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# Acceleration of social enterprises : how interactions shape the entrepreneurial process ?

Carlos Eduardo Mota Pereira

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Carlos Eduardo Mota Pereira. Acceleration of social enterprises : how interactions shape the entrepreneurial process?. Business administration. Université de Lille, 2021. English. NNT : 2021LILUA021 . tel-04368869

**HAL Id: tel-04368869**

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## ACCELERATION OF SOCIAL ENTREPRISES: How interactions shape the entrepreneurial process?

*ACCÉLÉRATION DES ENTREPRISES SOCIALES:  
Comment les interactions forment-elles le processus entrepreneurial ?*

Thèse préparée et soutenue publiquement par **Carlos Eduardo Mota Pereira**  
le 09/12/2021, pour obtenir le grade de Docteur en Science de Gestion

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To my family, friends and all of those who supported me along this process.

## Abstract

Until now, only a few studies have investigated social interactions in entrepreneurial processes. Most of the authors have focused on theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence about the context in which entrepreneurs are embedded, taking a broad perspective. Yet, scrutinising interactions that entrepreneurs engage in provides valuable and rich information regarding the evolution of venture creation process. Therefore, practitioners and academics must look at social interactions as one possible trigger and/or enactor for the improvement of the venture idea. Several studies, in different fields, evoke interactions during the venture creation process, but little is known with regard to what these social interactions are and how they shape the entrepreneurial process.

By adopting an interpretative phenomenology as the philosophical foundation and research methodology, this study aims to better understand everyday social interactions that early stage entrepreneurs engage in, and their outcomes in the entrepreneurial process. First, we explored effectuation theory as an entrepreneurial process based on a mode of action. Then we analysed pivots - change in venture idea - during venture creation process. This is done through a literature review and analysis of empirical data collected in a French acceleration program. The results of both parts converge. Interactions are interlinked and reflect each other as they all happened in complex reality. Moreover, by combining all the results, it was possible to delineate that some interactions are more propitious to create specific pivots.

While researchers denoted that social interactions play a relevant role in the development of venture creation, none of the studies scrutinised the social interactions. Yet, outcomes from interactions with other individuals, such as receiving resources, feedback and information, are discussed among these studies as contributions to the venture creation process. Similarly, the interviewees point out several elements from interactions with others when explaining the evolution of their venture idea work. Hence, the results show that interactions that stimulate reflection seem to provoke more drastic changes in the venture idea work.

Taking this into consideration, it is possible to draw and advance scientific knowledge through the scrutiny of the dynamic of social interactions. Moreover, this thesis helps to sustain the necessity of investigation of situations that occur in these interactions, as it brings more knowledge to effectuation theory on how, and why, entrepreneurs re-assess their venture.

## Resumé

D'après la littérature, seules quelques études ont exploré les interactions sociales dans les processus entrepreneuriaux. La plupart des auteurs se sont concentrés sur les hypothèses théoriques et les preuves empiriques concernant le contexte dans lequel les entrepreneurs sont intégrés, en adoptant une perspective large. Pourtant, l'examen des interactions dans lesquelles les entrepreneurs s'engagent fournit des informations précieuses et riches concernant l'évolution du processus de création d'entreprise. Par conséquent, les praticiens et les universitaires doivent considérer les interactions sociales comme un déclencheur et/ou un acteur possible de l'amélioration de l'idée d'entreprise. Plusieurs études, dans différents domaines, évoquent les interactions au cours du processus de création d'entreprise, mais on sait peu de choses sur ce que sont ces interactions sociales et comment elles façonnent le processus entrepreneurial.

En adoptant une phénoménologie interprétative comme fondement philosophique et une méthodologie de recherche, cette étude vise à mieux comprendre les interactions sociales quotidiennes dans lesquelles les entrepreneurs, en phase de démarrage s'engagent, et les résultats qui en résultent dans le processus entrepreneurial. Tout d'abord, nous avons exploré la théorie de l'effectuation comme un processus entrepreneurial basé sur un mode d'action. Puis, nous avons analysé les pivots - changement d'idée d'entreprise - pendant le processus de création d'entreprise. C'est deux premières parties ont été réalisées au travers une revue de la littérature et une analyse des données empiriques collectées dans un programme d'accélération français. Les résultats des deux parties convergent avec des interactions liées entre elles et se renvoient les unes aux autres car elles se sont toutes produites dans une réalité complexe. De plus, en combinant tous les résultats, il a été possible de déterminer que certaines interactions sont plus propices à la création de pivots spécifiques. Bien que les chercheurs aient indiqué que les interactions sociales jouent un rôle important dans le développement de la création d'entreprise, aucune des études n'a examiné les interactions sociales. Pourtant, les résultats des interactions avec d'autres individus, tels que la réception de ressources, de commentaires et d'informations, sont apparues comme des contributions au processus de création d'entreprise. De même, les personnes interrogées soulignent plusieurs éléments issus des interactions avec les autres lorsqu'elles expliquent l'évolution de leur travail sur les idées d'entreprise. Les résultats montrent donc que les interactions qui stimulent la réflexion semblent provoquer des changements plus radicaux dans le travail sur l'idée d'entreprise.

