994). However, as many researchers have revealed, corporate entrepreneurs have distinct characteristics from other types of entrepreneurs in terms of motivation, learning process, personal backgrounds, and
organizational settings (e.g., Hisrich, 1990; Honig, 1990; Luchsinger & Bagby, 1987; Smith et al., 2016).

Most importantly, corporate entrepreneurship is often manifested, driven, and carried out by middle managers in organizations (Burgelman, 1983b; Burström & Wilson, 2015; Rutherford & Holt, 2007). Because corporate entrepreneurs are not official positions like CEO or senior manager, middle managers, who serve multiple roles in organizations (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Mantere, 2008) may experience identity conflict. For example, middle managers are required to have multiple role identities including administrator, manager, leader, and innovator (Kanter, 1982). They can become both champions and resistors of the strategic initiatives of their organizations (Harding et al., 2014) depending on their subjective evaluation of their identities. Thus, if managers define themselves as managers, then their manager identity remains only as manager. However, if managers define themselves as corporate entrepreneurs, then their behavior that is connected to the perceived role significantly changes. Therefore, without clearly defined roles and identities, it is likely that the gaps between the expected and perceived roles of middle managers will grow depending on the circumstances (Jones-Evans, 2000). This gap can cause role conflicts within and between members in the organization (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Mantere, 2008; Nandram & Klandermans, 1993). Understanding the roles and role identities of middle managers is central to corporate entrepreneurial identity.

To explore the process of corporate entrepreneurs’ identity work, it is important to unravel middle managers’ roles and the contextual factors influencing their identity. According to role-identity theory (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000), individuals construct multiple identities in relation to the roles that are socially and structurally assigned to them (Thoits, 1992). Two components operate in individuals’ role identity work: identity centrality
and identity salience (Burke, 2006; Hogg et al., 1995). *Identity centrality* refers to the relative and subjective importance of a certain role identity to one’s self-concept compared to other identities (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). In contrast, *identity salience* indicates the readiness to activate an identity given a situation or context (Stets & Burke, 2000). Thus, when middle managers consider their entrepreneurial role as their central role, it changes how they exhibit entrepreneurial behavior. In addition, a pressing need for strategic renewal or innovation in the organization will enhance middle managers’ identity salience for corporate entrepreneurs.

Consequently, this study explores middle managers’ identity work in corporate entrepreneurship. The purpose of this study is to answer the question: Why and how do middle managers turn themselves into corporate entrepreneurs? As Lewis (2016) contends, exploration of unexplored contexts (i.e., corporate entrepreneurial identity) will extend our understanding of the notion of entrepreneurial identity and also add new insights to entrepreneurial identity as a research field.

**Context of the Study**

In this section, I provide general information about the national context and economic situation of Korea to better understand the context of corporate entrepreneurs in Korea. In addition, I describe recent practices and summarize the scholarly efforts related to corporate entrepreneurship in Korea.

**Country Profile**

The research site is large corporations in Korea. South Korea, located in East Asia, is officially called the Republic of Korea (ROK). Since the Korean War in the 1950s, Korea has been divided into two entities, North Korea and South Korea, and a state of truce between the north and south has continued for more than 70 years. For the 73 years after the separation,
South Korea has been rapidly industrialized from the mid-1960. This era of socioeconomic modernization led to heightened civic awareness and democratic changes in the late 1980s, which facilitated drastic social, political, and economic development. The Korean economy is now the fourth largest among Asian countries and 11th largest in the world (Bajpai, 2018). Currently, the estimated population of Korea has reached about 51.4 million (Statistics Korea, 2018), the life expectancy is 82.2 years, and most of the population lives in urban areas (82.6%). Korea’s GDP per capita is $35751.7 (Bertelsmann Transformation Index, 2018).

The economy of South Korea has relied on manufacturing and has mostly been led by larger corporations (Worldbank, 2018). More than 65% of the exports are achieved by large corporations (Cho, 2017; Kim, 2018). A large corporation in Korea is usually defined as a company with total assets of more than 10 trillion Won (about USD 10 billion). However, these gigantic conglomerates, so called *Chaebol*, which make up a substantial portion of the South Korean economy, have recently struggled with new rivals and market needs. With the economic rise of China and India in the global economy, many Korean corporations are experiencing difficulties such as low growth rate, decreased profits and brain drain (Pasquier, 2016). To resolve these crises, and to pursue sustainable growth of organizations, many corporations have looked for viable solutions.

**Corporate Entrepreneurship in South Korea: Practice and Research**

Although Korea’s large corporations have sought strategies to adapt to recent changes, the innate problems of their size – the bureaucratic system, rigid organizational culture, and low motivation for innovation – are perpetual. To be more agile entities and compete with young, innovative ventures, larger corporations have had to be proactive and innovative as well as take
more risks (Covin & Slevin, 1991; Miller, 1983). In this sense, there is growing interest in corporate entrepreneurship in both professional areas and academia in Korea (Lee & Park, 2017).

**CE practice in Korea.** Corporate entrepreneurship in Korea is driven by large, private-sector companies such as Samsung, SK, Hyundai Motor Group, and LG. These corporations use corporate venturing as the main vehicle of corporate entrepreneurship, and foster internal venture teams to drive internal innovation. They have also attempted to nurture a creative organization culture and encourage new business idea incubation. For example, Samsung started its corporate entrepreneurial unit, named the “Creative Lab (C-Lab)” in 2013 (Samsung Newsroom, 2017). C-Lab has produced several new high-tech projects and commercial products from its seven successful spin-offs to Consumer Electronics Show (CES) 2018. Hyundai Motor Group has a relatively long history of corporate entrepreneurship compared to other corporations. The company has operated internal startups since 2000 and has established 37 internal venture units (HMG Journal, 2018). SK hynix also launched its corporate venture fostering program, “HiGarage” in 2018. These Korean corporations have tended to focus on the R&D competency of the organization to develop new business ideas and products.

With these movements, the Korean government announced a new policy to support corporate entrepreneurship as a way to create a business start-up environment. In 2017, the Ministry of SMEs and Startups, Ministry of Economy and Finance, and Financial Services Commission of Korea decided to support large corporations’ internal or external venture creation (Park, 2018). The policy was activated in 2018 to support large- and medium-sized companies by giving tax exemptions and funding to the parent company so the parent companies can take less risk of failure (Choi, 2017). Arguably, corporate entrepreneurship in Korea is just beginning, and
has received considerable attention from industry and the government as a new engine for economic development and sustainability.

**Studies on corporate entrepreneurship in Korea.** Corporate entrepreneurship as a research topic has also recently gained attention from Korean researchers. Lee and Park (2017) conducted a systematic review of empirical studies on corporate entrepreneurship published in Korean journals, and found that the first research on corporate entrepreneurship appeared in 2003 (Yun, Wi, & Choi, 2003). However, corporate entrepreneurship studies in Korea are still an embryonic state but are expected to gradually increase (Lee & Park, 2017).

To date, all empirical studies on corporate entrepreneurship conducted in the Korean context are quantitative studies (Lee & Park, 2017). Researchers have mainly set corporate entrepreneurship as an independent variable and have examined the relationships between corporate entrepreneurship and organizational outcomes such as organizational effectiveness (e.g., Hwang & bae, 2017; Yun et al., 2003, Yun and Kim, 2006) and financial/non-financial performance (e.g., Jang et al., 2018; Song, 2015). Few studies have explored factors affecting corporate entrepreneurship. Kim, Gang, and Ko (2010) found that an innovation-oriented culture, and an autonomy and future-orientation culture have a positive influence on corporate entrepreneurship in the SME context. In addition, Jung, Choi, and Sung’s (2015) study revealed that employee rewards are positively associated with corporate entrepreneurship both in high-tech and traditional businesses.

Despite the growing attention, there are notable gaps in Korean studies on corporate entrepreneurship. Namely, studies on corporate entrepreneurship have tended to focus on the statistical relationship between corporate entrepreneurship and firm-level performance, rather than on individuals’ corporate entrepreneurial behaviors. Furthermore, extant Korean studies on
corporate entrepreneurship are also inclined toward organizational-level corporate entrepreneurship, which is the already established characteristics of a company, so our understanding of the processes of how individuals become corporate entrepreneurs is still lacking. In this sense, this study will contribute to theory building of corporate entrepreneurship in Korea in that it focuses on individual-level corporate entrepreneurial behavior, and also sheds light on the process of becoming a corporate entrepreneur.

**Summary**

Entrepreneurs and their identity work have recently been of interest to researchers. Entrepreneurial identity is constructed by various triggers such as life-changing events, personal styles and values, and circumstantial factors. However, in spite of its significance, both entrepreneurship and middle management literature has ignored the identity work of corporate entrepreneurs. Hence, the current body of knowledge about entrepreneurial identity cannot adequately answer to the fundamental questions of the how and why corporate entrepreneurs manage the process of their identity work. This study will explore middle managers’ identity work as corporate entrepreneurs.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore the process of entrepreneurial identity construction of Korean middle managers in large corporations. In this chapter, I address the methodological issues of the study. First, I provide the epistemological justification for the study and then explain the characteristics of the grounded theory methodology and my rationale for using it. Next, I introduce the context of the study, followed by methods for data collection and analysis. Finally, I propose the strategies to address the issues of credibility and conclude this chapter with my reflective positionality.

Social Constructivism

The epistemological standpoint and theoretical home of this study is social constructivism (also called social constructionism or constructionist view). Social constructivists cast considerable doubt on the taken-for-granted, unified worldview of the positivist perspective that assumes a single-objective reality and multiple realities (Merriam, 2009). Thus, social constructivists’ ontological standpoint acknowledges multiple truths, not single and universally accepted reality. In terms of the epistemological view, social constructivists refute the notion of objective truth and believe that all knowledge and meaningful reality are constructed by individual agents’ active engagement in interactions and their interpretations of a phenomenon and meaning-making activities within a social context (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985). Social constructivism is principally concerned with an explanation of the social processes and interactions in which individuals constantly engage, negotiate, and generate meaning in their everyday lives (Burr, 2006; Gergen, 1985). Therefore, the process of understanding of a
phenomenon or knowledge creation can be achieved not by the forces of nature, but as a consequence of an active, cooperative endeavor among individuals (Gergen, 1985). In this sense, a social constructionist inquiry of social events should be grounded in the historical and cultural contexts where various forms of realities emerge (Gergen, 1985).

Identity has been a focal interest of social constructionists in that identities of individuals are constructed, fortified, and changed by social interactions, which is the fundamental assumption of the social constructivist view (Burr, 2006; Celuro, 1997). For social constructionists, an individual’s identity is not predefined, unified, and fixed; rather, it is fluid, dynamic, negotiable and constructed by constant engagement with individual agents (e.g., Alvesson et al., 2008; Kreiner et al., 2006; Watson, 2008). Accordingly, the process of identity work of entrepreneurs can be best understood through the intertwined and interactive meaning-making process of individuals (Crotty, 1998). For this reason, I adopt social constructivism as the guiding philosophical framework for this study.

**Grounded Theory Methodology**

Qualitative approaches are well-suited for investigating ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions, especially when the researcher has little control over events, and when the focus of a study is the lived experiences of participants (Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 1994). Thus, a qualitative research design is particularly appropriate when a researcher attempts to address the questions of why and how, which are exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive in nature (Patton, 2002; Yin, 1994).

Several qualitative approaches are informed by the social constructivist view, including a basic qualitative/naturalistic approach, phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory (Merriam, 2009). Among these methodologies, I adopted grounded theory for this study. Grounded theory consists of “systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing
qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). Grounded theory procedures include concurrent generation, collection, and analysis of data with constant comparisons of codes, categories, and data (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The focal phenomenon of this study is the process of middle managers’ corporate entrepreneurial identity construction, which has not been explored by either identity researchers or entrepreneurship researchers. Hence, instead of grounding in a preconceived theory; rather, an inductive, emergent design that allows for the development of a theory to explain the phenomenon of interest is appropriate for this study (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In addition, the grounded theory approach is particularly useful to answer, “questions about process” or “how something changes over time” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 43). Grounded theory guides the process of how relevant constructs emerge from participants’ accounts of their experiences in specific contexts.

There are several grounded theory methodologies that vary depending on different philosophical orientations (Birk & Mills, 2015). For example, Strauss and Corbin’s (1988) grounded theory is rooted in symbolic interactionism, while Glaser (1998) takes a pragmatic position. Further, Adele Clarke (2005) is a proponent of post modernistic grounded theory. I chose the grounded theory methodology suggested by Charmaz (2014) because Charmaz’s version of grounded theory is rooted in social constructivism, which is aligned with my philosophical standpoint. Unlike Glaser and Strauss (1967) who argued for the discovery of theories, Charmaz (2014) took a position that theories are not discovered; rather, “we are part of the world we study, the data we collect, and the analyses we produce. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvement and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (p. 17).
Several grounded theory studies on entrepreneurial identity have been conducted based on constructivism (e.g., Bredvold & Skålen, 2016; Gill & Larson, 2014; Grimes, 2018; Larson & Pearson, 2012, Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016). Because an individual’s identity is constructed and changes based on the individual’s interpretation of reality, using constructivist grounded theory is suitable for exploring the target phenomenon of this study: corporate entrepreneurial identity construction of middle managers.

The grounded theory process suggested by Charmaz (2006) is as follows:

1. Research problem and opening research questions
2. Initial coding and data collection
3. Initial memos/ raising codes to tentative categories
4. Data collection – Focused coding
5. Advanced memos/ refining conceptual categories
6. Theoretical sampling/ seeking specific new data
7. Theoretical memo-writing and further refining of concepts/ adopting certain categories as theoretical concepts
8. Sorting memos
9. Integrating memos/ diagramming concepts
10. Writing the first draft and further theoretical sampling if needed

This process seems to be linear, but in practice, any steps in the research process can be visited and revisited during the study, making this process iteratively executed (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). I view the process as flexible guidelines instead of rigid prescriptions for my study (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). Therefore, as a constructivist, I remained open-minded in the research process rather than strictly adhering to these steps.
Methods

In this section, I present strategies to collect and analyze data. Specifically, I discuss the sampling procedures, recruitment process, interview techniques, and analytical methods.

Sampling Procedure

Similar to most grounded theory research, the sampling procedure of my study began with identification of a population that is aligned with the phenomenon of interest (Strauss Corbin, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I employed three sampling techniques: criterion-based, snowballing and theoretical sampling. First, I used a criterion-based sampling strategy (Patton, 2002). I invited 12 participants who met the following criteria to participate in the initial stage of the study. The identification and recruitment process of participants are provided in the following sections in greater detail:

1. Middle manager: Participants should be mid-level managers in a company. Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) defined middle managers as “organization members who link the activities of vertically related groups and who are responsible for at least sub-functional work flow, but not the work flow of the organization as a whole” (p. 157). I adopted this definition as a sampling criterion. Thus, middle managers in an organization who are in charge of any internal sub-unit in an organization were eligible to participate. However, since many organizations have different positions and hierarchical structures, I asked the companies to recommend participants whom they consider middle managers.

2. Full-time employees in large corporations in Korea: Participants should be working as full-time employees in a large corporation located in Korea. I only focused on corporate entrepreneurs in large corporations, due to the recent intense attention on CE activity from the large companies in Korea (Lee & Park, 2017; Park, 2018). I referred to a list of
31 large corporations in Korea provided by Korea Fair Trade Commission. The benchmark for the listing was total assets of above 10 trillion Won (about USD 1 billion). All the participants I recruited were affiliated with large companies on the list at the time of the study.

3. Corporate entrepreneurs: Individuals who held corporate entrepreneur positions or engaged in corporate entrepreneurial activities were invited. Thus, I selected individuals who were engaged in one of the following activities: a) corporate venturing, b) strategic renewal, and/or c) innovative activities (e.g., new product or service development) in large corporations in line with the previously defined types of corporate entrepreneurship positions (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999).

I started identifying an initial pool of four participants based on my personal and professional network. I contacted people whom I know working on corporate entrepreneurial projects. After that, I used the snowballing sampling technique (Patton, 2002) to invite additional participants. That is, after each interview session ended, I encouraged the participants to nominate another person who met the sampling criteria. The chain referral technique was employed until I reached data saturation, meaning, no additional information emerged from the interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Theoretical sampling.** One of the unique characteristics of grounded theory is its sampling technique – theoretical sampling. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), theoretical sampling is “…the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges”. (p. 45)
Theoretical sampling directs a researcher to find a more relevant sample for further theoretical elaboration and refinement (Charmaz, 2006). Unlike other types of sampling strategies in qualitative studies in which a researcher makes decisions about who, what, when, where, and how to collect data in the initial study design, theoretical sampling is not possible until the researcher identifies the initial categories (Charmaz, 2014). After identifying these categories, the researcher conducts theoretical sampling to explicate the categories.

I used the theoretical sampling technique to confirm, clarify, and expand the categories and elaborate on the ideas for further theorizing (Charmaz, 2014). The theoretical sampling continued until the concepts that emerged from the data reached saturation (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), that is, neither additional codes nor categories and subcategories emerged.