En tenant compte de ces éléments, il est possible de tirer et de faire progresser les connaissances scientifiques par l'examen de la dynamique des interactions sociales. En outre, cette thèse contribue à soutenir la nécessité d'enquêter sur les situations qui se produisent dans ces

interactions, car elle apporte plus de connaissances à la théorie de l'effectuation sur la façon dont, et pourquoi, les entrepreneurs réévaluent leur entreprise.

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## Acknowledgements

Throughout this Ph.D. journey many people were present in this long and painful learning process. Much has changed and much has been [re]built. I would like to use this short space of this academic work to thank several people who made a difference during this period.

First, I would like to thank my thesis director Nicolas Vaillant for believing in me. To Frederik Claeys for his patience, effort, and academic discussions and support during these years. To Jarrod Ormiston, who became an external supervisor always with sharp feedback and important questions about the entrepreneurial universe. To Sandra, who besides being a co-worker, became a great friend in my life, who always encouraged me to continue and, without a doubt, without her support I would not have finished this Ph.D. To the EMES network, which provided me with several beautiful meetings and made me understand that Ph.D. is a hard process that we all go through.

I would like to thank the funders of this thesis. First, MEL for providing the initial funding of the thesis. To FGES, in particular to Elisabetta Magnaghi and Veronique Flambard, who did not spare efforts to make possible my field work and my stay in faculty. To my parents, Antonio and Ivony, who were always supportive and were my providers these last months to finish my thesis.

I would like to thank my close friends who always showed me that there was life after, and during, a thesis. To Alice and Leora who listened to me complain about my tiredness so many times and showed me that I was not alone in this endeavor. They were crucial emotional food to the development of this study. To Camille, Maria, Jeff, Camille (the other) and Pierre who always showed their unconditional support these last years. To my flatmate, Guillaume, who has always brought lightness to our daily life with his positive perception of life. To Antoine and Enrico who have become friends from EMES network. To Natalia and Augusto, friends from my childhood who always accompanied me on the phone on my way home from work to discuss about future projects. Life is a roller coaster of emotions and I am very grateful to have these incredible people by my side in these last years. My humble thanks to you all.

To my family, my sister and my brother, thank you for your patience and encouragement in the last years.

## Chapter I - Introduction

Social interactions are inherent to our society. In human history, individual or collective, it can be observed that society is formed through these social interactions. Interacting allows us to exchange and understand the world around us and it's no different in the entrepreneurial universe. Interactions between the individual entrepreneur and the social structure are inherent to entrepreneurial action. Entrepreneurs engage with a diverse range of actors in the process of creating their ventures in order to create viability and greater value for their product and/or service. Our starting point for this research was to better understand how interactions take place, and how they affect the development of early-stage ventures. In this introductory chapter, we present the backbone of this research by explaining what, why and how we developed this study.

We begin by exploring the research context, specifically, social enterprise creation in the accelerator environment. After that, we briefly explain the background of the research and also elucidate the gaps in the literature. After defining these baseline subjects of our research context, we describe the aims and objectives of this research. All these theoretical lenses underpinned the choice of the research design and methods applied in this study. Thus, we present key findings and the research outline to guide the reader along this study.

### 1.1. Research context: Social entrepreneurship creation and accelerators.

Social entrepreneurship covers a wide spectrum of activities, and is generally thought to combine a commercial business-like approach with the aim of pursuing positive social change (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). Researchers have brought attention to social entrepreneurship as a promise to combine innovation and viable business models that help solve the pressing problems of our age (Mair & Marti, 2006; Nicholls, 2006; Perrini et al., 2010). In this global social landscape, evidence and stories about the potential of social entrepreneurship emerged in several fields: health care, education, financing, culture, and development aid, etc.

While social entrepreneurship appears to increasingly be seen as an important way to tackle social problems, Corner & Ho (2010) described that the social venturing process occurs as entrepreneurs develop the venture idea through interactions with a multiplicity of actors engaged in the social issue addressed by the social enterprise. Many stakeholders are resourceful actors that provide the potential support and sponsorship to social entrepreneurship (Nicholls, 2006; Pandey et al., 2017). Meanwhile, Levinsohn (2014) argues that institutions are interested in making social

entrepreneurial actions more effective. Acceleration programs are one example of these kinds of activities.

Accelerators are a relatively new way of supporting the creation of ventures and in spite of their growing popularity (Levinsohn, 2014; Pandey et al., 2017; Pauwels, 2015), other authors indicate that little is known about the effectiveness of these programs (Casasnovas & Bruno, 2013; Levinsohn, 2014; Pandey et al., 2017; Politis et al., 2019). Therefore, considering that venture acceleration programs focus on venture-oriented training and networking to boost social enterprise creation (Politis et al., 2019), we decided that this environment was a relevant context to understand entrepreneurial social interactions.

Acceleration programs are “ *designed to accelerate their [early stage entrepreneurs’] learning processes by means of coaching, networking events and seminars*” (Politis et al., 2019, p. 590). For Pauwels (2015), accelerators focus on these intangible knowledge intensive support services. Therefore, as Høvig et al. (2017) suggested, many venture acceleration programs aim to foster resource sharing and networking as a means of providing entrepreneurs the assets they need to develop their ventures. This shows that acceleration programs are an ideal environment to understand entrepreneurial interactions.

Thus, speeding up entrepreneurial learning process in support programmes is based on the support of a group of entrepreneurs, called cohort, for the development of their ventures ideas and the launching of their products or services. (Politis et al., 2019; Stayton & Mangematin, 2019). For Cohen (2013), acceleration programmes boost the venture creative process by encouraging entrepreneurs to develop a coherent strategy, emphasizing the reflective process in the learning process. Similarly, Levinsohn (2014) suggested that these entrepreneurial learnings are a result of entrepreneurs’ interactions with others, instead of the particular program design. Following that, Levinsohn (2014) has also called for more investigation of the different types of social interactions that take place in accelerators. This reinforces the relevance of our research, as we scrutinize these social interactions and their impact in venture creation.

To better understand the social interactions within nascent entrepreneurs, the present thesis selected a French acceleration programme to better comprehend the different interactions of early stage entrepreneurs and their outcomes. This acceleration program was identified as the most appropriate case study site as the entrepreneurs were exposed to structuring and experimenting approaches during their entrepreneurial process.

The literature taught us that accelerators had a strong impact on social entrepreneurship practice by identifying and helping social entrepreneurs through mentoring, networking, knowledge,



skills and expertise to ventures as they need to emerge, supporting them to overcome the early stages of venture creation (Pandey et al., 2017). Therefore, this microecosystem are ideal as acceleration programmes promote interactions and experimentation during the first stages of venture creation. A detailed description of this case and it's context is provided in chapter III.

This particular case was adopted to capture the complex nature of social interactions and their outcomes leading to entrepreneurial pivot. Looking at this acceleration programme's context, we may systematically dissect the entrepreneurs' experiences in social interactions with others, their experiments, and their strategic reorientations through interviews of accelerator program participants. With this, we examine each sub-case supported by the acceleration program by identifying and examining everyday social interactions, as well as looking at associations with entrepreneurial pivots.

## 1.2. Research background and research gaps

In this section we explore the background of the research context, pointing out the issues in the literature we are addressing. It is important to mention that the starting point of this research study was to better understand and capture the internal dynamics of support programmes in enacting social venture creation. We initially began to streamline this study through the social incubation literature, but due to the scarcity and lack of consistency of this literature, we decided to focus on the entrepreneur's perspective, particularly on the creative process of venture creation. Therefore, and driven by abductive reasoning (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), we moved between the initial information from the field and theoretical grounding to restructure the research. Following this, we then focused our research efforts on better comprehending entrepreneurs' venture creative process in the view of social interactions shaping the entrepreneurial pivots.

Building on the above, we revised the literature of effectuation and pivots to better understand the current position in regard to social interactions.

### 1.2.1. Effectuation: an entrepreneurial process based on entrepreneurs' mode of action

Effectuation refers to an entrepreneurial process based on the action of the entrepreneurs. In this, effectuation considers that entrepreneurs *"take a set of means as given and focus on selecting between possible effects that can be created with that set of means."* (Sarasvathy, 2001, p. 245).

Authors that described the effectual approach emphasized an actor-dependent process by which entrepreneurs act through their available resources and potential partnerships in an ongoing process of interactions and experimentation (Spedale & Watson, 2014). Therefore, this theory offers a non-linear creative perspective of the entrepreneurial process that is more aligned with the everyday social interactions in which entrepreneurs engage.

Following that, Perry et al. (2011) and Read et al. (2009) have described that effectual mode of action is an excellent way to exploit contingencies, while understanding and dealing with the human component of the entrepreneurial process. In this, Corner & Ho (2010) noted entrepreneurs are confronted with a scarcity of resources and so operate with a make-do approach. Therefore, in effectual action, entrepreneurs determine the next and best step according to their available resources, in order to achieve their goals. To do this, entrepreneurs have to continually balance their objectives with their resources and actions (Sarasvathy, 2001).

Nonetheless, while effectuation remains underused when investigating the process of social venture creation (Akemu et al., 2016; Weerakoon et al., 2019; Yusuf & Sloan, 2015), we suggest that effectuation is a relevant approach to understand the process of social venture creation and, moreover, it encourages a wider dissemination of the effectual practice. Therefore, we highlighted the convergences in venture creation process between social entrepreneurship literature and effectuation theory (Akemu et al., 2016; Corner & Ho, 2010; Malsch & Guieu, 2019; Yusuf & Sloan, 2015).