I employed one round of theoretical sampling for data generation in this study. I initially invited four participants through my professional network. Analysis of the interview data of these four participants directed me to seek out participants who could further contribute to the theory building. Specifically, from the interview of the four participants, I found that two of the four participants defined themselves as corporate entrepreneurs, but the other two refused to be defined as corporate entrepreneurs. The salient difference between the two groups was whether they had clear career aspirations. If they had a long-term and solid career goal (e.g., creating their own venture within 10 years or becoming a renowned expert in a specific industry), then they embraced the corporate entrepreneurial identity as their role identity. However, the participants who did not have any prospective career goals, regardless of its relation to entrepreneurship, self-identified as “an employee of an organization,” or “professional” (P1 and P3). This significant difference between the two participant groups led me to recruit more participants who had a clear
career perspective or plan. Interviewing participants with entrepreneurial career aspirations gave me a better chance to link their experience to their identity construction process.

Sample size. The required sample size for grounded theory studies varies (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2001). Glaser (2001) argued that a small sample size is not an issue because participants can be interviewed for further data collection. However, Charmaz (2006, 2014) suggested that researchers who make hefty claims have to be careful in claiming saturation with a small number of interviewees. In general, most grounded theorists do not start with a predefined number of participants because the size of the sample depends on whether the categories are saturated or not. Therefore, instead of determining the number of participants, I began the interviews with a relatively small number of initial participants (four) and then employed theoretical sampling. I used theoretical sampling to refine and elaborate on the categories and subcategories by inviting eight new participants to interview. After I analyzed the interview data and felt the data was saturated, I met with a grounded theory expert (my methodologist on my dissertation committee) to discuss the number of participants I needed to interview further. She encouraged me to conduct one more interview to confirm saturation. I conducted two more interviews to confirm saturation, and found no further codes, categories, or subcategories. The final sample for this study included 12 participants.

Recruitment process. Recruitment of potential participants for this study started with my personal and professional networks. First, I contacted individuals who met the sampling criteria using an instant messenger app (e.g., KakaoTalk), email, or phone. After explaining the purpose of the study and confirming their willingness to participate in the study, I sent an invitation email (Appendix B) to each potential participant. I also utilized my professional network (e.g., colleagues in my former company in Korea) to ask for referrals from their contacts whom they
thought would be eligible for this study. In addition, some participants recommended other potential participants to interview. Participants’ decision as to whether or not to take part in the study was completely voluntary. No obligatory participation was imposed. I requested that the potential participants email or text me if they were willing to participate in the study. Because I interviewed participants only through video calls, I did not send the consent form via email for their signature prior to the actual interviews. Instead, the IRB required me to explain the information sheet (Appendix C) orally before the interviews. As an incentive for participation, I emailed a Starbucks’ coupon with a value of 20,000 Korean Won (about USD 20) to each participant upon completion of the interview to show my gratitude.

**Data Generation**

In grounded theory, the process of data generation and analysis are not separate; they are simultaneously and iteratively generated and analyzed (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Accordingly, I followed the general guidelines proposed by Charmaz, specifically the following second edition of her book, *Constructing grounded theory*. I conducted one interview, at a time, then transcribed and analyzed it, and then repeated this same process. Thus, I conducted each interview and analysis concurrently.

**Individual interviews.** The primary method I used for data generation was in-depth interviewing. As Patton (2002) stated, interviewing helps researchers find out “what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories” (p. 341). Because we cannot observe the feelings and thoughts, and are limited in seeing behaviors in a specific time and place where the participants reside, in-depth interviewing is the most appropriate tool to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of participants and the process of their identity construction.
In constructivist grounded theory, data are considered to be generated rather than collected. Unlike other types of interviews that merely mirror reality, constructivist grounded theorists view interviews as “emergent interactions in which social bonds may develop” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 91). Accordingly, for constructivists, interviewing is constructed based on the participants’ narratives, and the mutuality between the interviewer and participant. The constructivist interview is “the site of exploration, emergent understandings, legitimation of identity, and validation of experience” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 91).

Face-to-face interviews were not feasible for data generation for my study because I, the researcher, was living in the United States and the study participants resided in Korea when interviews were conducted. Furthermore, even if I had visited Korea, participants were full-time professionals working at different locations across the country, so some interviewees would likely have preferred being interviewed through a video conferencing program or by phone.

Telephone interviewing is an effective apparatus for collecting data from participants who are geographically dispersed (Kruenger & Casey, 2015). However, I acknowledge the limitations of employing telephone interviews, as doing so means potentially risking missing important visual and non-verbal cues (Kruenger & Casey, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Nevertheless, an increasing volume of studies use phone interviews as the primary method to collect data (Lechuga, 2012). The use of telephone interviews can give participants a greater level of anonymity and privacy so that the participants are more willing to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings with an increased sense of safety (Sturges and Hanrahan 2004). Telephone interviewing is also well suited for collecting data from busy professionals like participants of the present study (Kruenger & Casey, 2015). In addition, using telephone interviews allows a researcher to discreetly take notes during the interview and help engage the
interviewee in conversation more naturally (Lechuga, 2012; Sturges and Hanrahan 2004). Further, some researchers argue that, when coupled with other media such as video calling, the disadvantages of telephone interviews (i.e., resulting in inferior data due to the missing body languages or other visual cues) can be mitigated (Lechuga, 2012). For these reasons, I decided to interview the participants via video conferencing call programs including FaceTalk (i.e., the video calling function of KakaoTalk, the most widely used instant messaging software in South Korea) and the FaceTime function of my iPhone.

The use of phone interviewing was more convenient for both me and the study participants not only because of the geographical distance between me and the participants, but also the enhanced accessibility. For example, I texted some participants to ask if they were available at any time, and we were able to talk during their lunch time or even working hours. This flexibility increased the participants’ willingness to participate in the study because it reduced the burden of spending time and energy of the participants.

During the interview only two female participants (P1 and P3) did not want to use the video feature. Thus, I interviewed them without visual interaction. However, I had already established a rapport with the two female participants since they were my former mentor and a leader in my former company, so I could identify and capture their feelings through their voices.

**Pilot interview.** Before conducting intensive interviewing, a set of semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were developed to guide the interviews (Merriam, 2011). The interview questions addressed participants’ self-concept (e.g., “How do you define your major role at work?”) and lived experiences as corporate entrepreneurs (e.g., “Please tell me your experience with a recent corporate entrepreneurial project” or “What is the motivation for your current work role?”). I received feedback regarding interview questions from my dissertation
committee. The committee encouraged me to capture the critical incidents in relation to participants’ corporate entrepreneurial experiences and their identity construction (Flanagan, 1954). For example, one of my committee members suggested that I ask questions probing some situational aspects (e.g., the length of time within a certain context versus a different context) and the role of participants, and its influence on their identity shifts or differences. Another comment was to look into an event that made participants extremely proud or frustrated. My dissertation chair and methodologist concurred with these comments, and I revised the interview guide accordingly (Appendix E). The revised interview question enabled me to delve deeper into participants’ corporate entrepreneurial experience and identity processes.

Next, I conducted a pilot interview with two participants from my professional network at the initial stage of data collection to verify the appropriateness of the questions and the recruitment process. The two participants for pilot interview were former employees in my company, but now they are working for different companies. One participant had a corporate entrepreneurial career working at a start-up company, and the other one is working on an internal corporate venturing project. I asked them to check if the probing questions were appropriate for investigating the phenomenon of corporate entrepreneurial identity construction. Based on their feedback, I refined and revised the questions.

The major feedback from the pilot interview was that the participants did not exactly understand what corporate entrepreneurship meant and what corporate entrepreneurial activities included. Because the term corporate entrepreneurship is still relatively new to practitioners in South Korea, they were not familiar with the concept; thus, they did not fully understand the notion of corporate entrepreneurship. Based on this feedback, I added a definition of a corporate
entrepreneur and identified three primary activities of corporate entrepreneurship (i.e., corporate venturing, strategic renewal, and internal innovation) to the interview guide (see Appendix F).

**Interview procedure.** Grounded theorists use intensive interviewing to generate data. Intensive interviewing is a flexible and emergent technique that allows a researcher to (a) select research participants with first-hand experience with the research topic, (b) utilize open-ended questions, and (c) elicit participants’ interpretation of their own experiences (Charmaz, 2014). I conducted the three rounds of interviews with each participant: initial interview, interview with theoretical sampling, and interview to confirm data saturation.

After the pilot interview, I emailed the demographic information questions to all the 12 participants (Appendix D) along with the interview guide three to seven days before the scheduled interview. Two or three days prior to the actual interview, I confirmed via email, the participant’s availability and interview schedule. On the scheduled interview date, I contacted the participants via KakaoTalk program or email, confirmed again their availability before I initiated a call using the FaceTalk or FaceTime program. I began each interview with a brief introduction to this study and explained the content of the information sheet to inform them of their rights and roles as study participants.

I conducted two rounds of interviews with each participant, except P2 who participated in three rounds of interviews. The first round took about 60 minutes depending on the participant’s availability. The second-round interview was conducted for supplementary, follow-up questions, and clarification of the data gained from the first-round interview. If I needed to ask very simple, fact-checking questions such as years of current or previous positions, I used email or text message to communicate with the participants.
All interviews were conducted in Korean, the mother tongue of the participants and the interviewer (me). The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants’ consent and thoroughly transcribed verbatim by me in Korean. In addition, I took notes during the interviews to capture the key words and notions, which could be probed in the next round of interviews (Patton, 2002). After an interview session, each participant received a copy of the interview transcript and was asked to verify the accuracy of the content within one or two weeks. To prevent a breach of confidentiality and risk of disclosure of personal identification, all the names and affiliations of the participants were replaced with pseudonyms (i.e., capitalized alphabet P with a number representing the order of participants, e.g., P1 for the first participant).

**Initial interviewing.** I started interviews were with four participants among the 12 participants. Two of them were former colleagues at work. I interviewed them using the interview guide via video calling programs. Rapport had already been established previously, or at the beginning of the interview through 10 or 15 minutes of catching-up stories of life and work. There was evidence of engaging moments of intensive interviewing. In the initial interview, some of the participants were worried about the duration of the interview. For instance, P3 was a bit skeptical about talking for an hour about her work. She said she did not think that she had much to say. When the interview finished, I let her know that we had already spent one hour on the interview, and she was quite surprised. Some participants were very passionate. For example, P2 called me a week after the first interview. The first interview with him had lasted 79 minutes, and the second interview session took 45 minutes. Nevertheless, he felt that the first interview was not enough to convey his thoughts, so he wanted to talk more about his experiences and thoughts. Thus, P2 and I had the third interview, which took 25 minutes.
**Interviewing with theoretical sampling.** From the initial interviews with the four participants and the initial coding results, I identified a significant difference among participants. Two of them defined themselves as corporate entrepreneurs, but the other two participants identified their roles at work as just a waged worker or an employee. Comparing the initial codes and provisional categories, I found that the difference between the two groups was career aspirations. The two participants (P2 and P4) had a strong desire to pursue entrepreneurship as their long-term career so they embraced the work of corporate entrepreneurship in preparation for their future career. However, P1 and P3 stated that their work was just a means for making a living, and they firmly believed that they would not pursue an entrepreneurship career in their future. In addition, they also said that they would do whatever the organization asked of them as professional employees. Although they had a high level of professional identity, the absence of career aspirations deactivated their identity as a corporate entrepreneur. Consequently, I sought out further potential participants who had career aspirations as entrepreneurs or an equivalent role such as a change agent. I recruited eight new participants who fit this condition. Through this second stage of interviewing, I also identified enthusiastic participants. P11 also texted me a few days after the first interview. It seemed that he felt comfortable during the interview and texted me to ask if he could talk more. This deep engagement and active co-construction of narratives occurred with several participants throughout the entire interview process.

**Interviewing to confirm data saturation.** Grounded theorists aim for theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014). According to Glaser (2001), saturation is not the same as identifying similar patterns repeatedly; rather, “it is conceptualization of comparisons if these incidents which yields different properties of the pattern until no new properties of the pattern emerge” (p. 191). After conducting interviews with 10 participants and analysis of the data, I concluded that
the data had reached saturation with no new codes, categories, or properties (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I consulted with my methodologist about further interviews to confirm saturation. Although my methodologist recommended that I conducted one more interview, I conducted two more interviews for a more solid conclusion. Although one of the participants at this interview stage had both master’s and MBA degrees, which was different from the other participants, no new codes, properties, or categories were identified in these two interviews. Thus, I concluded that my theoretical categories were saturated with data. Hence, I stopped data generation. The two rounds of intensive interviewing generated 995 minutes 48 seconds of recordings, which turned out to be 145 single-spaced pages of transcription with 11-point font size.

**Supplemental materials.** In addition to collecting data through interviews, a grounded theorist can utilize other sources of data (Birks & Mills, 2015). I gathered additional materials to expand my understanding of participants’ context and corporate entrepreneurial activities. I visited the participants’ company websites to evaluate their corporate entrepreneurial activities. I also collected a few internal corporate reports describing the corporate entrepreneurship projects. Surprisingly, some participants voluntarily provided their internal corporate reports without my request because they were so passionate about sharing with me their work. However, they asked me to use the materials just for my research and to not disclose the information to others. For confidentiality, the supplemental materials were not included in my findings. Instead, I only used the reports to understand their work and develop further probing questions for interviews.

**Data Analysis**

Since I adopted the grounded theory procedure outlined by Charmaz (2014), data analysis started with *initial coding* with a *line-by-line* coding technique. After I identified the initial
codes, I moved on to the second major stage of coding in grounded theory, *focused coding*, which allows a researcher to identify more significant and conceptual codes. I then identified more abstract-level categories and subcategories based on the focused codes. The coding procedure was conducted using constant comparison techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Finally, I combined the categories and subcategories and attempted to identify relationships and proposed a model called *theoretical coding* (Charmaz, 2014). A more detailed process of each coding phase is described in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Concurrent Data Analysis Process](image)

**Initial coding.** I began the analysis immediately after the first interview. I thoroughly read the transcriptions of each interview and then identified the initial codes through line-by-line coding. Grounded theorists conduct initial coding but remain open to any theoretical possibilities derived from the data (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, instead of applying a pre-existing perspective or categories to the data, I attempted to learn from what my participants’ experiences while
remaining open to new possibilities. During the initial coding, I constantly compared the codes that emerged from the data. Each code was examined and compared to new data obtained from subsequent interviews. Any code or provisional category could be replaced, revised, added, or abandoned until the categories were saturated.

The general procedure of my initial coding was as follows. After transcribing an interview verbatim, I printed it out as a hard copy. Then I skimmed the transcription for a general impression of the participant’s narrative and major events or concepts that emerged from the data. I briefly took notes about my feelings, impressions, and significant words or events in the white space of the transcription. This activity helped me recognize the overall experience of the participant and significant incidents, which helped me to identify provisional categories in the later phases of coding. Second, I thoroughly read the transcription and highlighted some sentences or words that might be related to the topic of my research. At this stage, I ignored any small talk statements such as greetings or self-introductions. Next, I conducted initial coding with word processing software (i.e., MS Word). I used the “New Comment” function of MS Word to code the data (See Appendix H as an example). I did not use any qualitative data analysis software such as ATLAS.ti or NVIVO. This manual coding allowed me to be more flexible when coding the data.

I conducted line-by-line coding with the data generated from the initial participants. However, after I discussed provisional categories and subcategories with my dissertation methodologist, she suggested that I move on to incident-by-incident coding. Therefore, I used this technique for P11 and P12. All codes were coded with gerunds as guided by Charmaz (2014), because coding with gerunds better reflects the processual nature of constructivist grounded theory.
**Focused coding.** Focused coding allows the researcher to concentrate on the most useful initial codes (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). Further, focused coding is coding of initial codes, and, in so doing, stipulates “which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize the data incisively and completely” (Charmaz, 2014, P. 138). Some codes initially identified in the interview data may appear more frequently in subsequent interview transcripts. Other codes can have more significant meaning than other codes. Using these recurring or more significant codes, a researcher can begin to assess, compare, and distinguishes the initial codes. Through the focused coding, I identified provisional categories and subcategories by collapsing some initial codes representing a specific pattern or selecting significant codes that account for a meaningful incident in the data (Charmaz, 2014).

After I identified the initial codes, I then re-read the transcripts and codes. As I re-read, I highlighted the major codes among the initially identified codes (see Appendix I for an example). These codes repeatedly appeared throughout the interviews, had an impactful meaning, or illustrated major activities of participants in relation to the topic of study. I then identified some tentative categories and subcategories using the focused codes. Note that although P1 and P3 did not have a specific career aspiration, I concluded to include them in my sample. Because I came out with the same categories but those two were different in terms of the properties of the same category, thus including the two participants seemed reasonable to make my data rich.