### 1.2.2. Social interaction in effectuation and social entrepreneurship literature

The effectual literature argues that entrepreneurs interact seeking resources, new information, and feedback, to generate new means and goals (Arend et al., 2015; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001). These interactions with others is referred to as “*effectual ask*” by Dew et al. (2018), in which entrepreneurs interact through asking for and seeking for inputs<sup>1</sup>, in order to create early commitments and alliances (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007). In addition to this, interactions with others lead the co-construction of knowledge, of their identity, of their social capital, the spark of their ideas (Kerr & Coviello, 2019), and the evaluation of their means (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Kerr & Coviello, 2019).

On the one hand, social interaction is investigated as a deliberate practice where entrepreneurs engage with one another in asking others for resources (Dew et al., 2018). On the other

---

<sup>1</sup> Inputs can include intangibles - advice, introductions to network contacts - and tangible aspects - resources such as customer orders, supplier materials, labour, and money.

hand, social interactions seem to be investigated throughout reflections of the self-identity, cognition, and subjective aspects of the venture creation process (Kerr & Coviello, 2019; Nielsen & Lassen, 2012; Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019). Yet, we consider that social interactions may go beyond these elements, bringing more robustness to the entrepreneur's venture idea (Fischer & Reuber, 2011). Interactions are inherent to the process of venture creation. Building on this, we understood that social interactions are more complex than what they have been portrayed as in the current literature on effectuation, as they may provide other inputs to entrepreneurial pivots. This lies at the core of our research goals as we focus on the examination of social interactions, comprehending how they shape the pivoting processes.

### 1.2.3. Pivot: marker on the venture creation process

When entrepreneurs move along the journey of venture development, they may face different challenges in adapting their solution to the addressed market, which, in turn, demands them to refine their idea work, either by persisting in their current course of action, abandoning it, or reorienting it (McMullen, 2017). These changes are called pivots (Hampel et al., 2019; Shepherd & Gruber, 2020). In this line, we adopted pivots as a marker on the venture creation process in order to examine the social interactions, and the effect of their outcomes, on the development of the venture idea. While effectuation is based on social interactions for the development of a venture, pivots are based on testing the solution, where the venture emerges from the accumulation of information from users and marketplaces acquired through social interactions.

The effectuation process and the performance of pivots work under the context of uncertainty, and effectuation may enhance the understanding of how interactions happen and how they shape pivots. In a similar line, the literature of pivots calls the attention to entrepreneurs' behaviours, and/or interactions, that lead to pivots (Flechas Chaparro & de Vasconcelos Gomes, 2021). The literature had highlighted the need for research about informational signs leading to pivots (Shepherd & Gruber, 2020). Therefore, in this thesis, we focus on the connection of social interactions and pivots. We suggest that, by understanding the interactions entrepreneurs engage in, we can clarify the path that leads entrepreneurs to pivot.

### 1.3. Aim and objective of the research study

This thesis aims to increase our understanding of social interactions during early venture creation processes. The research focuses on the phenomenon of entrepreneurial pivoting in order to appreciate the social interactions and their implication on the small strategic reorientations during the venture creation process of entrepreneurs. The following overarching research questions guide the present research: *“What are the social interactions that early stage entrepreneurs engage in?”* and *“How do social interactions shape the venture creative process?”*

### 1.4. Research design and methods

This section briefly introduces the interpretative phenomenology as dual capacity in our thesis as its philosophical foundation and research methodology. After that, we share insights into phenomenological case studies that were used to better understand the interactions that early stage entrepreneurs engage in, and their outcomes, in the entrepreneurial process.

#### 1.4.1. Interpretive phenomenology as research methodology

We explored the philosophical foundations of phenomenology, and then we described its influence in our research methodology, considering this dual capacity of phenomenology in our study. This thesis adopts a Heideggerian interpretivist strand focusing on Benner’s (1994) interpretive phenomenology to inform our methodology.

Benner’s (1994) interpretive phenomenology is appropriate as it supports the need of emphasis into the entrepreneurs’ ways of being, in particular how they tell their history, connecting with their background, and untangling future projections. Interpretive phenomenology informs the choice of phenomenological case studies using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis as an appropriate research strategy for interpretive, phenomenological studies (Benner, 1994a; Cope, 2005; Gill, 2014). This methodological decision also informs the use of exemplars in presenting the data analysis and findings.

### 1.4.2. Phenomenological case studies as research strategy

This thesis adopts “phenomenological case studies” as the research strategy, given the need to appreciate complex social interactions as well contextual factors. To investigate the very early stages of phenomenon field, case study research appears specifically suitable, where others theories seem scarce (Saunders et al., 2009; Yin, 2011). The utilization of case study design permits the comprehension of the landscape through multiple perspectives to make sense of the background and context of the lived experiences of entrepreneurs. This is particularly relevant for phenomenological research approach as we aim to gain rich and strong comprehension of individuals’ experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Moreover, we adopted the interactive process of abductive logic (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), as a loop mechanism used for constant consideration of the theoretical and the empirical world.

The research strategy also ensures that semi structured interviews deepen the understanding within the broader social and historical contexts of our sample. A “multiple case design” was adopted to allow interaction with separate research settings and ensures that diverse perspectives are gathered inside and across cases (Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, Tennant, & Rahim, 2014). The microecosystem of one acceleration program based in Paris was selected as the main case study site. In this sense, we analyse entrepreneurs’ experiences during this acceleration program.

### 1.5. Key findings

#### **i) Social interactions leading to pivots**

Our empirical findings demonstrated that social interactions can trigger and enable entrepreneurial pivots. In this, we found that mentors’ questioning triggered entrepreneurial self-assessment that generated reengineering pivots, and users’ feedback triggered the incorporation of information in the venture idea work leading to repairing pivots. Moreover, we found that market knowledge worked as enablers of repairing pivots. Therefore, our findings indicated that particular commonalities of interactions may trigger particular pivots.

**i) Collective interactions**

Our empirical findings described that collective interactions emerged as an important moment when entrepreneurs discuss and reflect about their venture idea. We identified collective resource-sharing, where nascent entrepreneurs shared resources within the group, and collective sensemaking, where early stage entrepreneurs helped others to make sense of their ventures through suggestions and informal discussions about the venture idea.

**ii) Peer-to-peer asks**

Our empirical findings show peer-to-peer “asks” that refer to two-way interaction in which early stage entrepreneurs ask and give a variety of resources according to their needs. We found early stage entrepreneurs asking for resources through advice on tools and materials, marketing communications and feedback. In turn, we identified nascent entrepreneurs giving resources through the provision of recommendations on the venture structure, advice on technical skills, and communication.

**iii) Strategic orientation**

Our empirical findings demonstrated that nascent entrepreneurs interacted with mentors in three configurations: i) *venture structure*: mentors counselling through sharing of their experience and tips for structuring entrepreneurs’ venture; ii) *venture idea-work*: mentors’ questionings entrepreneurs’ venture idea work and encouraging entrepreneurs to pursue their creative process, and iii) *individual self*: mentors encouraging self-evaluation practices emphasizing entrepreneurs’ individual self.

**iv) Entrepreneurial mindset and social support**

Our empirical findings demonstrated two key findings about the outcomes of social interactions. First, in regard to entrepreneurial mindset, we found that interactions with the entrepreneurial community helped to co-construct early stage entrepreneurs’ ways of thinking. This, in turn, created a mindset, and a reassured/conscious nascent entrepreneur, to the next move of the venture creation process. Second, our data indicated that regular exchanges between peers about the venture development and/or personal performance created a social support. This relies on nascent entrepreneurs seeking reassurance in their creative process. These constant practices of social support

among peers can be a helpful behaviour in the creation of an environment of trust and the feeling of belonging to a community.

#### **v) Peer pressure**

Our empirical findings indicated that the inspirational effect of peer-to-peer interactions, sees nascent entrepreneurs investing greater effort in moving faster - and feeling pressure - to develop their ventures. In this, nascent entrepreneurs have mentioned rushing their creative process as a result of interactions with the cohort.

### **1.6. Thesis outline**

In this section we expose the outline of the thesis. The present chapter focuses on introducing the main topics of the research, providing an overview of this academic work. Thereafter, we outline the thesis as follows:

#### **Chapter II - Literature review**

The Chapter II reviews entrepreneurship literature that focuses on social interactions and pivots. First, we revised effectuation theory as an entrepreneurial process based on a mode of action. We explained the basic foundations of the theory. After that, we elucidated the effectuation process used in social entrepreneurship literature. Following this, we critically revised effectuation, conceiving this theory as a mode of action to focus on entrepreneurs' concrete behaviours, and more specifically the social interactions they engage in. In this, we have focussed first on the revision of effectuation and social interactions in entrepreneurship research and, after that, we appreciated effectuation and social interactions in the context of social entrepreneurship. Finally, we critically reviewed the emerging literature of pivots to better understand these small shifts of strategic reorientation during the entrepreneurial process.

#### **Chapter III - Research design and methodology**

In this chapter we discuss the research methodology, research strategy, and research procedures adopted in this thesis. The chapter begins by describing the philosophical underpinnings of interpretivism and phenomenology that inform the choice of Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology as the research methodology. The use of phenomenological case studies as the

research strategy is then presented. The chapter concludes with a description and justification of the procedures of research, which include semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis.

#### **Chapter IV – Empirical findings**

The empirical chapter is divided in two parts to better show the understanding of everyday social interactions and the outcomes of social interactions.