**Theoretical coding.** The last analytic phase of constructivist grounded theory is theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014), which enables a researcher to achieve theoretical abstraction of the data. According to Glaser (1978), theoretical coding is the process of “how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory” (p. 72). To construct
a model or theory, a grounded theorist identifies and selects a core category that is conceptually abstract and defined as the central phenomenon around all other categories (Birks & Mills, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Simply put, theoretical coding is identifying a core category and integrating all other categories together to shape a highly abstract grounded theory. This advanced coding phase also requires undertaking constant comparisons of initial codes and focused codes, and elaborating on and refining categories and subcategories while pursuing an overall level of conceptual abstraction (Birks & Mills, 2015). By sorting memos, diagramming and integrating the relationships among categories, grounded theorists construct storyline (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As such, I followed the guideline suggested by Charmaz (2014) to create a general storyline to connect all categories to the focal phenomenon, “becoming a corporate entrepreneur.” By integrating and refining categories and subcategories, I developed a model of middle managers’ corporate entrepreneurial identity construction. In this stage, the use of diagramming enabled me to identify the relationships among categories and theoretical codes (see Figure 2 for examples of diagrams) For readers’ convenience, I provide a detailed illustration of how I integrated categories and generated the storyline at the end of the findings section.

**Memoing.** While conducting the interviews and analyses, I wrote memos as part of the data analysis. Memo writing is a crucial step between data generation and writing. I wrote the date, topic of the memo, name of the category or property, a brief account of the data, and a representative quote (Appendix J). A memo is a place where a researcher actively engages in analyzing and interpreting data, developing ideas, leading subsequent data generation, and
Figure 2. Examples of Diagramming for Theoretical Coding

facilitating reflexivity (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). Another purpose of memo writing
is to help the researcher engage in deep thinking about the data and trace the analytic procedure
to enhance credibility in peer debriefing. Thus, utilizing memo writing enabled me to identify the
emerging patterns and underlying assumptions, and provided insights into the relationships

Trustworthiness

At the beginning of Chapter III, I provided my epistemological stance that shapes my
own worldview and influences the research process. In addition to the philosophical paradigm,
acknowledging and bracketing a researcher’s subjective positionality helps ensure the credibility
of the data (Bourke, 2014; Watt, 2007). In this study, credibility was also established by utilizing two verification strategies: member checking and peer debriefing (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

**Member Checking**

The first strategy is member checking, which allows participants to verify whether the researcher’s analysis and interpretation accurately and consistently represent the participants’ experiences shared with the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I conducted member checking by sharing the interview transcripts and findings with the participants. I emailed a one-page, bullet-point summary of the interview (see Appendix G) with my interpretation to each participant within two weeks after completion of the interview. I asked the participant to review the summary and provide feedback if any clarification or verification was needed. Eight of the twelve participants provided feedback on my interview summary and interpretation. They all agreed with my interpretation and checked if any sensitive information was exposed.

**Peer Debriefing**

I also utilized a peer debriefing technique as a verification tool (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout the analysis, I invited two of my committee members (i.e., my chair and methodologist who have expertise and experience in qualitative research) to examine and verify the labelling and relationships between the categories and subcategories and to cross-check the consistency and validity of my data interpretation. Peer debriefing was employed two times: after the initial interview and after the interview with theoretical sampling.

**Peer debriefing after the initial interview**. After completing my first analysis of the data gathered from the initial four participants, I met with my methodologist who is an expert of grounded theory. I shared whether my transcriptions with the initial codes and focused codes and memos including the provisional categories with quotes. My methodologist who is a grounded
theory expert, checked my analytic processes and codes and said she was satisfied with my grounded theory process. However, she gave me feedback that there were too many focused codes and I needed to employ theoretical sampling. She asked me to revisit her after I conducted more interviews and analyses.

**Peer debriefing after the interview with theoretical sampling.** After the first debriefing session, the methodologist and I scheduled another meeting for the second peer debriefing. I had already finished the interviews with eight participants selected through theoretical sampling. I shared the emergent/provisional categories and subcategories and written descriptions for the categories, and identified subcategories and representative quotes for each of them. Each memo included the date, so she could trace my analytic procedure with an audit trail.

After careful review of the materials and a conversation regarding my analytic procedure, my grounded theory methodologist confirmed that I utilized appropriate analytical techniques and proceeded correctly according to the constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2014). However, she asked me to rename the titles/labels of the categories and subcategories because the labels of categories and subcategories were too long (e.g., accumulating relevant experiences to corporate entrepreneurship by intentional segueing or unintended transfer). In addition, some of them did not reflect the actions and meaning making of the participants so she also asked me to more clearly write about the interpretations and descriptions of the categories and subcategories, which helped me move towards theory building. It seemed that my categories had reached saturation at that point, but I was not sure because of the relatively small sample size. Thus, my methodologist encouraged me to conduct one more interview to see if I needed to do more interviews. I scheduled two more interviews and, confirmed that my categories had reached saturation.
After the second peer debriefing session, the grounded theory methodology expert summarized our conversation and feedback, and shared it with my chair. A few days later, I met my chair and shared the same materials and my tentative model as the preliminary findings. My chair checked the materials, and encouraged me to write up my findings.

**Reflexive Positionality: The Researcher’s Role**

Qualitative researchers have searched for ways to enhance the credibility of qualitative studies. One way is recognizing and sorting out the researcher’s beliefs and biases from the study (Patton, 2002; Watt, 2007). In qualitative research, the researcher is always the main lens for the phenomenon of interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005) since a qualitative study is an ongoing process (Bourke, 2014) in which the researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In this sense, qualitative inquiry represents a shared space that results in the co-constructed narrative between the researcher and participants (England, 1994). The researcher affects the development of the research ideas, interaction with the study participants, and formulation of the implications (Bourke, 2014; Morrow, 2005). As such, the researcher’s disposition, assumptions, biases, and competence have an impact on all phases of the study (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the trustworthiness of qualitative research can be best achieved by a clear articulation of the paradigmatic underpinnings of the study and the researcher-as-instrument statement (Morrow, 2005).

As a qualitative researcher, acknowledging my own worldview helps mitigate the potential influence of my subjectivity, including my identity and professional background that might influence the study process. I am currently a fourth-year Ph.D. candidate majoring in Human Resource Development (HRD) at a ResearchI university in the United States. Before I came to the US to pursue my doctoral degree, I was born and raised in South Korea, where the
culture is highly collectivistic and competitive. From primary school to my master’s degree, I spent most of my time in my home country. My undergraduate major was education and I also studied English education as a minor. I earned a master’s degree in Educational Technology. After completing the master’s program, I worked for four years as an HRD professional at a global IT corporation in Korea. I applied to the doctoral program and came to the United States in 2015. The Korean culture strongly emphasizes the role of education and human resource development, so I have naturally been interested in ways to unleash human potential.

My father was an entrepreneur. He founded a firm and ran a business from his early 20’s. He experienced business failures twice due to the economic recessions in 1979 and 1997, respectively, which had a severe impact on my family both financially and emotionally. Nevertheless, my father kept trying to rise again, and now he is still a self-employed farmer. I did not understand why my father kept trying to run his own business at that time despite the failures and its impact. Certainly, his motivation and disposition to become an entrepreneur has affected my research orientation. I am interested in the motivational aspect and identity of an entrepreneur. In sum, my identity as a Korean and my father’s entrepreneurial career have stimulated my desire to explore entrepreneurs’ experiences and ways to develop entrepreneurs.

In addition to my internal motivation, my professional career allows me to have both emic (insider’s view) and etic (outsider’s view) perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002) of my research topic. First, having worked for a large company in Korea gives me an insider’s perspective on the research setting and participants. After I earned my master’s degree, I worked as a management consultant and human resource analyst. I started my career as a performance consultant working for a global auto parts manufacturer and engaged in a six-month competency development project for their dealerships. Then I moved to a global IT corporation.
During my three-and-half-year career, I participated in a variety of projects including training and assessing employees, developing IT systems, and business planning in multiple roles in the organization. These experiences have given me insights into the structures and strategies of large Korean corporations and working styles of employees in Korean organizations. All these experiences have enabled me to gain a solid understanding of the research context and participants, which is essential to conduct a qualitative inquiry study.

On the other hand, I am also an outsider in the world of corporate entrepreneurs. My understanding of corporate entrepreneurs is likely limited by my experience as an HRD professional. Furthermore, my four years of experience as an HRD professional may not have adequately prepared me to sufficiently understand corporate entrepreneurs and their roles because I have never belonged to that population. Consequently, the lack of lived experiences as a corporate entrepreneur in a large corporation means that I am outside of the phenomenon.

Summary

In this study, I adopt a grounded theory methodology informed by social constructivism. I first selected participants using criterion-based and snowballing sampling techniques. Data were generated and collected through individual interviews with semi-structured questions. I also utilized theoretical sampling to elaborate on and refine the categories. In addition, I wrote memos throughout the study process to improve my theoretical sensitivity. Categories were saturated through a constant comparison technique, and iterative data generation and analysis.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the experience of Korean middle managers’ corporate entrepreneurship experience, including how and why they engage in the process of corporate entrepreneurial identity construction. Understanding the process of how middle managers construct their corporate entrepreneurial identity will enable researchers to build theories on the phenomenon. Findings from this study can also contribute to HRD professionals who seek ways to foster corporate entrepreneurship within an organization. I adopted the constructivist grounded theory methodology proposed by Charmaz (2014) because it is aligned with my epistemology and is particularly useful to investigate the processual nature of identity construction. Through criterion-based, snowballing sampling and theoretical sampling techniques, 12 middle managers currently working as corporate entrepreneurs were invited to this study. Through an intensive interview process, the data were generated and then analyzed through the process of using initial, focused, and theoretical coding. This chapter begins with a general description of participants’ demographic characteristics. Next, I present the identified categories and subcategories from the analysis with direct quotes corresponding to each property.

The Participants Profile

In this section, demographic information is provided including age, gender, educational background, work experience, and participants’ corporate entrepreneurial identity. To prevent a breach of confidentiality, each participant was given a pseudonym consisting of the letter “P,”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Work Exp.</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Type of CE Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>21 yrs</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Part Leader / Human Resource Development</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Corporate Venturing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>18 yrs</td>
<td>Deputy General Manager</td>
<td>Project Manager / Human Resource Development</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Innovation / Corporate Venturing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>22 yrs</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Project Manager / Human Resource Development</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Corporate Venturing / Innovation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Computer Education</td>
<td>28 yrs</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Part Leader / Human Resource Development / Infrastructure management</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Corporate Venturing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>11 yrs</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Project Manager / Business Development</td>
<td>Civil Engineer / Business Development</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Corporate Venturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>17 yrs</td>
<td>Executive Consultant</td>
<td>Project Manager / IT Consulting</td>
<td>Software Engineer / IT Consulting Sales / Human Resource Development</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Strategic Renewal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Human Resource Development</td>
<td>24 yrs</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Project Manager / Human Resource Development</td>
<td>Automobile Manufacturing</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Work Exp.</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Type of CE Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Information &amp; Media</td>
<td>6 yrs</td>
<td>Assistant Manager</td>
<td>General operations manager</td>
<td>Business Development/ Open Innovation</td>
<td>Automobile Manufacturing</td>
<td>Corporate Venturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Food Engineering</td>
<td>13 yrs</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Business Development/ R&amp;D Planning</td>
<td>Food Industry</td>
<td>Strategic Renewal / Corporate Venturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>20 yrs</td>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>Software Engineer / Business Development</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Corporate Venturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Master / MBA</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>23 yrs</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Unit Leader</td>
<td>Product Development/ Business Analyst &amp; Development</td>
<td>Banking Industry</td>
<td>Corporate Venturing / Innovation / Strategic Renewal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>14 yrs</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Business Development/ Strategic Alliance</td>
<td>Automobile Manufacturing</td>
<td>Strategic Renewal / Corporate Venturing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Continued
which stands for participant, and a number indicating the interview order (e.g., P1 for the first participant). Participants’ profiles are presented in Table 1.

The 12 middle managers who engaged in corporate entrepreneurial activities consisted of seven males (58.3%) and five females (41.7%). Participants’ ages ranged from 31 to 54, but the majority (9 participants; 75%) were in their 40s. Only two participants (16.7%) were in their 30s and one participant (8.3%) was in her 50s.

All 12 participants held at least a bachelor’s degree. Among them four participants had master’s degrees, an MBA, or both (33.3%). Only one participant had a Ph.D. degree (8.3%). In terms of their areas of study, eight participants majored in science and engineering including mathematics, mechanical engineering, or computer science. Four participants majored in social science including HRD, management and computer education.

The average work experience as a full-time employee was 18 years. Half of the participants had more than 20 years of career experience. Five participants’ careers ranged from 11 to 18 years, and only one participant had worked for only 6 years. Most of the participants held at least the rank of manager in their organizations (11 participants, 91.7%). The titles of their rank included general manager, senior manager, deputy general manager, and executive consultant. Only one participant was an assistant manager.

In addition to their ranks, participants held the responsibility of a leader or project manager. Six of them worked as project managers. Two participants were “part leaders,” which is a type of middle manager who is in charge of a Part, (e.g., a subunit) of a team. Similarly, one participant was a unit leader, and another participant was a general operations manager. Although their positions were equivalent to other middle managers, these two participants worked as a manager of an independent unit.
Six participants worked in the information technology (IT) industry. Three participants worked for automobile manufacturers. The remaining three participants worked in the construction, food, and banking industries. In terms of the job, all participants had varied job experience. Participants had either changed companies or careers, so they had experienced more than one job before they started their corporate entrepreneurial activity. Six participants started their careers as software engineers. The other six participants’ initial careers varied including product developer, business developer, sales representative, civil engineer, and HRD professional.

**Type of Corporate Entrepreneurial Activity**

Based on the typology of corporate entrepreneurship (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999), three forms of corporate entrepreneurial activity were identified. Seven participants had engaged in only one type of corporate entrepreneurship (58.3%), but the other five participants had participated in more than one corporate entrepreneurship project (41.7%). The most frequently mentioned corporate entrepreneurship activity was corporate venturing. Ten participants had corporate venturing experience (83.3%). Four participants (33.3%) had participated in both innovation and strategic renewal activities.

An analysis of the participants’ profiles allowed me to identify some commonalities across all participants. First, a majority of the participants were in their 40s, indicating that they had accumulated considerable experience and expertise through their careers. Second, they were highly educated. All of the participants had a bachelors (i.e., B.A. or B.S.) degree as a minimum. Third, they all had multiple career trajectories. They started their careers in one field, and then moved to another job later in their careers, but never changed fields/industries. I can assume that
they accumulated career experience and expertise within the same industry even though they changed roles.

In addition to the commonalities, I also observed some variations among the participants. First, there were no gender differences in engaging in corporate entrepreneurship. Among the 12 participants, five were female. Second, participants’ positions were also diverse; some of them were project managers or leaders of a specific unit, but some participants had no role as leader or manager. The industries were also different. Seven participants worked in IT and the service industry, but five worked in manufacturing and construction industries.

**Categories and Subcategories**

In this section, I present the key findings from my analysis including the categories and subcategories. The identified seven major categories and 20 subcategories pertaining to each category are summarized in Figure 3. In each category, subcategories are listed in alphabetical order, and the number in the last column indicates the frequency of participants mentioning the property. Because the overarching research questions of this dissertation study are “Why do middle managers engage in corporate entrepreneurial activity, and How do they construct their corporate entrepreneurial identity in South Korea?” it may require two different answers. However, as Charmaz (2014) noted, “the why question might emerge with the ‘how’” and “a fine-grained inductive analysis of how people construct actions and meanings can lead grounded theorists to theorize answers to ‘why’ questions” (p. 240). Thus, I believe the general accounts of categories and subcategories from the analysis, and its relationships can cover the overarching research question. In the following sections, I provide a detailed explanation of each category along with representative quotes from the participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmental readiness</td>
<td>Having accumulated experiences and expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having entrepreneurial propensity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having flexible role identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a career aspiration</td>
<td>Aspiring to become an expert in an industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pursuing independence in a long-term career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being triggered</td>
<td>Actively seeking a next career opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responding to external career threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being engaged in a CE activity</td>
<td>Being engaged in by chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being engaged in due to requests from other business functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being engaged in by top-down ordering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes accompanied with a CE activity</td>
<td>Having an expanded and deepened perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Handling uncertainty and complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intensively learning new knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalizing CE as a new role</td>
<td>Continuous and expansive involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gaining recognition and sponsorship from stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-fulfillment of becoming &quot;a significant one&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming a CE</td>
<td>Pursuing unique career as a vanguard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working as a boundary spanner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Actualizing personal vision through work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separating self from the commercial image of entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Categories and Subcategories
Developmental Readiness

This category illustrates the initial status or condition of participants in terms of their identity, competency, and characteristics. Before they began their corporate entrepreneurial activity, they all had a certain level of developmental readiness. Subcategories in this category encompassed (1) having accumulated experience and expertise, (2) having a propensity for entrepreneurial activities, and (3) having a flexible role identity.

Having accumulated experience and expertise. Because participants were middle managers with an average of 18 years of work experience, it is reasonable to assume that they had experienced multiple jobs and projects. Thus, they would have accumulated experience as experts in their respective industries. The job transitions were made through a job rotation, organizational restructuring, or a voluntary choice based on their career aspirations (i.e., I want to do the job! I have always wanted to be a teacher, so I moved to the HRD department), personal growth, or better working conditions. One participant said:

I didn’t think, at first, that I wanted to do this. In my case, one of the main reasons that I like to find my next job is, when I am working on some job, then I get used to it very much, then there is no learning. Knowledge does not increase anymore, so I keep looking for a job that gives me an opportunity to learn and expand my work. So I always change the department or company in line with this idea. So, I was working on some wealth management. I coached the PBs to become better sales representatives, then moved to a business analyst position in an innovation team…[P11]

Another participant recalled the transition from his first job to the second position:

Working as a system developer for six years…was extremely stressful…but I couldn’t bail out of that situation given that structure. While I was preparing to leave the company,
I saw an internal recruitment announcement on the intranet, by chance. So I applied to the HRD position because I had a little interest in training, and had a little experience…[P2]

Participants moved from a business function to another business function, department to department, and/or company to company. However, none of them changed industries. The driver of their mobility was grounded on their current expertise. Instead of moving to a totally new area of expertise, they expanded their expertise in relation to the current job. P12 illustrated this:

It’s difficult to make a good result, even when you have worked in a one organization. Doing a new business in a new team or department is thus never easy…. So instead of starting an entirely new thing, I contemplate the business…. to visualize the possibility…why this is connected to the other things, and how these things are converged into new, innovative ideas. I am always thinking about it, and it is difficult but exciting.[P12]

To expand their expertise, the participants worked in diverse business functions or several companies. Throughout their careers, the participants accumulated certain experience relevant to their current competency or expertise, and were eventually recognized as internal experts in a certain area. This expertise functioned as an anchor for being engaged in corporate entrepreneurship in the later phase of their careers.

Having a propensity for entrepreneurial activity. Participants’ personal traits were also a critical constituent of their initial readiness. These traits were persistence, propensity for risk-taking, or creativity, which have frequently been mentioned in existing literature on entrepreneurship. One commonly mentioned trait was persistence. For example, P7 said, “I believe that you need to do 120% when you want to accomplish 100%…If you do not, then any loss occurs in any point.” Other participants also had the same trait of persistence:
Will power, trying to do a job successfully is, you know, I think, very strong. Because…I think about it every day, every moment…How can I resolve the issue…very seriously, spending a lot of time. [P3]

P6 also commented on his propensity to be persistent:

Um…the most critical element is, I think propensity. Propensity…to continuously attempt to find ideas, embrace failures, and rise again…persistence? Passion? That kind of attitude is the most important. [P6]

This persistent personality produced creative ideas to solve problems, but one participant admitted that it was difficult:

It’s a huge stress. Sleepless nights…endless thoughts…you need to everything. It is necessary to do things by fair means or foul. Like flow…this level of persistence gives you creative, new ideas, and fresh perspectives in the end. [P2]

**Having a flexible role identity.** Another element of participants’ developmental readiness was being flexible in their initial role identity as a professional. To embrace new roles or tasks that they never expected to take on, the participants had to be flexible in terms of the way they accepted a new role and work. All of the participants demonstrated a very open-minded, flexible professional identity. They did not experience role conflict or an identity mismatch when they were assigned to a corporate entrepreneurial task. Rather, they took it that as an opportunity to learn. P3 commented:

I don’t know, I honestly haven’t had any specific role preference ever. Um…I think the reason why I have been doing that work is because of the way I take on a job, not because I am good at working. Some people cannot take on a job that they don’t want. But I think everything can be a good experience, and I also think “What can be the cost? Nothing!”
So the leaders gave me the jobs…I guess. I am open to any job. If I said, “No,” then the result would have been different. [P3]

The following quote also represents a more compliant attitude of the participants. When I asked the question “What if you think this is very meaningful and important, but your leader or executives say no, what would you do?” participant 6 quickly responded, “If you cannot persuade your leaders, then you need to change. That is an organization. You need to follow the hierarchical order.” [P6]

Participants’ concept of a professional was strongly linked to their organizational attachment. As P1 said, “as a paid worker, I can, and should do anything that my company wants to do.” Further, as shown in the conversation with P6, the compliance to the organizational order or hierarchy enables participants to embrace a corporate entrepreneurial activity as a kind of tasks that they should do as a member of an organization. In line with this conception, participants developed a flexible role identity as a professional or organizational member, which allowed them to embrace a new role or task with minimum intra- and inter-personal conflict. Because they believed they could benefit from a new role or assignment, or they tended to follow the order for a broader organizational need, they did not stick to their current role or work.

**Having a Career Aspiration**

This category explains the participants’ career prospects as a strong driving force that pushed them to continuously engage in corporate entrepreneurial activities. This aspiration is different from the subcategories of the “being triggered” category, which is a motivation to seek out an alternative career. Rather, this aspiration pushed participants to assess their current positions and to continuously engage in corporate entrepreneurial activities as a part of their career trajectory.
Aspiring to become an expert in the industry. Participants’ career plans were about creating a venture or self-employment. However, becoming an expert in their respective specific industries was also a powerful driver of their viable career options. For instance, P12 said:

Two or three years after I entered this company, I set several milestones in my career path, like, when I reached five years, after 10 years, and after 15 years…I wrote my plan and goals, and updated them. So if I stay in this company for several more years, I want to become an expert of business planning in the mobility industry. I will keep doing this kind of work, but everything will be placed within the boundary of the mobility industry.

[P12]

P7 also added:

I wanted to become an expert in HRD. So for the competencies required to be the expert, such as planning, project management and reporting skills…I needed to develop those competencies. This being so, I just stopped working as a trainer, then put all my efforts into becoming an HRD expert. This is the thing that I need to do, and I am really enjoying it. [P7]

The motivation to become an expert in their special areas drove the participants to keep engaging in corporate entrepreneurial activities. Most of the corporate entrepreneurial projects they worked on or embarked on required a high level of expertise and experience to resolve complex and unstructured problems or to move forward in unprecedented areas.

Pursuing independence in their long-term careers. In addition to the participants’ strong career aspirations to be experts, they also pursued independence in their careers. Corporate entrepreneurship was considered a vehicle to secure independence both within and beyond the organizational boundaries. Because working as a corporate entrepreneur prompted
(and also required) them to act like entrepreneurs who think independently and make decisions, they experienced a similar situation to the actual business outside their current organizations’ borders. This led them to conceive an independent career beyond the current organization. For instance, Participant 5 said, “Someday, when I take off the umbrella (company), people will say ‘Hey, that guy is in the job market,’ and everyone in this business is going to work with me. That is the picture I am drawing now.” [P5]

The following quote from another participant represents how a corporate entrepreneur maintained a strained relationship with her current company based on her career perspective:

My philosophy is, if the company knows that I am relying on them, I will be abandoned right away. Relying on a company for one’s career only makes my life vulnerable. Likewise, any company that cannot give me a valuable experience to grow was and will be rejected for me. Although I experienced unemployment for a while due to my philosophy, I still believe I made the right choice. It keeps me awake. It helped me to move forward without losing my wildness… Yes, being tailored is the last thing I want. [P11]

Consequently, their career aspirations allowed them to keep a distance from their organizations and become more independent professionals in their industries.

Two participants, however, stated that they still thought of themselves as just employees or professionals despite their corporate entrepreneurial careers. For them, corporate entrepreneurship was just a form of the work they needed to do as professionals. For example, P1 stated:

I am just an employee. I never had any career plan, as an entrepreneur. Not a bit of it…well, an entrepreneur shouldn’t work nine to six…Creating a venture requires
enormous efforts and focus but I don’t want to do it like that. Yeah, I can do this type of job, a corporate entrepreneurial, but it is a mere task just as an employee. Making a living is my only motivation. [P1]

The explicit difference between these participants and others was that they did not have a clear plan or strong aspiration for their future careers. The absence of a prospective career with the question of “What’s next?” distinguishes these two participants’ role identities from others’ corporate entrepreneur identity.

**Being Triggered**

Participants faced some triggering events before they engaged in a corporate entrepreneurial activity. These triggering events were related to their careers. For example, participants were either triggered by (1) actively seeking the next career or (2) responding to external career threats.

**Actively seeking the next career.** One type of trigger is having a career prospect. These participants were not motivated by a career crisis. Instead, they more actively engaged in the corporate entrepreneurship activity. They did not have clear career goals such as starting their own business outside of the current company. Rather, they started to consider the current job or company as the preparation phase for their vague future career of self-employment or becoming an internal expert. Participant 11 stated:

I have been always thinking of my competitiveness in the market. Am I competitive? If not, what kind of competency should I develop? Basically, that is the same as other companies. Although I am an employee, I will retire at my 60s. I should do something after that. So I thought “Am I doing my ‘preliminary business’?” There are so many things I can do even if I quit my job today. [P11]
Another participant added:

[When I was] working with sales guys, while I was a designer, I observed how the business people talk, negotiate, persuade… and what kind of knowledge I should know. So I started to think that someday, I should do the same thing, because, many executives have a sales career or business development. Plus, if this solar power business goes south, then I will need to find other jobs, so I thought about my future career. [P5]

Some of participants looked for an innovative and interesting project simply because they were tired of the routine working patterns. P10, for example, said:

I wanted to do something different… um, after 10 years of only programming… yes, I got bored, and a bit tired of doing the same thing… Of course, it didn’t look very promising… I mean, my job as a software engineer. So I started to think about several options. [P10]

These participants proactively planned and embarked on tasks that were relevant to their provisional career. This active preparation allowed them to do a self-assessment of their market value and their own competency or expertise, which ultimately led them to pursue more impactful and significant career achievements.

**Responding to external career threats.** Some participants felt a threat to their career prospects. When they reached the middle manager level after several years of working, they encountered a moment when they needed to think about their next career. They suddenly realized that there would not be a bright future in their careers unless they took “special action” to secure their positions in the companies or showed a competitive advantage over others. This self-assessment led them to pursue their uniqueness or distinctiveness in the organization.
Participating in the corporate entrepreneurial activity was their choice to be different from others.

P2 said:

Um…there are so many engineers in the company, so I thought, reaching a top-tiered position would be very hard for me. Compared to the high performers, who are really good at their job, I thought I cannot reach that level… I enjoyed my work; it was promising but…I just couldn’t be the same as those people…So I had this idea that I needed to differentiate my career from others…like, becoming a team leader… but with my current job? It was not viable….so yes, I didn’t intend to be an entrepreneur at that moment but I just wanted to climb the organizational ladder, and having my specialty, uniqueness was something that I really needed to pursue to be successful. [P2]

Whether it was a crisis of their career or active preparation for their next career phase, the participants were motivated to engage in a corporate entrepreneurial activity that was related to their career trajectories.

**Being Engaged in a Corporate Entrepreneurial Activity**

Participants recalled their first experience of participating in a corporate entrepreneurial activity. They were removed from their daily routines or the jobs they held and were assigned to a position of corporate entrepreneur. The first encounter with a corporate entrepreneurial activity occurred in three ways. Participants engaged in corporate venturing, internal innovation, or strategic renewal (1) by chance, (2) at the request of another organizational unit, or (3) were given a top-down order.

**Being engaged by chance.** Several participants remembered that they started to work as a corporate entrepreneur through unexpected changes in the workplace such as being transferred into a new team or department due to organizational restructuring or merger and acquisition
(M&A). In some cases, the task was given simply because the participant was the only one available. P3 recalled:

I was involved in the project because… I was working on the planning team, and then moved to the convergence team. At that time…I didn’t have any particular mission. Instead, we always did some “rotation.” One of us needed to be delegated to another department for a collaborative task. And I, at that moment, didn’t take on a specific role…I was the only one. And also, I was the only person who had that work experience…so. [P3]

P1 also added:

Well, I didn’t actually initiate the project… K (a predecessor) was the one who started this project. And then she moved to a different team after two years. I just took over the task because I was a successor of the part leader position. Yeah, so I had worked on this project merely because I was there at that moment. [P1]

**Being requested from other business functions.** The second type of engagement was prompted by a request from other teams, departments, or divisions to support their work or join a task force or project team. Because most participants had considerable work experience and expertise in a specific business, they gained a company-wide reputation as an internal expert. Thus, when a business unit initiated a new project, they wanted to “borrow” the insights, knowledge, and skills of the participants. P2 remarked:

I got a request from that division. I was kind of an internal expert to them because I had done some internal projects to develop systems…two times, three times…, so, they asked me to join them for a cooperation. So, yes, I did not intend to do LMS system business, but they said I am the expert. In retrospect, ah yes, I had many experiences on that stuff.
And I had some degree of confidence. So okay, I had this idea that, it seems likely that I can do this by combining my expertise of HR and my experiences of IT system…[P2]

Similarly, P4 also received a request from another team, but she found a niche in meeting with other colleagues:

At that time, the company was concerned about the performance of our subcontractors. So how to improve their performance and product quality was one of our big issues. One day, a manager in the outsourcing management team contacted me and asked if we could share our training facility for their business…it was training other companies’ employees…I thought “what if we run this business as an internal enterprise?” It looked profitable. So reversely, I proposed a new business plan and got funds from the government, and initiated this corporate venturing project. We trained our subcontractors’ employees and increased the revenue. Literally, it was killing two birds with one stone. [P4]

**Top-down order.** The third occasion of participating in a corporate entrepreneurial activity was provoked by an order from the top management team or a team leader. This type of engagement is similar to “by request,” except it came more directly from the upper level hierarchy, so the tasks were often aligned with the organization’s or company’s strategic mission. One participant said:

I was a trainer in the sales division and the HRD department looked for an employee who had an MS in HRD, so I was selected by my former mentor who is now in the Georgia branch. He was my team leader and gave me an order, saying, “Our organization has this problem…so you need to solve this problem.” I started this work with that directive. [P7]

Another participant also described a similar experience:
While I was doing that, our bank initiated a new strategic movement: expanding the wealth management function and made it more luxurious... We changed our business model. During that time, I was assigned to a project manager, in a top-down way, leading the process... so I had to change and develop the new business model and so forth...[P11]

From the three types of engagement, there is one commonality. Whether it was by chance, request from others, or organizational needs, participants’ expertise was the main reason they were chosen for the corporate entrepreneurial project.

**Changes Accompanying the CE Activity**

This category has three subcategories that illustrate the participants’ learning and development through corporate entrepreneurial activities. Participants changed in terms of (1) intensive learning of new knowledge and skills, (2) having an expanded and deeper perspective, and (3) handling uncertainty and complexity. These subcategories indicate that participants’ perspectives in an industry, their competencies, and approaches to problem solving changed with their experiences in a corporate entrepreneurial role.

**Intensive learning of new knowledge and skills.** By working as a corporate entrepreneur, participants learned considerable new knowledge and skills especially in solving problems. P6 described his intensive learning through his corporate entrepreneurial projects:

For the past three years, I did more than 40 projects... so I can learn a lot of things within very short periods. And my work is about the business, and regarded as much more important tasks than the previous work... so it is very enjoyable. [P6]

Furthermore, although they already had a high level of domain-specific knowledge and
skills, participants also commented on their learning regarding business. Through their corporate entrepreneurial activities, they learned more about knowledge and skills to run a business:

So I changed gradually, in spite of myself…I should analyze some cost to do a business…the fixed cost and variable cost. Things I didn’t know. But the upper level required that stuff, so I kept working on it…and I found myself doing quite good. I can calculate and estimate the cost and revenue. For example, if we trained employees, we needed a facility, instructor…material cost…and I can estimate, “Okay, with 15 people, we reach the break-even point, and after that each person, will be our net profit…something like that. [P4]

P5 also added:

Working as a designer only required me to understand the technical stuff, but now, I need to know the overall aspects of a business, like cash flow, financing, and licensing. I graduated from an engineering school, so I got used to clear answers and fixed processes…but my current job made me think and act differently. I feel like, I am blind or in a dark room, and start to think about what to do…[P5]

Because they dealt with unstructured and complex problems that did not have fixed solutions, self-directed learning was an essential task to overcome their limitations and move forward.