##### *Part I - Drivers, content and form of entrepreneurs' social interactions*

This empirical chapter focus on answering the first sub research question: *“What are the social interactions early stages entrepreneurs engage in?”* To do this, we examined social interactions at different levels. We zoomed in on the interactions between entrepreneurs and their peers, entrepreneurs and their mentors, and entrepreneurs and the community they are embedded in. This means that we dissected the experiences of entrepreneurs by clarifying the complexity of everyday interactions.

##### *Part II – Outcomes of entrepreneurs' interactions*

This second of the empirical chapter concentrates on answering the second research question: *“How do social interactions shape entrepreneurial pivots?”* To better explore the potential of this question, we focus on the outcomes of the social interactions mentioned in Part I of the empirical results. To do this, we looked at what entrepreneurs brought out from social interactions and their evolution of venture ideas, seeking to understand how social interactions fed or nurtured pivots.

#### **Chapter V - Discussion and conclusion**

The goal of this chapter is to discuss research results and interconnect the theoretical grounding revised in Chapter II with the empirical results presented in Chapter IV. We follow the same structure as Chapter IV, considering part I and part II. In this line, we first discuss the drivers, content and form of entrepreneurs' social interactions, and then we discuss the outcomes of social interactions. We then present our contributions to theory and practice, the limitation and future research.



## Chapter II - Literature review

This chapter outlines the theoretical foundation of the present thesis. In this literature review chapter, we aim to critique and capture previous research that helps us to answer our two research questions: *“What are the social interactions early stages entrepreneurs engage in?”* and *“How do social interactions feed into entrepreneurial pivots?”*

To build our argument, we started this chapter with a brief revision of effectuation theory as an entrepreneurial process based on a mode of action. We explained the basic foundations of the theory. After that, we elucidated the effectuation process used in social entrepreneurship literature. We explored the social entrepreneurship literature as the data collected in this research was embedded in social entrepreneurship and sustainable development.

Following this, we critically revised effectuation conceiving this theory as a mode of action to focus on entrepreneurs’ concrete behaviours, and more specifically the social interactions they engage in. In this, we have focussed first on the revision of effectuation and social interactions in entrepreneurship research and, after that, we appreciated effectuation and social interactions in the context of social entrepreneurship<sup>2</sup>. Lastly, we critically reviewed the emerging literature of pivots to better understand these small shifts of strategic reorientation during the entrepreneurial process.

The review of this literature highlighted two main gaps. First, in regard to the literature on effectuation, we explored social interactions as a key underexplored aspect (Mansoori & Lackeus, 2020). The current literature addressed it focusing at self-identity, cognition and subjective aspects affecting the venture creation process (Kerr & Coviello, 2019; Nielsen & Lassen, 2012; S. Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019). However, the literature has not explicitly investigated the effect of social interactions on the venture idea work.

Second, in regard to literature on pivoting, we found that entrepreneurs’ behaviours, and/or interactions which result in pivoting (Flechas Chaparro & de Vasconcelos Gomes, 2021) remains understudied. Due to the emergence of the research field, we found a large call for clarification of the informational signs leading to pivots (Shepherd & Gruber, 2020). In this line, we draw the attention to social interactions, and their outcomes, as a means of contributing to effectuation literature.

Building on the aforementioned, we begin this literature review by exploring effectuation theory and its process.

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<sup>2</sup> We found it important to put light in the research settings since it may bring more elements to our empirical discussion.

## 2.1 Effectuation: an entrepreneurial process based on entrepreneurs' mode of action.

Entrepreneurship is strongly linked to growth, decay, creation, deconstruction, maturation and failure; this constant movement in reality shows the vivacity of the entrepreneurship field (Hjorth et al., 2015). This notion of flow, movement and motion is identified as being at the core of the entrepreneurial process (Steyaert, 2007). Therefore, process theorists have started criticizing stable models of the entrepreneurial process by suggesting perspectives that recognize a more complex, interactive and contextual understanding of the venture creation process (Hjorth et al., 2015; Moroz & Hindle, 2012; Shepherd, 2015; Steyaert, 2007). For this reason, we start our review with a brief introduction to process theories to introduce this notion of the entrepreneurial process before we move to a critical review of effectuation theory as a creative process view of entrepreneurship.

Process studies have gained popularity in entrepreneurship literature lately (Chalmers & Shaw, 2017; Hjorth et al., 2015; Johannisson, 2011; Steyaert, 2007). They emerged from a critique of “*static frameworks – does not capture sequence of dynamics*” or “*stage models designs - a priori stages define major tasks or phases*” (Moroz & Hindle, 2012, p. 792) that dominated entrepreneurship literature. Therefore, Moroz & Hindle (2012) have highlighted the lack of uniformity, apart from patterns shaped around the typical stages of a venture's life cycle, or the focus on stages or events based on the notion of opportunity or cognition surrounding decision making. As a result, research on entrepreneurial processes began to focus on “how things come about” as a result of relational processes (Fletcher, 2006).