Learning, learning, and keep learning. No end. Actually one of my strengths to overcome the difficulties in my work is, I study a lot. When I face an issue, I cling tenaciously to that issue. I search all the books and video clips, and come up with questions. So I keep studying while I am awake. How I can make a quick transition from explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge is one of my strategies. [P11]
Having an expanded and deeper perspective. In addition to the newly acquired business knowledge, participants also experienced changes in their perspectives toward their work, organizations and industries. This implies both horizontal and vertical changes in their perspectives. P1 alluded:

As an internal corporate trainer, I was only interested in developing my own capability: what I am doing good, what I am capable of, or how much I can enjoy it…But now I changed. The focus is not my competency or standard anymore. I found that I now see things from a more business- and organization-wide perspective. What are my clients’ needs? What can WE do as a team? What are our limitations?…It’s not about getting a good assessment on my individual performance…because…the project is not something that can be successfully done solely by my ability. So, I had this new mindset for this business. [P1]

Another participant also said, “I have reviewed a lot of technological and business areas more than ever, which makes me feel like my expertise is expanding to more diverse disciplines.” [P9]

Handling uncertainty and complexity. The innovative, creative, unstructured, and complex nature of entrepreneurial tasks is different from what the participants had done before they began their corporate entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, the significance and volume of the tasks were overwhelming. They needed to consider as many factors or contingencies as possible and think “outside of box” to find a new path or approaches to a problem. At the initial stage, they struggled to adjust to this approach, but they gradually adjusted. The characteristics of corporate entrepreneurial tasks led them to act like an entrepreneur, who faced and handled uncertainty in the market. P2 talked about this:
The boundaries and goals of the project are much larger than my former work. And it requires very different methods and solutions…every time, in each case. Of course, I plan at an early stage, how much manpower will be needed, when to input the labor…But, you know, the project, that never worked as I planned. There have always been unexpected problems, for some reason. And also, we should make a totally new thing from scratch. So, yeah, it is a creation, creating something…I need to do something highly complex…a complex system. So I played the angles to accomplish the task. There is no answer. And there is no rule. Actually, you should become a frame-breaker, working freely and creatively. [P2]

P12 also shared a similar experience:

When I worked on process management or product operation, I tried to check each number…it should not be wrong, it should exactly match the actual stocks. But when I started to work on new business development, this was a different game. It did not always end up with a correct answer. So it does not need to be A; instead, it can be A* or A**…This job asks you to change your standpoint. Now I can embrace the uncertainty. Even though there is an unexpected result or issue, many attempts with multiple routes can be utilized to achieve the goal. [P12]

**Internalizing the Corporate Entrepreneur Role as a New Role**

After they experienced their first CE activity, participants experienced a sense of accomplishment and were internally and externally recognized as competent individuals from leaders, colleagues, and clients, which encouraged them to keep pursuing their CE careers. When I asked them if they could choose to do CE work or other types of work (e.g., what they had done before engaging in CE activity), every participant (even including the two participants with
an employee identity) preferred the CE role to other types of jobs. After they experienced success in their CE project, they started to think of CE as their new role and even initiate a CE project with an autonomous, bottom-up approach. Thus, internalizing the role of a corporate entrepreneur proceeded with three sub processes: (1) continuous and expansive involvement, (2) gaining recognition and sponsorship from stakeholders, and (3) self-fulfillment of becoming “a significant one.”

**Continuous and expansive involvement.** After successfully completing their first corporate entrepreneurial projects, the participants had an internal reputation as an expert. Most of the corporate entrepreneurial projects were well-recognized by organizational members. The participants were labeled as experts in certain areas after the project was a successful case or best practice. This success meant that they were often invited to join another similar project. P2 said:

> When there was a new mission…the new projects were assigned to me [by leaders], so I got increased requests from that time on, like making a new frame, product or service that is something new…My role was recognized in that way. Yes, that sort of pattern has been established. [P2]

P3 also commented:

> After I identified and resolved the issues in that area, the Chief Director was satisfied with the result. Hence, I was given those kinds of innovative projects. My career changed from that point on. If I had stayed in my original team, nothing may have changed. But through the process of continuous involvement, completion, and re-assignment to a new project…I changed. [P3]

This so-called “pattern” of subsequent involvement also required more expansive application of their expertise and problem-solving skills to complete a new project that both
overlapped or incorporated different aspects of their previous projects. Participant 12 commented:

It is not important to do new things for my career. Say, you have A and B, and your colleague has C, in this case, you need to expand and improve your A and B, and then try to make a connection to C, based on your A and B. It is more like “connecting the dots.”

[P12]

**Gaining recognition and sponsorship from stakeholders.** All participants agreed that sponsorship and recognition from others were two of the most significant drivers to drive them forward despite the difficulties and challenging situations around the corporate entrepreneurs’ work. The recognition and support from upper-level managers and other members of their organizations came from the success of the initial corporate entrepreneurial project. The successful outcomes also helped participants trust their own capability, which led to strong empowerment. Empowered by this sponsorship, participants met a turning point of their work: the transition from a top-down to a bottom-up approach of corporate entrepreneurial work. P8 confirmed this transition:

The experience of success (of the project) taught me how to communicate with, and invite my bosses to the supporting position for this business. So after the huge success of the first project, I formulated another idea, changing the entire branch models of our sales agency, and suggested this idea to the executive, and he said, “Let’s give it a try.” Now, when there is a new initiative, the executives call me and ask me first, “What is your plan for the next move?” Of course, my responsibilities are increasing, but the organization believes me and the process is now bottom-up, rather than the top-down like before. [P8]

Another participant added:
Initiating a new business plan is daunting, and never easy…so when I got approval for my idea from the executives, which gave me a huge sense of accomplishment. The company bought my idea and direction, and it made me think, “This is it! This is it!” [P12]

Not only did the recognition from upper-level management drive them to embrace the new role as a corporate entrepreneur, but recognition from colleagues and clients also motivated them to embark on subsequent projects. For example, P2 said:

While I was working on this project, I thought I could differentiate myself from others. The leading role fit me better than I expected…negotiation, persuasion…I was convinced that this is my role that I can do better than others, and it led me to think. “Ah, I can be a leader, and I will be quite good at it.” All these come from the evaluation of my colleagues and most importantly, the clients…They said I did great work, successfully led the project, and cleared hurdles. [P2]

**Self-fulfillment of becoming “a significant one.”** Continuous engagement in a corporate entrepreneurial project also gave them a new sense of self. Through the recognition surrounding them and their high degree of achievement, the participants felt like they were part of an important, meaningful, and huge task in the organization. Participants differentiated themselves from other employees with the feeling of becoming a significant one. The expressions participants used, such as “a pioneer, a weirdo, footprint or creator” reflected the meaning of becoming a corporate entrepreneur. P12 stated:

I can be remarkable. I mean, this work can be a significant footprint of the company. You know, there are many outstanding people in this company, but my ideas can be a milestone that moves the company beyond the current boundary…And I love that. [P12]
Another participant emphasized the uniqueness of her job:

I really love my job. I am entirely devoted to it. I am a weirdo, because nobody works in the same way as I do. I did new things that others didn’t…they cannot do this. I started it first. Now they followed me…so our organization has gradually changed….and the management also wants it now. [P7]

Becoming a Corporate Entrepreneur

Finally, participants defined their role, or role identity as a corporate entrepreneur. However, many of them were not used to the term CE, so they described themselves using different but relevant terms such as an entrepreneur, change agent, or problem solver (except one participant strongly defined herself as a passionate CE). This category consists of four subcategories: Pursuing a unique career as a vanguard, working as a boundary spanner, actualizing a personal vision through work, and separating self from the commercial image of an entrepreneur.

Pursuing a unique career as a vanguard. One of the salient aspects of participants was that they were recognized as a vanguard by other members in the organization and also saw themselves as such. Due to the nature of corporate entrepreneurial work, most of the participants were involved in innovative projects that had never been tried or implemented in the history of the company. Hence, they were positioned as internal experts doing unique tasks. This uniqueness led them to see their role or work more favorably. Although some of the participants said that they did not think of themselves as special, their narrative reflected the otherness in their self-image. One participant said:

My team leader or executives are saying, “You are an innovation expert.” So there is a benefit. Yes, my work is to identify an issue, set up a new team, create a new business
program or project. Creating new things in the organization, creating a new business model...yes, everybody thinks that is my work. I am positioned like that. [P11]

P12 added:

I am always asking myself, “Do you want to be just a user or a creator?” I have had this question in my mind. I chose to be the latter, not just using something given, but making and moving forward with what I created. I have this desire...to create something. Well, that does not need to be “things from ground zero.” Rather, it’s like “march to unknown,” say, a new business domain or seeking opportunities to converge multiple areas. [P12]

P10 also commented:

After three or four years, I wanted to try something entirely new…that I had never experienced. So, yeah, it’s hard to say, but I want to be seen as a guy who carved out a new path…I want to show them how to do it as an example. [P10]

**Working as a boundary spanner.** Doing entrepreneurial work requires a multidisciplinary approach because there is no fixed way or a manual for doing business. In the same vein, because corporate entrepreneurial activities also require the crossover of diverse knowledge, skills and expertise, participants collaboratively worked with multiple professionals inside and outside of their organizations. As P5 said, “When we write a proposal, we need to work with sales teams and technology teams, and we need to get support from the financial function and legal office…” Working collaboratively with multiple stakeholders also drove these corporate entrepreneurs to ask a fundamental question. As P6 said, “I always think about “Why?” I have thought about the fundamental question, “Why should I do this?” or “Why are these interrelated to other parts and how are these converged into one, to generate a new thing?” Eliciting support from others or jointly working with experts in other teams, departments or
business functions is a crucial part of working as a corporate entrepreneur. P11 alluded to this idea:

You need to work with…a lot of functions, from each product department, legal, regional office, compliance and even technological divisions to change the business and work processes. Thus, you need to know about the history of the work, or you need to have a wide range of network across multiple departments or division. Otherwise, you cannot make it successful. [P11]

Another participant also confirmed this:

When you go to a Sashimi restaurant, you should find that there is a main dish, but also…there are a lot of Tsukidashi (side dishes), right? And, paradoxically, that makes the Sashimi expensive and stand out…So yeah, I don’t need to be Sashimi every time. I can be a decoration, or side dish to make it successful. You are working in a big company to utilize resources you can reach out to. Otherwise, there is no meaning in working in this huge organization…[to be] playing solo. That shouldn’t be my option. [P10]

**Actualizing personal vision through work.** This property represents the participants’ underlying motivation. The participants responded that they were pursuing greater missions or trying to contribute to a wider society beyond their organizational boundaries. The meaning of work (i.e., contributing to the company, community, and even society) mattered to the participants more than the money itself. P4 said, for example:

The purpose of business is revenue, right? All entrepreneurs should generate a profit. At the same time, they also have missions…sort of…for greater social benefit. I also did not pursue only the profit when I did the job. It wasn’t important to me, actually. I had my own mission of developing talent. [P4]
P12 also stated:

Well, people say, a company exists for making profit…but I put a lot of emphasis on a certain value. What is the ultimate purpose of the business? What is the core value of the company? What makes the business continues matters to me. (Interviewer: What is your value then?). My value… I can surely say that I want to make my company respectful and proud so I can even talk to my son, “Join daddy’s company.” [P12]

Separating self from the commercial image of an entrepreneur. Most of the participants believed that an entrepreneur is an individual who ruthlessly pursues profits; therefore, they did not want to be seen as an entrepreneur. Instead, they mostly labelled their role identity as a change agent (i.e., “an individual who initiates or willingly accepts changes, and makes an innovative attempt based on the current business model” defined by P2) or innovator, or described themselves using their own words (e.g., “an individual who stimulates clients’ desires” [P6] or “an individual who attends and facilitates each independent business” [P5]). One participant described himself as follows:

I can’t say I am an entrepreneur…Putting an emphasis on the business mind does not necessarily mean that I am an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur’s mission is different, right? That mission is profit. I was not confident about it. Actually, you need to experience that. Without experiencing it, you can’t say you are an entrepreneur [P1]

Theoretical Integration of Categories and Subcategories

Conducting theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014) enabled me to integrate the seven categories and 20 subcategories into a general storyline responding to the question, “What seems to be going on here?” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 148). I conducted theoretical coding without
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical code</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preconditioning</td>
<td>Developmental readiness</td>
<td>Having accumulated experiences and expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having entrepreneurial propensity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having flexible role identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having a career aspiration</td>
<td>Aspiring to become an expert in an industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pursuing independence in a long-term career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingency</td>
<td>Being triggered</td>
<td>Actively seeking a next career opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Responding to external career threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being Engaged in a CE activity</td>
<td>By chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Due to requests from other business functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>By top-down ordering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical code</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transitioning</td>
<td>Changes accompanied with a CE activity</td>
<td>Having an expanded and deepened perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Handling uncertainty and complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intensively learning new knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internalizing CE as a new role</td>
<td>Continuous and expansive involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gaining recognition and sponsorship from stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-fulfillment of becoming “a significant one”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming</td>
<td>Becoming a CE</td>
<td>Pursuing unique career as a vanguard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working as a boundary spanner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actualizing personal vision through work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Separating self from the commercial image of entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
applying extant concepts (e.g., Glaser’s (1978) *coding families* or Strauss & Corbin’s (1998) *paradigm model*) to integrate my categories. Instead, following the constructivist grounded theory tradition (Charmaz, 2006, 2014), I used theoretical codes that emerged from the analysis of my data. By sorting memos, comparing categories and drawing multiple diagrams of the relationships among categories and subcategories (Charmaz, 2014), I identified the following four theoretical codes: “Pre-conditioning,” “Contingencies,” “Transition,” and “Becoming” (see Table 2). Then I constructed a model of construction of corporate entrepreneurial identity by connecting categories and subcategories using the theoretical codes (see Table 2).

**Storyline**

As the last step of theoretical integration in grounded theory, I constructed a storyline. For grounded theorists, storyline is “a means and an end in itself,” that helps the development and dissemination of theory (Birks, Mills, Francis, & Chapman, 2009, p. 407). Albeit presented here at the end of the findings section, constructing a storyline usually starts with preconceived ideas at the earliest stages of analysis, and gradually becomes evident through the “process of constant regrounding” (Birks et al., 2009, p. 407). Specifically, a story is not isolated from the data (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory researchers outline their storylines with several hypothetical statements capturing the essence of analysis (i.e., memos of category), and confirm it by revisiting and re-reading the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). When major categories are identified, grounded theory researchers develop and confirm the storyline by adding existing categories into the story (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), so the theory can be translated into a coherent storyline (Birks et al., 2009).

I wrote a storyline following Stough, Ducy, and Holt (2017). The authors used italics and underlines to respectively indicate properties and dimensions in their storyline. By emulating
Stough et al.’s (2017) approach, I bolded the theoretical codes, italicized categories, and underlined subcategories in the storyline. The following storyline illustrates the process of becoming a corporate entrepreneur, the core category of this study.

Before participants were involved in corporate entrepreneurial activity, there were pretrained characteristics and motivations. Because the participants of this study were middle managers who had several years of professional experience, they had accumulated working experience and their own expertise. Interestingly, participants did not maintain specific roles. Rather, they displayed a flexible role identity based on their strong organizational attachment and their concept of professionalism. Hence, they were open to any roles or tasks imposed by their organizations, which reduced possible role conflicts both in and out of their previous role identities. Participants also showed a propensity to be an entrepreneur such as innovativeness and the propensity to take a risk. With developmental readiness, participants also had strong career aspirations. First, being recognized as an internal expert mattered to the participants. In addition, as shown in their propensity to be an entrepreneur, the participants pursued independence in their careers.

Aligned to the preconditions, some contingencies led participants to be triggered and engaged in a CE activity. Participants were triggered in two contrasting ways. One was actively seeking the next career opportunities, and the other was rather passively reacting to external career threats such as the perceived lack of promotion opportunities. Participants were actually engaged in CE activities in three ways. When they were recognized as an internal expert, they were invited to participate in a CE project by other business functions in the company requiring their expertise. In a similar vein, a top-down order from executives or top management made
them join a task force or project team. Some participants started their first CE project by pure chance, such as a job rotation, team change or departmental transfer.

Once involved in a CE project, they experienced a **transition** from their previous role identity to a new role identity – a corporate entrepreneur – by experiencing *changes as they participated in the CE activity*. The complex, and demanding nature of the CE projects required the participants to **intensively learn new knowledge and skills** and handle the uncertainty and complexity of the work. Through these experiences, participants expanded and deepened their perspectives of their work, careers, and businesses. Over time, the participants gradually *internalized CE as their new role*. Successful completion of a CE task gave them recognition and sponsorship from stakeholders. Their reputation within the organization as an expert unleashed them so they became **continuously and expansively involved** in subsequent CE projects at a greater scale. In so doing, participants had a strong *sense of self-fulfillment* that they were significant in the organization. Finally, the participants constructed their corporate entrepreneurial identity by embracing the new role. **Becoming** a corporate entrepreneur made participants pursue a unique career as a vanguard or pioneer in the organization. They moved one step beyond other organizational members by initiating innovative projects or businesses.

**Working as a boundary spanner** is necessary to perform a corporate entrepreneurial role because leading a large project requires cooperation among diverse organizational functions. Thus, participants could actualize their personal vision through the CE work. However, they separated themselves from the commercial image of entrepreneur. For them, becoming a corporate entrepreneur meant doing meaningful work, contributing to the organizations or broader society, not just making a profit, which is considered the primary mission of a conventional entrepreneur. Consequently, the participants embraced a corporate entrepreneurial role as their new identity,
but they acknowledged their role as part of their organization, rather than standing out alone as a heroic figure.

Summary

This chapter presented seven categories encompassing 20 subcategories that were identified as key findings of this study: developmental readiness, being triggered, being engaged in a corporate entrepreneurial activity, having a career aspiration, changes accompanying the CE activity, internalizing the corporate entrepreneur role as a new role, and becoming a corporate entrepreneur. The data generated from individual interviews uncovered a procedure that accounts for why the participants were triggered to engage in corporate entrepreneurship, how they embraced the role of corporate entrepreneur as a new role and constructed a corporate entrepreneurial identity. To support and illustrate the findings, selected samples of representative quotes from interviews with the participants are included in this chapter. By providing participants’ own voices and rich contextual aspects I attempt to establish confidence in the data. Next, I integrated categories and subcategories into the model using the theoretical codes that emerged from the advanced analysis. The model depicts the core category: becoming a corporate entrepreneur. As the final product of my grounded theory study, I created a storyline illustrating the process of constructing a corporate entrepreneurial identity.

One primary finding of this study was the motivational aspect of becoming a corporate entrepreneur. Participants faced contingencies such as the sudden transfer to a new team, taking on a new task as assigned from the top, or perceiving a career threat. However, while dealing with uncertainties, complex tasks, or innovative projects, they gradually internalized the corporate entrepreneurial role based on their strong desire for personal growth and development. The second finding of this study was that becoming a corporate entrepreneur does not consistent
merely of taking on a role as corporate entrepreneur. Rather, it is connected to the participant’s long-term career, and was a strategy for positioning themselves as a unique expert in the organization. Finally, the participants’ self-identity was not aligned to their role. Several participants denied that they were corporate entrepreneurs because their conceptualization of entrepreneur did not match what they perceived they were performing. The participants were motivated by doing meaningful work, which gave them a sense of fulfillment and enabled them to actualize their vision.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I discuss my findings in relation to the existing theories and empirical research on corporate entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial identity and entrepreneurial career development. The chapter concluded with the implications for theory, practice and research.

Discussion

In this section, I discuss the findings from my analysis in response to the overarching research questions, “Why do middle managers engage in corporate entrepreneurial activity, and How do they construct their corporate entrepreneurial identity in South Korea?” Instead of discussing both why and how questions in tandem, I break the question into two separate questions. Therefore, I first discuss why the participants of this study engaged in corporate entrepreneurial activity. Then I address the “how” question by unpacking the process in which participants constructed their corporate entrepreneurial identities and became a corporate entrepreneur. I further highlight the contributions of my findings in filling the void in the extant literature on entrepreneurial career development and entrepreneurial identity.

Participants of my study experienced several processes. As middle managers who had worked for several years within an organization or industry, they encountered a career milestone. Some of them perceived that they were no longer competitive in their organizations as a candidate for upper level positions, whereas others sought an opportunity to start another career outside of their organization. Regardless of their motivation, however, both types of middle managers showed some commonalities, entrepreneurial personality traits, diverse working experiences and expertise, and flexible attitudes toward any kind of work. The participants
started their first CE project or work because of contingent events. Perhaps the most representative example is P3, who was the only one not having a specific role in her team at that moment. Some participants were invited by others or asked by management to participate in a company-wide project. Working on corporate entrepreneurial activities changed the participants’ identity. Through intensive learning and development, and expansive experiences and working boundaries, participants gradually became accustomed to the new role, which affected their position relationships with others within their organizations. Finally, the participants aligned their personal vision and career goal to the organizational mission and strategies. Consequently, they embraced CE as their new identity and continued to pursue a CE career based on their new identity.

In the following section, I address three discussion points vis-à-vis the findings from this study: (a) why the participants engaged in corporate entrepreneurial activities, (b) how the participants constructed their corporate entrepreneurial identity, and (c) what becoming a corporate entrepreneur meant to the participants.

**Discussion Point One: Corporate Entrepreneurship as an Entrepreneurial Career**

One of the primary purposes of my study was to discover why the middle managers engaged in corporate entrepreneurial activity. Three categories identified in this study contribute to answering this question: “developmental readiness,” “having a career aspiration,” and “being triggered.” These categories unfolded the motivational aspects of corporate entrepreneurs and their career decision making.

One of the most significant contributions of my study is expanding the conceptual boundary of corporate entrepreneurship to the realm of entrepreneurial career development. Corporate entrepreneurship has been considered as individuals’ entrepreneurial behaviors
(Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001, 2003) or one of middle managers’ roles (Burström & Wilson, 2015; Fulop, 1991; Hornsby et al., 2002) to an entrepreneurial career. However, the motivational aspect of the participants of this study clearly showed that working as a corporate entrepreneur is part of their long-term career trajectory.

The three categories (i.e., developmental readiness, having a career aspiration, and being triggered) support the findings of previous entrepreneurial career literature. First, the category, “developmental readiness” confirms the evidence from previous studies (e.g., Chen & Thompson, 2016; Burton et al. 2016; Sorgner & Fritsch, 2018), in that most entrepreneurs started their entrepreneurial careers based on their prior occupational history. Because the learned knowledge and skills in an earlier career stage become the foundation for the next career stage, the entrepreneurial career must be built upon the prior working experience of entrepreneurs (Minniti & Bygrave, 2001). As many studies have revealed, successful business creation and operation is strongly influenced by the extent of entrepreneurs’ prior employment history (e.g., Chen & Thompson, 2016; Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Georgellis & Yusuf, 2016; Gimeno, Folta, Cooper, & Woo, 1997; Madsen, Neergaard, & Ulhøi, 2003; Mallon & Cohen, 2001). Specifically, their accumulated human and social capital played key roles in their career transition to entrepreneurship (Hytti, 2010). Likewise, my participants also utilized their accumulated work experience and expertise to conduct the new corporate entrepreneurial activity, which is similar to the entrepreneurial career transition of other employees (Burton et al. 2016; Hytti, 2010).

The other two categories, “having a career aspiration” and “being triggered” also provide a rationale for locating corporate entrepreneurship in the discourse of entrepreneurial career by corroborating the previous theoretical perspectives on entrepreneurial career motivation. The
extant entrepreneurial career literature has explained the motivation of transitioning to an entrepreneurial career using a push and pull factor model (e.g., Dawson & Henley, 2012; Sorgner & Fritsch, 2018). A push factor refers to a negative determinant that forces employees to leave the current job or employer, thus prompting them to enter into an entrepreneurial career. Examples of push factors are lay-offs or dissatisfactory working conditions (e.g., Abebe & Alvarado, 2018; Mallett & Wapshott, 2015). Conversely, a pull factor provides an impetus to start a business. The commonly mentioned pull factors are better financial reward or better working conditions such as flexibility, autonomy, and work-life balance (WLB) (e.g., Kautonen, Kibler, & Minniti, 2017; Mallon & Cohen, 2001; Patterson & Mavin, 2012). Push and pull factors have been considered the most prominent elements explaining individuals’ career choices and migration (Chen & Thompson, 2016; Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Mallon & Cohen, 2001; Sorgner & Fritsch, 2018).

Interestingly, two different types of motivation were identified in my interviews with the participants of this study. Participants were motivated either by their own ambition and vision of a long-term entrepreneurial career, or triggered by unexpected threats to their careers. These two contrasting causes reflect the push and pull factors of a career transition, respectively. First, participants who were triggered by a career crisis or anxiety chose a corporate entrepreneurial career as an alternate career within the organization. For the participants who assessed themselves as unattractive candidates for the next level of the organizational hierarchy such as a team leader or upper managerial position, corporate entrepreneurship became an option to position themselves as an expert or specialist to overcome their perceived vulnerability.

Another type of motivation was strong career aspiration. Several participants had strong entrepreneurial personalities and always tried to align their personal vision and goals with their
organization’s strategic mission and advancement. The participants dove into corporate entrepreneurial work because they thought it was a good opportunity to learn knowledge and skills, establish a business network, and even test new ideas that might benefit their own business in the future. The corporate entrepreneurial projects provided them with a small-scale business environment and as a test bed for the next career outside the current organization such as a start-up or self-employment. As such, these participants considered corporate entrepreneurship as preparation or a rehearsal for their long-term career (i.e., the next entrepreneurial career outside of organizations).

In summary, the above three categories presented that corporate entrepreneurship could be an entrepreneurial career or, at least, part of it. This expansion of the conceptual boundary could contribute to building an entrepreneurial career development theory in two ways. First, previous literature on corporate entrepreneurship has ignored corporate entrepreneurship as an entrepreneurial career. Many researchers have defined corporate entrepreneurship as employees’ entrepreneurship within established organizations (e.g., Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003; Holt et al., 2007; Rutherford et al., 2007). However, my analysis suggested that corporate entrepreneurship is closely related to individuals’ career choice and career transition. In addition, few attempts have been made to examine the process of an entrepreneurial career transition, regarding how individuals prepare themselves before leaving the organization and launching their own business. This lack of processual perspective of corporate entrepreneurship has limited our understanding of the relationship between corporate entrepreneurship and the phenomenon of entrepreneurial career transition. Hence, our understanding of how corporate entrepreneurial experiences affect individuals’ long-term career decisions and trajectory has remained elusive.
In this sense, the significance of this study is the discovery of the role of corporate entrepreneurship as a transition from employees to employers. In other words, this study reveals the continuum of organizational employees, corporate entrepreneurship, to entrepreneurship under the overarching entrepreneurial career concept.

**Discussion Point Two: Connecting Corporate Entrepreneurial Learning to the Process of Constructing Entrepreneurial Identity**

The second question that I explored in this study was the process of how middle managers construct their corporate entrepreneurial identity. Categories of “being engaged in a CE activity,” “changes that accompany CE activity,” and “internalizing CE as a new role” account for the process of constructing a corporate entrepreneurial identity in this study.

Exploring the processual aspect of corporate entrepreneurship and identity construction of the participants can be a significant contribution to entrepreneurship theory. Traditionally, entrepreneurship research has maintained the view that entrepreneurs are naturally born with fixed characteristics of entrepreneurial personalities. However, the recent confluence of the sociological perspective in the field of entrepreneurship (Thornton, 1999; Thornton et al. 2011) has altered our understanding of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship as a “process of becoming,” rather than “a state of being” (Bygrave, 1989, p. 21). This paradigmatic change introduces approaches to entrepreneurial activity as a process of business creation (Hjorth et al., 2015; McMullen & Dimov, 2013; Rindova, Barry, & Ketchen Jr, 2009; Steyaert, 2007).

The findings from this study also revealed the process of becoming a corporate entrepreneur as one of the focal interests of my study. Specifically, two processes of entrepreneurship in relation to becoming a corporate entrepreneur were identified in this study:
entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial identity construction. Each process is discussed in detail with the corresponding theoretical framework.

Once involved in a corporate entrepreneurial activity, participants felt that the new task or role was very complex and somewhat overwhelming. The corporate entrepreneurial work also required new skills, expanded domain knowledge, and different processes compared to what they had done in their current or previous position. To achieve successful results, the participants became deeply engaged in their newly assigned role and task, and needed to understand the business and industry from a broader perspective, like entrepreneurs. Although they experienced considerable stress, the participants made various attempts to test their business ideas and accomplish the successful outcomes. Through this process, the complex and dynamic nature of corporate entrepreneurial activity promoted the participants to engage in intensive learning and developmental activities to acquire more knowledge, enhance their skills, and manage uncertainty.

The findings regarding participants’ learning processes can be best explained through the lens of entrepreneurial learning theory (Cope, 2005; Minniti & Bygrave, 2001). Entrepreneurship researchers have argued that entrepreneurship should be understood as a contextual process of “becoming” entrepreneurs (Rae, 2000) through a continuous process of learning and development during business creation (Cope, 2005; Minniti & Bygrave, 2001). Entrepreneurial learning is defined as the learning of entrepreneurs in the process of the creation and development of a business (Cope, 2005). There are two types of learning under the concept of entrepreneurial learning: *exploitation* and *exploration* (Minniti & Bygrave, 2001). Exploitation is utilizing what is already known or learned, suggesting that entrepreneurs learn by applying their
pre-existing knowledge and skills to a new task or project, whereas exploration is taking new actions that are different from what they have done or known (Politis, 2005).

The participants of this study engaged in both exploitative and explorative learning. As P11 noted, “Learning, learning, and learning. No end.” The participants first equipped themselves with new knowledge and skills acquired from intensive self-study. Then they tried to connect what they already knew to the newly acquired knowledge. The next step was the trial-and-error phase, which is represented in P6’s comment, “[I] persistently attempt to find ideas, embrace failures, and rise again,” because there is no fixed answer to their work.

One interesting finding is participants’ broader view of their work and organization. Before taking on a corporate entrepreneurial role, the participants’ primary interests were their own success and development. However, leading corporate entrepreneurial projects provided transformative learning so they could see their work and team from both vertical and horizontal perspectives.

Through their multiple attempts and collaborations with others, the participants also experienced expanded work boundaries and business networks. This process of corporate entrepreneurial learning gave participants an extraordinary sense of fulfillment because they had a strong desire for personal growth and development. Thus, incrementally and ultimately, the participants felt that the corporate entrepreneurial work or role fits them very well, and they started to shape their corporate entrepreneurial identity. The participants embraced the corporate entrepreneurship as part of their new sense of self, and did not consider it as a task or merely an assigned role.

The link between entrepreneurial learning and identity construction of the corporate entrepreneurs is another significant finding of this study. Rae (2000, 2005) defined
entrepreneurial learning as a social process where the entrepreneurs’ identity was socially emerged and developed. My finding also brings this connection into the discourse of corporate entrepreneurship. By embarking on corporate entrepreneurial activity, the participants gradually perceived and negotiated their new roles in the organizational context, and shaped their new sense of self as a corporate entrepreneur.

Identity theories (Burke, 2006; Stets & Stryker, 2000) explain the transition from an employee to a corporate entrepreneur, or the process of constructing a corporate entrepreneurial identity. Individuals define themselves based on their role or category/group. Among identity theories, identity control theory (ICT) (Burke, 2006) is particularly relevant to the findings of this study. According to Burke (2006), “an identity is viewed as a set of self-relevant meanings held as standards for the identity in question” (p. 81). For example, for the role identity of an entrepreneur, the standard would be running a business or owning a company. Burke further explained the change in individuals’ identity when there are discrepancies between “the meanings in the identity standard and the meanings in the situation” (p. 82). Thus, when individuals perceive the discrepancies between the meaning of their role and expectations from others, they try to fill the gap to meet the expectations by modifying their behaviors in situations where their identity is activated. As a result, individuals’ identity change.

The experiences of participants of this study are aligned with ICT. When the participants were first assigned to a corporate entrepreneurial role, they faced many challenges between their current role and newly assigned role. By adjusting to the new role, they tried to meet the expectations of the organization. Conducting a successful corporate entrepreneurial project enabled the participants to gain recognition from other organizational constituents, such as their supervisors or employees in other project teams or business functions. Through this process, the
participants gradually internalized the corporate entrepreneurial identity as their new sense of self.

There is another interesting aspect of the study participants’ identity change/construction. Burke (2006) claimed that individuals experience identity conflict when their performance of the identity is not demonstrated vis-à-vis others’ expectations. However, only two participants in this study said a corporate entrepreneur was not their role. They had a strong professional and flexible identity that defined their role as “doing whatever they should do for the organization in return for a salary.” This broad conceptualization of their role identity enabled them to perceive their corporate entrepreneurial role as just one of several tasks in their organization. The only difference I identified between the two participants and the other participants is a lack of long-term career goal. Therefore, having career aspiration affected the participants’ identity construction and the way they embraced the idea of corporate entrepreneur as a career identity, their salience of identity among other identities.

Ten participants also acknowledged that they had taken on a corporate entrepreneurial role identity. They had a strong professional and flexible identity as an employee, but also a strong career desire. This professional identity might play a key role in a smooth transition of their identities from “What am I doing?” to “Who am I doing this for?”

**Discussion Point Three: Becoming a Corporate Entrepreneur and Defining an Entrepreneurial Self**

The core category, “Becoming a Corporate Entrepreneur” and its four subcategories (“Pursuing a unique career as a vanguard,” “Working as a boundary spanner,” “Actualizing personal vision through work,” and “Separating self from the commercial image of entrepreneur”) should be discussed in relation to the current discourse around entrepreneurial
identity. Some commonalities and differences between my findings and the existing literature are discussed below.

Descriptions in the literature of experiences of being an entrepreneur have often included metaphoric explanations (e.g., Down & Reveley, 2004; Hytti, 2005; Mathias & Williams, 2018). As Morgan (1980) argued, understanding the root metaphors in a certain field elucidates the insights of underlying assumptions and dominant thought patterns that often do not explicitly come into view. Thus, by understanding the images and metaphors reflecting an entrepreneurial identity, we can gain a deeper understanding of the thought patterns and meanings of an entrepreneur (Lundmark, Krzeminska, & Shepherd, 2017).