To study entrepreneurship as a process is to view the world in its constant restlessness (Hjorth et al., 2015). In a seminal contribution, Steyaert (2007) reviewed process theories in entrepreneurship studies, identifying 13 different approaches. He coined the term “*entrepreneurship*” to capture the inherent notions of movement and process of the entrepreneurial phenomenon. These studies imply that this creative view of the entrepreneurship process differs from the mainstream view, which previously posited entrepreneurship in a static world. Entrepreneurship as creation and way of worldmaking “(...) *should be viewed as a continuous, evolving process rather than a single event or a series of unrelated events*” (Baum et al., 2014, p. 19).

Process scholars argue that the mainstream tradition to study entrepreneurship was grounded in examining things, entities and isolated relations (Hjorth et al., 2015). Many authors have pointed out the transition from stable frameworks and linear paths to more fluid and interactive perspectives (Johannisson, 2011; Steyaert, 2007). To bring this motion and aliveness to entrepreneurship, researchers should align their approaches with the continuous reinvention of the context that entrepreneurs engage with (Hjorth et al., 2015). Processual approaches demand both an inventive

craft of theory and concepts to understanding the intricacies of entrepreneurship, thus going beyond static templates.

Hjorth et al. (2015) call for creative process views that consider the venture creation process as diffuse and fundamentally interactive. One such avenue, that we will consider in this thesis, is effectuation theory (Sarasvathy, 2008), which offers a non-linear perspective of the entrepreneurial process where the entrepreneurs act through their available resources and potential partnerships in an ongoing process of experimentation (Spedale & Watson, 2014).

As such, effectuation theory emerged to overcome the growing concern with the validity and reliability of static models of the entrepreneurial process (Moroz & Hindle, 2012) in an attempt to capture the dynamic process of the entrepreneurial journey (Chalmers & Shaw, 2017). Sarasvathy (2001) proposes this theory, considering aspects of dynamic entrepreneurs based on the transformational nature of the venture creation process (Moroz & Hindle, 2012). In other words, effectuation reorients the entrepreneurial process to an actor-dependent perspective by which entrepreneurs are in a constant process of seeking information and experimenting with their venture (Arend et al., 2015; Read et al., 2009). This effectual dynamic mode that considers the market and the venture creation process was first proposed by Sarasvathy (2001), and further expanded by Sarasvathy and Dew (2005), Sarasvathy (2008), Read et al. (2009) and Dew et al. (2018). In the next section, we zoom in on the effectuation literature in order to conceptually locate entrepreneurship “in action” within its wider context (Chalmers & Shaw, 2017; Moroz & Hindle, 2012).

### 2.1.1. A primer on effectuation theory

In the quest to understand what can be taught to entrepreneurs beyond the typical business development toolbox, Saravasthy (2008) conducted a cognitive science-based study of 27 founders, in which she presented 20 problems and asked them to think aloud. As a result of this study, Sarasvathy (2001) introduced the effectuation theory as logic of decision making and action in entrepreneurial process, in which entrepreneurs determine the next and best step, according to their available resources, in order to achieve their goals. To do this, entrepreneurs have to continually balance their objectives with their resources and actions. Conceptually, Sarasvathy (2001) describes the effectuation process in terms of *“tak[ing] a set of means as given and focus[ing] on selecting between possible effects that can be created with that set of means.”* (p.245). As such, the effectuation process starts from the means available to a potential entrepreneur<sup>3</sup>. These “means” involve entrepreneurs’

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<sup>3</sup>It is important to note that Sarasvathy (2001) uses the term entrepreneur to indicated those people who are creating a new venture and entrepreneurship referring to the process by which the new venture is created.

resources such as knowledge, skills and competences. Therefore, these “means” shape, in turn, what goals or objectives can be attained with the resources at hand. This approach was perceived as a paradigmatic shift in the way we understand entrepreneurial behaviour (Perry et al., 2011; Steyaert, 2007).

The aforementioned shift is based on the evolution of effectuation research as an alternative to the causation logic (Perry et al., 2011) that takes a predefined goal and focuses on selecting means and resources to achieve this goal. In the causation approach, the entrepreneur searches within the environment for the best way to achieve the goal she/he has set him or herself (Sarasvathy, 2001). It is noteworthy that the causation logic makes entrepreneurs concentrate on the predictable aspects of the future, as, in a causation approach, an entrepreneur would begin from a chosen goal - for instance, a specific social venture idea - and then she/he would gather the resources needed to accomplish this particular goal (Corner & Ho, 2010). The venture is conceived from the beginning and all efforts are directed at achieving this goal (Chandler et al., 2011).