Several metaphors were identified through my interviews with the study participants, which reflects the meaning of becoming a corporate entrepreneur. First, participants called themselves (or wanted to be called) very innovative, bold, and creative individuals. For example, P12 used a “creator” metaphor to describe himself as one who “marches to the unknown.” Likewise, P10 described himself as “a guy who carved out a new path.” P11 gained a reputation as “an innovation expert” from her supervisors. P7 used a “weirdo” metaphor, which alluded to her pride in her work “because nobody works in the same way” as she did. These metaphors represent that the participants recognized their job as unique in the organization, and the role of corporate entrepreneurs as a pioneering role.

Not surprisingly, the pioneer and hero metaphors of entrepreneurs have often been mentioned in many entrepreneurship studies because the characteristics of entrepreneurs have been illustrated with words such as persistence, taking risks, and innovativeness (e.g., Down & Reveley, 2004; Larson & Pearson, 2012; Mills & Pawson, 2012). However, these images of a heroic figure do not necessarily refer to becoming a solitary hero. As Mathias and Williams
(2017) depicted, the entrepreneurs who mentioned heroism also described an entrepreneur’s team and goodfellas working together. For my study participants, two subcategories “pursuing a unique career as a forerunner” and “working as a boundary spanner” under the category of “becoming a corporate entrepreneur” are consistent with the heroic image of entrepreneurs.

There were, however, some differences in the participants’ self-images from the traditional images of entrepreneurship. The distinct characteristics of becoming a corporate entrepreneur can be understood through the categories of “actualizing personal vision through work” and “separating self from the commercial image of entrepreneur.”

First, the participants considered a corporate entrepreneur role as a vehicle to actualize their personal vision. For example, P4 contended that she was working for her own mission of talent development, and in so doing, she wanted to contribute to the greater social benefit. Likewise, P12 focused on his own values and beliefs, and tried to make it a reality through his work. In addition, although 10 out of 12 participants did not deny being labeled as a corporate entrepreneur, they explicitly tried to maintain distance from the commercial image of entrepreneur.

Perhaps this distinction between an entrepreneur and corporate entrepreneur as a self-image requires more culturally nuanced interpretation. The participants’ refusal to be called as an entrepreneur may come from their negative perspectives toward the concept of an entrepreneur in South Korea who are often considered as a greedy profit-seeking personal. Traditionally, many South Koreans have thought that there must be a significant correlation between a successful entrepreneur (or his or her firm) and unethical behaviors of the entrepreneur (Lee & Park, 2010). Thus, the participants of this study may try to keep a distance from the greedy
image of an entrepreneur, and put an emphasis on their vision toward the organization or broader society.

Another interpretation can assist to understand their denial to be labeled as an entrepreneur. Because their positionality is the middle of the organizational hierarchy, they may not think themselves as an entrepreneur. For them, an entrepreneur is a person who established or owned a company. In addition, the collectivistic mindset of the participants may contribute to this conception. The participants of the study kept talking about their attachment and loyalty to their organization. All the participants put a strong emphasis on their belongingness to their organization and stated that their love and loyalty to their organization are part of their drivers to engage in corporate entrepreneurial activity. This cultural aspect of their identity help them shape a corporate entrepreneurial identity. Thus, the participants’ identity as a middle manager led them to the idea of separating themselves from the image of an entrepreneur and encouraged them to accept the corporate entrepreneur as one of roles they play in their organizational context.

Based on the participants of my study, therefore, a profit-seeking motivation is not always the key driver to perform a corporate entrepreneurial role. Rather, they were interested in doing something worthwhile and leaving a significant mark on their organizations, individual lives, and the society at large. This motivation is very similar to that of social entrepreneurs (Lewis, 2016; Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016).

Rindova et al. (2009) defined the term, entrepreneuring as “efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or a group of individuals” (p. 477). In this sense, entrepreneurship is not only about wealth creation through venturing, but is also about why entrepreneurs act in a certain fashion in creating and
running businesses, and how they achieve their individual aspirations (Rindova et al., 2009). In this sense, corporate entrepreneuring is not merely a profit-seeking activity. As shown in the previous research on entrepreneurial identity, it is a quest for becoming a meaningful actor for their organizations and lives. Hence, for the corporate entrepreneurs in my study, doing business could be expanded to a way of life and a journey to self-fulfillment. As a consequence, I provide a definition of corporate entrepreneur in South Korea: a corporate entrepreneur is an entrepreneurial individual within existing organizations, pursuing individual career success and vision, in tandem with aspiring the success of organizations they belong to.

Implications

The findings of this study can contribute to the theoretical advancement of corporate entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial identity and entrepreneurial career development. In addition, there are also implications for organizational leaders and human resource development (HRD) professionals.

Theoretical Implications

Findings from this study can add several insights to existing theories. Specifically, my study provides the building blocks for theorizing corporate entrepreneurship development in terms of motivational aspects, the role of entrepreneurial learning in the corporate entrepreneurial process, cultural influence on corporate entrepreneur identity construction. Findings from this study also contributes to HRD and career development literature by revealing the role of corporate entrepreneurship in entrepreneurial career choice.

First of all, this study uncovers middle managers’ motivations to become a corporate entrepreneur or engage in corporate entrepreneurial activity. Kuratko et al (2005) suggested five critical antecedents of middle managers’ corporate entrepreneurial behaviors: supportive
management, work discretion and autonomy, reward and reinforcement, time availability, and organizational boundaries (i.e., clear standard for outcome expectations and process of assessing, selecting and utilizing the outcome). More recently, Urbano and Turró (2013) suggested that individuals are likely to become a corporate entrepreneur when they have enough knowledge and experiences for the role. These studies are grounded in resource-based view (RBV) theory on entrepreneurship, which contends that individuals embark on entrepreneurial activity if they have available resources and time. Although these antecedents may be important for middle managers’ successful corporate entrepreneurial activity, yet little is known about how those antecedents shape middle managers’ motivation for diving into a corporate entrepreneurial activity. My study fills in this void by suggesting that strong career aspirations can lead middle managers to corporate entrepreneurship, by either seeking a prospect career or trying to find an alternate career option. Thus, the underlying motivational mechanisms of participating in corporate entrepreneurial activity can be considered as the preliminary stage for future entrepreneurial career outside of the organization, should be considered in the process of corporate entreprenuring.

Second, the role of middle managers’ entrepreneurial learning in their corporate entrepreneurial process deserves more attention. Existing models of individuals’ corporate entrepreneurship (e.g., Kuratko et al., 2005; Hornsby et al., 1993) provide processes of how individual employees engage in a corporate entrepreneurial activity. However, these studies have ignored the role of learning in that process. I argued that, based on the findings of my study, entrepreneurial learning should be incorporated into the process of becoming a corporate entrepreneur because individuals experience a steep learning curve during the process. In the same vein, my findings also shed light on the intertwined relationship between entrepreneurial
learning and identity development of corporate entrepreneurs. The findings of this study suggest that how exploitative and explorative learning contribute to knowledge building and skill refinement of corporate entrepreneurs. Such learning can shape corporate entrepreneurial identity.

Third, findings from this study shed some lights on the relationship between a non-western culture and identity construction of a corporate entrepreneur. As Burke (2006) argued with his identity control theory (ICT), individuals may experience identity conflict when there are differences between their self-images and others’ expectations. In particular, scholars have said that middle managers experience identity conflicts due to their ‘betwixt and between position’ in the organizational hierarchy (i.e., the role of a leader and a follower) (Harding et al., 2014). However, the study participants did not show any role conflict in their transition to a corporate entrepreneurial role. Rather, their professional identity and loyalty acted as buffers in their identity change. The participants have a strong, but flexible role identity as a professional, which makes them embrace any role assigned by their organization. In addition, the participants emphasized that they are part of the organization and pursue the organizational success while trying to achieve their own vision. They did not just exploit the organizational resources for their career development. Rather, they try to maintain the balance between individual career and organizational success. This strong attachment to their organization influences participants’ identity transition to a corporate entrepreneur. In other words, their compliance to the organizational order can reduce their identity conflict in the transition. This can signal to entrepreneurial identity or identity change theories that multiple identities may not only conflicting but also buffering under the specific cultural context.
Last, in terms of HRD and career development theorizing, findings from this study revealed a link between the process of becoming a corporate entrepreneur and middle managers’ entrepreneurial career choice. By incorporating corporate entrepreneurship into the phases of entrepreneurial career development, this study expands our view of an entrepreneurial career. In particular, this study found that corporate entrepreneurship can be a terminal career or preliminary stage of the long-term career. This can add to the existing models of employees’ entrepreneurial career transition that corporate entrepreneurship can be a preparation stage between an incumbent employee and an employer. Researchers of entrepreneurial career transition can utilize these findings to delve into the process of employees’ transition to entrepreneurship and how they prepare themselves and what urges them to do it.

**Practical Implications**

Based on the findings of this study, organizational leaders can recognize the value of middle managers as corporate entrepreneurs. Researchers have identified middle managers as the most appropriate resources for corporate entrepreneurship because they have accumulated knowledge and skills, have experienced more than one functional transfer, and still desire personal growth and career aspirations (Holt et al., 2007; Ren & Guo, 2011). Middle managers understand the culture and norms of the organization and work effectively when they are empowered. However, to date, entrepreneurship researchers have presented little empirical evidence regarding why and how middle managers are valuable resources for corporate entrepreneurship. My study identifies middle managers’ motivations and processes of becoming corporate entrepreneurs. The findings of my study can help change leaders’ and executives’ perception of middle managers from being lower-level management to strategic change agents.
Organizational leaders should also provide corporate entrepreneurial career development opportunities for middle managers as an alternative career path. Doing so can lead to better organizational outcomes, such as a lower turnover rate and higher job satisfaction among middle managers, which ultimately contributes to talent retention and increased organizational performance. For example, as entrepreneurial career researchers have revealed, bureaucracy is a push factor that often prompts employees to leave the organization because it reduces employees’ entrepreneurial intentions and creativity (Mallon & Cohen, 2001; Özcan & Reichstein, 2009; Sørensen, 2007). However, my study showed that if employees can be turned into corporate entrepreneurs as an antidote for the organizational inertia, then they might choose to stay and contribute to the company. As a result, both organizations and middle managers can benefit.

Organizational leaders can also build a learning organization for a long-term goal of establishing an entrepreneurial culture in the organization. Entrepreneurial learning can be maximized when the culture of the organization is favorable to employees’ learning, which, in turn, helps develop corporate entrepreneurs. Therefore, fostering corporate entrepreneurship can be better achieved by cultivating learning culture of the organization.

My study also has practical implications for HRD professionals whose mission it is to develop corporate entrepreneurs. Learning and development activities played a huge role in the process of career transition and identity construction of the corporate entrepreneurs in this study. HR professionals can facilitate these processes with specially designed interventions in terms of training and development, organization development, and career development. For example, action learning is an effective way to develop corporate entrepreneurs. Existing literature on entrepreneurship education has found that action learning can facilitate entrepreneurship
education and training (Jones-Evans, Williams, & Deacon, 2000; Taatila, 2010). Providing a simulated learning environment or real case assignments stimulates middle managers (or even employees at other levels) to discover their entrepreneurial spirit and competencies. In addition, in-house training, structured on-the-job training (S-OJT), job design, and rotation can also be effective methods to identify and develop corporate entrepreneurs. As revealed by the participants of this study, taking part in corporate entrepreneurial activity began with a functional move, job rotation, or team change. Thus, carefully designed interventions that target on developing employees’ entrepreneurial intentions and competencies may contribute to developing corporate entrepreneurs.

**Research Implications**

As with all studies, there are several limitations in the present study in terms of the study participants, research context, and research methods. Each limitation offers opportunities for future research. First, participants of this study were middle managers working in a large corporate sector. Therefore, the findings of this study only reflect the thoughts and experiences of this sample. However, middle managers are not the only group that engages in corporate entrepreneurship. Many researchers have studied senior executives, and CEOs (e.g., Boone, Lokshin, Guenter, & Belderbos, 2019; Jones, Jolly, Lubojacky, Martin, & Gomez-Mejia, 2019) and employees at the lower-levels of organizational hierarchy who have also engaged in corporate entrepreneurial activities (e.g., Gawke et al., 2017; Menzel, Aaltio, & Ulijn, 2007). Thus, studying the corporate entrepreneurial identity construction processes of different populations can result in a richer and perhaps more balanced understanding of the phenomenon and help researchers build a comprehensive theory of corporate entrepreneurship.
In addition, I only explored the experiences of middle managers who are highly successful in their role. However, corporate entrepreneurial projects have a high rate of failure, and many corporate entrepreneurs have experienced negative emotions that ultimately lead to their departure from their organizations (Shepherd, Covin, & Kuratko, 2009; Shepherd, Haynie, & Patzelt, 2013). In addition, some entrepreneurial individuals can experience identity conflict depending on the roles imposed on them (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009), but in this study, I chose to focus on individuals who did not experience such conflicts. Hence, future studies should include unsuccessful corporate entrepreneurs or people who have experienced considerable role identity conflict because doing so may add different perspectives and bring a new understanding of the process of constructing corporate entrepreneurial identity.

Second, the context of this study was limited to large companies in private sector industries in South Korea. Thus, the findings from this study should be interpreted with caution and within such a context. In other words, they should not be generalized to other contexts. For future research, scholars may explore corporate entrepreneurial identity in different contexts such as public industries (e.g., government institution or school contexts) or small-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as in different national contexts. Further, since this study is one of a few cases of investigations of corporate entrepreneurial identity in non-Western contexts, studying the corporate entrepreneurial identity process in countries with similar or different cultural characteristics can expand our understanding of the phenomenon.

Lastly, there are also some limitations in the data generation process. Due to the geographical distance between the participants and the researcher, I was unable to utilize a face-to-face interview technique that is considered a primary method for collecting data in qualitative studies. Although I utilized advanced conference calling, having only telephone interviews may
not fully capture the emotions and nuances of the participants’ reflections. Using other data generation techniques such as face-to-face interviewing, observations or focus group interviews (FGI) in future research may help generate fresh or different insights. In addition, in grounded theory, multiple sources of data are encouraged (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). To this end, I urged researchers to consider collecting and analyzing other textual or visual materials such as internal corporate reports, products of corporate entrepreneurial activity, or reflection notes of corporate entrepreneurs.

**Conclusion**

South Korean middle managers who are currently engaging in corporate entrepreneurial activity in large were the target population for this dissertation study. The purpose was to explore the process of constructing corporate entrepreneurial identity of middle managers, by asking why Korean middle manager engage in corporate entrepreneurial activity and how they construct a corporate entrepreneurial identity.

The significance of this study is grounded in the increased attention to corporate entrepreneurship as a vehicle to address the growing challenges and daunting competition for large established companies in the marketplace. Corporate entrepreneurship has been pointed as an effective antidote to organizational inertia and a way of revitalizing the company. Therefore, developing and fostering corporate entrepreneurs is a significant and timely issue for many established organizations.

Among diverse organizational constituents, middle managers have been considered as particularly important resources for corporate entrepreneurship due to their strategic importance. Despite the possible contributions of middle managers as corporate entrepreneurs, however, a
paucity of studies has been conducted to explore their process of becoming a corporate entrepreneur, and their identity construction. My study contributes to filling in this void.

Corporate entrepreneurship has recently gained strong interests from both academia and industry in South Korea. South Korea is facing economic slowdown and many Korean companies are losing their competitiveness in the global market because mostly economic growth had been driven by the large conglomerates that are now suffering from innovativeness, agility and creativity. The contextual background of Korea, in that corporate entrepreneurship is in the center of attention, provides a rich context and opportunities to explore the experiences of middle managers’ corporate entrepreneurial process.

I conducted a qualitative inquiry using a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014). I invited and interviewed 12 South Korean middle managers working in large companies. My interviews resulted in 995 minutes 48 seconds of recordings, which turned out to be 145 single-spaced pages of transcription. Following the guideline of grounded theory methods suggested by Charmaz (2014), I analyzed the data and identified seven categories and 20 subcategories as major findings.

One of the most significant contributions of my study is to expand the conceptual boundary of corporate entrepreneurship to entrepreneurial career development. My findings suggested that Korean middle managers engage in corporate entrepreneurial activity as their career choice triggered either by their internal motivation to proactively seek the next opportunity or perceived threat to their current positionality in the company. By engaging in a corporate entrepreneurial activity, participants connect their corporate entrepreneurial role to their long-term career vision, or utilize it as a strategy to position themselves within the current
organization. Doing so, the study participants try to achieve both individual growth and organizational success through their corporate entrepreneurship.

The second significant contribution is that this study confirms the role of entrepreneurial learning in the construction of corporate entrepreneurial identity. By continuously engaging in corporate entrepreneurial identity, participants expanded their knowledge, skills and the perspectives of business, organization and their role and career. With the strong desire for personal growth and development, participants gain a sense of fulfillment that makes them feel that the corporate entrepreneurial role is well-suited for themselves. This idea ultimately leads them to embrace a corporate entrepreneur as their new identity.

Third, this study identified how the Korean middle managers shape their image as a corporate entrepreneur. Because corporate entrepreneuring is not merely a way of achieving business success but actualizing individual vision (i.e., contributing to advancement of organization, or larger society), the study participants define their corporate entrepreneurial identity differently from the commercial entrepreneurship. Hence, the participants of the study defined themselves using other terms such as an innovator, pioneer or creator. In that sense, becoming a corporate entrepreneur is not just taking a role or task but a way of life and a journey to self-fulfillment.

Finally, findings of this study remind us of the importance of context in the study of corporate entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial identity. As revealed in this study, a cultural context can influence individuals’ identity construction because multiple identities can be interpreted in various ways depending on the cultural contexts. In this study, the interactions between participants’ professional identity and organizational attachment, which might be the distinct component of Korean (or Asian countries) culture, helped shape entrepreneurial identity,
rather than impedes. Future research on corporate entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial identity, and entrepreneurial career development, therefore, should take cultural influence into consideration.
REFERENCES


Birks, M., Mills, J., Francis, K., & Chapman, Y. (2009). A thousand words paint a picture: The
use of storyline in grounded theory research. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 14*, 405-
417.

Sage.

Bommer, M., DeLaPorte, R., & Higgins, J. (2002). Skunkworks approach to project

Boon, J., Van der Klink, M., & Janssen, J. (2013). Fostering intrapreneurial competencies of
employees in the education sector. *International Journal of Training and Development,
17*, 210-220.

diversity, corporate entrepreneurship, and innovation in multinational firms. *Strategic

19*, 1-9.

Bredvold, R., & Skålén, P. (2016). Lifestyle entrepreneurs and their identity construction: A

Brockhaus Sr, R. H. (1994). Entrepreneurship and family business research: Comparisons,


APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

January 18, 2019

Type of Review: Submission Response for Initial Review Submission Form
Title: CONSTRUCTION OF CORPORATE ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY: A CASE OF MIDDLE MANAGERS IN SOUTH KOREA
Investigator: Jia Wang
IRB ID: IRB2018-1644
Reference Number: 085561
Funding: Internal

Documents Reviewed:
- Information sheet_Revised_2nd (English) - (Version 1.1)
- Recruitment email revised - (Version 1.0)
- Certificate of Translation_JINLEE - (Version 1.0)
- Interview_Protocol_ver2.0 - (Version 1.0)
- Letter of cultural evaluation - (Version 1.0)
- Demographic_questions_ver_Korean - (Version 1.0)
- Information sheet Korean - (Version 1.0)
- Interview_Protocol_ver_Korean - (Version 1.0)
- Demographic questions - (Version 1.0)

Dear Jia Wang:

The HRPP determined on 01/18/2019 that this research meets the criteria for Exemption in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) under Category 2: Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior unless, the information is obtained in an identifiable manner and any disclosure of the subjects responses outside of research could reasonably place the subject at risk.

This determination applies only to the activities described in this IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made you must immediately contact the IRB. You may be required to submit a new request to the IRB.

Your exemption is good for five (5) years from the Approval Start Date. At that time, you must contact the IRB with your intent to close the study or request a new determination.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Administrative Office at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636.

Sincerely,
IRB Administration

750 Agronomy Road, Suite 2701
1186 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-1186
Tel: 979.458.1467 Fax: 979.862.3176
http://irb.tamu.edu
APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Subject: Inviting your participation in my dissertation project

Hi!

My name is Jin Lee, and I am a Ph.D. candidate majoring in Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. Currently, I am a Ph.D. student working on my dissertation project. I am writing to warmly invite you to participate in my study which aims to understand the process of middle managers’ corporate entrepreneurial identity construction. I would be deeply grateful if you will spare a few minutes to read this invitation.

Why you? I believe you will be the ideal participant for my study because you (1) are a middle manager (2) full-time employee in a large corporation in Korea; and (3) are currently engaging in corporate venturing, strategic renewal, or an innovative projects. Thus, your work experiences will be extremely valuable and informative to this study. I sincerely hope you will consider sharing your stories of corporate entrepreneurship with me!

How can you help me? To help me with this study, all you need to do is to have a 1-1.5 hours face-to-face or Skype or phone conversation with me. We will do it on a date and time that is most convenient for you. To participate, you do not need to prepare in advance; however, to facilitate our conversation, you may want to reflect on your professional experiences related to corporate entrepreneurship.

Your personal identity (e.g., name and affiliation) will not be revealed, nor attached to any written documentation or verbal presentation of my research. Your confidentiality will be maintained at all times, in accordance with the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University. If you have any questions, please contact me (jinlee.hr@gmail.com) or my Ph.D. advisor, Dr. Jia Wang (jiawang@tamu.edu).

As a small token of my great appreciation, I will send you a $20 Starbucks’ gift card upon completion of your interview.

I look forward to your positive support! Thank you so much for reading my letter.

Appreciatively,

Jin Lee
Ph.D. Candidate, Graduate Assistant
Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development
College of Education | Texas A&M University
E-mail: jinlee.hr@gmail.com
APPENDIX C

INFORMATION SHEET

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Construction of Corporate Entrepreneurial Identity: A Case of Middle Managers in South Korea

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Jin Lee, a Ph.D. Candidate, and Dr. Jia Wang, a full professor from Texas A&M University, College of Education and Human Development. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this study is to explore the process of middle managers’ identity construction as corporate entrepreneurs.

Why am I being asked to be in this study?
You are being asked to be in this study because you are a South Korean middle manager in a large corporation and currently engaging in a corporate entrepreneurial experience.

How many people will be asked to be in this study?
10 to 50 participants will be invited to participate in this study.

What are the alternatives to being in this study?
The alternative to being in the study is not to participate. No other activity will be given if you choose not to participate.

What will I be asked to do in this study?
You will be asked to take part in a phone or Skype interview, which will last one-two hours. A short follow-up interview may be conducted by Skype, phone, or email. You may also be asked to review a summary of your own interview transcript afterwards to verify the content. The total participation in this study will last up to three hours and includes a maximum of two visits.

Visit 1
This visit will last 60-120 minutes. During the first visit, the interviewer will introduce the study briefly and walk you through the Information sheet. You will be given time (as much as you need) to read through the Information sheet and ask any questions. The researcher will ask for you to give a verbal agreement to participate in the study prior to starting the interview. After you agree with the content, the interviewer will proceed with the interview.
Visit 2
If the interviewer has further questions or needs clarifications about the first interview, he may contact you and ask for a second visit. During the second visit, the interviewer will ask questions he has regarding the first visit. These questions may be asked through a telephone call or an email. The estimated time for the second visit will be 60 minutes or less.

Will photos, video, or audio recordings be made of me during the study?
Your participation in the interview will be audio recorded only with your permission. The researchers will make an audio recording during the study so that the interview can be transcribed verbatim. The researchers will take notes of your comments during the interview, if you do not give permission for an audio recording.

Are there any risks to me?
The things that you will be doing have no expected risks. Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions are stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to.

Will there be any cost to me?
Aside from your time, there is no cost for taking part in the study.

Will I be paid to be in this study?
You will receive a $20 Starbucks’ gift card. The interviewer will send you the gift card after the first interview is completed. You will receive the gift card through your email or via smartphone in the form of a gift icon.

Will information from this study be kept private?
The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Dr. Jia Wang and Jin Lee will have access to the records.

People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly. The institution(s) where study procedures are being performed (Texas A&M University) may also see your information. However, any information that is sent to them will be coded with a number so that they cannot tell who you are. Representatives from these entities can see information that has your name on it if they come to the study site to view records. If there are any reports about this study, your name will not be in them.

Information about you and information related to this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

Who may I contact for more information?
You may contact the Principal Investigator, Jia Wang, Ph.D., to tell her about a concern or complaint about this research at 979-862-7808 or jiawang@tamu.edu. For an alternate contact, you may also contact the protocol director, Jin Lee at 979-255-4605 or jinlee.hr@gmail.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to provide input regarding research, or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office by phone at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tamu.edu.

**What if I change my mind about participating?**
This research is voluntary, and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your student status, medical care, employment, evaluation, relationship with Texas A&M University, etc. Any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you. This information could affect your willingness to continue participation.
Gender:

Year of birth:

Educational attainments:
   Level:
   Major:

Total years of work experience:

Current position:
   Years:
   Position (industry):
   Job title:

Past work experience:
   Years:
   Position(s) (industry(ies)):
   Job title:
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Opening question:
Tell me about yourself (Simple demographic questions about age, position, etc.)

Transition question:
Now I’d like to ask you about your professional experience. Tell me about your current role in the workplace.

Probing questions:
1. Tell me any general information about your current job: How did you start the job?
2. How do you define your major role at work?
3. Please tell me your experience of recent corporate entrepreneurial project
4. What was the motivation for your current work role?
5. What do you think of “corporate entrepreneurship”? 
6. Please describe the first event that led you to engage in corporate entrepreneurship and why. What was the trigger?
7. What were the positive aspects of working as a corporate entrepreneur?
8. What were the negative aspects of working as a corporate entrepreneur?
9. When do you feel a sense of achievement? Or What makes you feel proud of yourself?
10. If any, what are the differences between you before CE and you after CE?

Ending questions:
Is there anything else you want to add to what we were talking about today?

Note: Thank you so much for your participation. I will go back and transcribe this interview and send you a copy of the transcript for you to check if it captures what you wanted to communicate. If further clarifications are needed, I will contact you for a follow-up meeting or send you an email with additional questions.
What is Corporate Entrepreneurship?
A corporate entrepreneur refers to an individual who is working for an organization and is being engaged in one or more than one of the following activities:

- Corporate venturing: a corporate venture is an independent business unit within an organization.
- Strategic Renewal: this activity means a significant change in the business model or strategy. For example, IBM, which changes its business model from manufacturer to a service provider can be a representative example.
- Innovation: Internal process improvement, new products or service development

Opening question:
Tell me about yourself (Simple demographic questions about age, position, etc.)

Transition question:
Now I’d like to ask you about your professional experience. Tell me about your current role in the workplace.

Probing questions:
1. Tell me any general information about your current job: How did you start the job?
2. How do you define your major role at work?
3. Please tell me your experience of recent corporate entrepreneurial project
4. What was the motivation for your current work role?
5. Please describe the first event that led you to engage in corporate entrepreneurship and why. What was the trigger?
6. When do you feel that this is your work or role?
7. What were the positive aspects of working as a corporate entrepreneur?
8. What were the negative aspects of working as a corporate entrepreneur?
9. When do you feel a sense of achievement? Or What makes you feel proud of yourself?
10. If any, what are the differences between you before CE and you after CE?

Ending questions:
Is there anything else you want to add to what we were talking about today?

Note: Thank you so much for your participation. I will go back and transcribe this interview and send you a copy of the transcript for you to check if it captures what you wanted to communicate. If further clarifications are needed, I will contact you for a follow-up meeting or send you an email with additional questions.
## 인터뷰 요약본

**Date 2019년 1월 2일**

- ERP 프로그래머로 입사 후, 여러가지 일을 잘한다는 평가를 받고 있었으나, 당시에 탑티어 프로그래머들과 경쟁하기엔 쉽지 않다는 생각을 하게 되고, 개발자 직무에 대한 환멸과 열악한 업무조건을 개선하기 위해 이직을 결심하던 차에 HRD 팀 전베에 대한 사내공고를 접함.
- 좋아하던 일이기도 하고 새로운 일을 해보고 싶다는 동기에 ERP 관련 강사등 교육경험을 활용하여 HRD 부서로 전베를 신청함.
- 사내기업가란, "어떤 변화를 뭐 기꺼이 받아들이고, 변화하려는 의지를 가지고사업을하거나,기존 사업을 이해를 하면서도, 어떤 새로운 시도를 해보려는 사람”으로 정의가 됐다.
- 정부사업관련 유캠프등의 혁신과제로사내기업가업무를시작하게됨.
- 참여계기는 해당사업팀에서 초기사업단계에서인력을구성하던중,우연히기술적인백그라운드로선정됨.
- 해당업무를시작할때기존업무와의처음에하던일은본인의의지와관련없으나, 일단시키는것을하는시키기때문에큰외적또는내적갈등이없음.
- 당시담당업무였던이러닝의한계와부정적인장래성을목격,HRD로전베왔을당시처럼,교육에서인정을받고남과차별화를통해승진및커리어를쌓아가기때문에생각을하게됨.
- 그러던중,타사업팀에서내부프로젝트관련명성을들고당시사업관련내용의전문가로지목되면서참여하게됨.
- 처음부터사업가가된다는목표는없었고,단순히사업을성공시키기위해그리고나만의차별적인역량을찾으러갔는데때마침그일을하게되고, 스스로에게잘 맞는다는 생각. 그리고리더로서의정체성에대한긍정적인 자기평가를하게됨.
- 복잡한기술과여러인력이다양하게움직인프로젝트를마약행하면서,기업가로서필요한능력및방식에대한학습을하게됨.
- 사내기업가의업무는HRD업무와는달리정해진포맷이나프로세스가없다는점이가장들었고,그때때프로젝트마다전부다달라서문제가항상끊임없이생기게됨.
- 한마디로사업은창조의작업,복잡계의일을해야하는것.
- 사업가의미션은수익성이기때문에스스로를사업가라생각하지않음. 다만사업가마인드는있다고생각함.
- 대기업은내가많은부분이외의업무를경험하기쉽지않기때문에다른영역을경험하지않으면미지의영역으로남음.이부분을경험해봐서제시프로세스가눈에들어오고,생각할때그러한수단과방법은아니다란게알게된순간,해볼만하다고생각하는것을하게됨.
- 조직에게서그동안본인에게기대되어왔던점.새로운계생기면나에게말려서둘을만들거나프로세스를만들게하는것. 그런일을하는사람으로인식하는패턴이형성됨.
- 사내기업가에필수적인역량은자기영역에대한실력과전문성,통찰력,그리고수단과방법을가리지않는집요함.
APPENDIX H

INITIAL CODING SAMPLE
APPENDIX I

FOCUSED CODING SAMPLE
Category: Being recognized as an internal expert

Subcategories:
- Accumulating relevant experiences to corporate entrepreneurship by intentional segueing or unintended transfer
- Gaining reputation as an expert in the organization

Before the corporate entrepreneurial activity, participants experience multiple jobs and projects. The transition was made by either job rotation, organizational restructuring, or they voluntary choice (i.e., I want to do the job! I have always wanted to be a teacher, so I moved to the HRD department). Through their career, participants have accumulated “certain experiences relevant to the corporate entrepreneurial activity”, and gradually recognized as “an internal expert” of something, which can function as “an anchor” for being engaged in the corporate entrepreneurship later.

Representative Quote:
I was involved in the project because…I was working in Planning team, then moved to Convergence team. At that time…so. And I, at that moment, didn’t take a specific role….I was the only one. And also I am the only person who has that work experience…so.

Representative Quote:
I didn’t think, at the very first time, I want to do this. In my case, one of the main reasons that I would like to find my next job is, when I am working on some job, then I get used to it very much, then there is no learning. Knowledge does not increase anymore, so I keep looking for a job which gives me an opportunity to learn and expand my work. So I always change the department or company in line with this idea. So, I was working on some wealth management. I coached the PBs to become better sales representatives. While I was doing that, our bank initiated the new strategic movement, expanding the wealth management function and made it more luxurious…we changed our business model. During that time, I was assigned to a project manager, in a top-down way, leading the process….so I had to change, and develop the new business model and so forth…

Representative Quote:
Got a request from that division. I was a kind of an internal expert to them, because I had done some internal projects to develop systems…two times, three times…, so, they called for a cooperation. So, yes, I did not intend to do LMS system, but they said I am the expert. In retrospect, ah yes, I had quite many experiences on that stuff. And
I had some degree of confidence. So okay, I had this idea that, it seems likely that I can do this by combining my expertise of HR and my experiences of IT system... and actually that was what I wanted to do...

 이제 그 사업부에서 연락이 왔어. 내가 뭐 그런쪽의 사내전문가다 이렇게 되어있으니까, 그전에 뭐 다른 이런 사내개발이나 이런 것들을, 교육시스템쪽을 했잖아 두세번, 세번 정도 하니까, 이제, 사내에서는 뭐, 이 사람 그만도 그런, 교육시스템 플랫폼 쪽은 잘안되며 이렇게 되어서, 연락이 온거야 사업부에서. 아 그래서 어. 내가 그런쪽, 별로 의도치 않았던 LMS 교육시스템 쪽에 뭐 사내전문가. 어 그라고 보니까 어 그래, 내가 그쪽은 많이 했지. 뭐 어 느 정도 자신은 있었어. 그러면, 어... 이 HR 베이스로 뭐 교육시스템 아니면 교육의 베이스로 이건 뭐가 뭐래 해보면 원지 좀 될거 같은 생각이 들고, 그 다음에 교육사업은 내가 해보고 싶었던 거야 사실은...