Thus, the effectual approach shifts the emphasis to an actor-dependent process by which entrepreneurs go through an ongoing process of seeking information and experimenting their venture (Arend et al., 2015; Read et al., 2009). In contrast to the traditional predictive approach (causation), effectuation proposes a transformational design (Read et al., 2009; Sarasvathy, 2008) that *“inverts causal reasoning to indicate a new connection among means, imagination, and action that helps generate intentions and meaning in an endogenous fashion”* (Sarasvathy, 2001, p. 256). Sarasvathy & Dew (2005) explain that the effectual transformation design is based on the idea that entrepreneurs create commitments aiming particular transformations of existing realities into new components of the market. In the same vein, Lundqvist et al. (2013) have suggested that causation works as a *“logic of choice”* and effectuation on a *“logic of design”*. Furthermore, Perry et al. (2011) and Read et al. (2009) have claimed that the effectuation mode of action may be an excellent way to exploit contingencies, while understanding and dealing with the human component of the entrepreneurial process. This resonates with social entrepreneurs’ mode of action as, generally, they are confronted with a scarcity of resources and so operate through making-do approaches (Corner & Ho, 2010).

Hence, as an alternative to causation, the effectual logic entails the entrepreneur taking a set of given means (resources) and scrutinizing possible effects (goals) that can be created with this set of means. Similar to the strategy-structure debate (Harris & Ruefli, 2000), the question is about the primacy of means over goals (or vice versa) and how an entrepreneur organizes the available resources s/he has at his/her disposal. Thus, effectuation theory encompasses a shift from a *goal-driven* logic to a *means-driven* logic, as the entrepreneur begins the entrepreneurial process by asking *“Who am I?”*, *“What do I know?”*; and *“Who do I know that can uncover opportunities?”* in relation to the uncertainty

of the environment (Perry et al., 2011; Sarasvathy, 2008). This effectual reasoning reverberates with the transformational design (Read et al., 2009; Sarasvathy, 2008) mentioned earlier.

Following this line of thought, authors have argued that entrepreneurs transform their environments into new artifacts - product, service or opportunity - in a context characterized by three features (Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019):

- (i) Knightian uncertainty - where the future cannot be predicted;
- (ii) goal ambiguity - where the entrepreneurs do not have a pre-defined or specific goal; and
- (iii) environmental isotropy - in which the individual does not know which elements of the environment to expect when developing the new venture.

These principles and features shape the creative process view of the effectual logic as it *“facilitates a view in which the entrepreneur is not supposed to rationally evaluate and/or calculate available opportunities but instead is to actively create the conditions upon which he/she wants to act.”* (Steyaert, 2007, p. 466). A creative process view is at the heart of effectuation theory as it resonates with the entrepreneurs’ behaviour of seeking information, interacting and evolving their ventures. In other words, effectuation research was built on the view that entrepreneurship is a creative process, in which entrepreneurial opportunity is formed and created by the entrepreneurs (Moroz & Hindle, 2012; S. Sarasvathy, 2001; Steyaert, 2007) through controlling what they know about the context, their imagination and their creativity. Other scholars (Goss et al., 2011; Spedale & Watson, 2014; Watson, 2013) described this as a non-linear effectuation thinking perspective of entrepreneurship, pointing out how it contributes to interactive processes of venture creation. Therefore, before moving forward our argument, we discuss the non-linearity of effectuation processes and the emphasis on the context.

First, effectuation relies on a non-linear processual logic of experimentation and, ongoing interactive cycles, to achieve a sustainable entrepreneurial path (Grégoire & Cherchem, 2019; Perry et al., 2011; S. D. Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005). The processual mode of action of effectuation provides a pathway to understanding the specificities of entrepreneurship “in action” within a given context. In this vein, effectuation theory moves away from the linear frameworks of entrepreneurship by emphasizing non-determined ends that depend on the availability of resources and the alliances acquired along the way (Spedale & Watson, 2014; Watson, 2013). In addition to the non-linearity of the framework, effectuation situates the study of entrepreneurship in a social ontology of relatedness (Steyaert, 2007; Watson, 2013), rather than in individualist methodologies. Therefore, both the non-

linear perspective and the creativity of the entrepreneurial process are associated, as the entrepreneur acts through a 'trial and error' function based on the resources available.

Second, scholars have claimed that effectuation theory places strong importance on the processual features to understand the uncertainty of the context (Hjorth et al., 2015; Steyaert, 2007). For example, in effectuation, entrepreneurial means and goals are not predetermined but, instead, are socially constructed in an incremental way (Hjorth et al., 2015). So, while entrepreneurs learn more about the context by interacting with the environment they are embedded in, they may narrow down or shift their means and goals. Following this line of thought, authors have argued that effectuation is often found to be linked to the actual practices in the field (Chalmers & Shaw, 2017; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007), as the effectual approach brings dynamicity and accords an instrumental role to the entrepreneurs in shaping the realities they are embedded in. This ties in with our research questions and methodology, as we seek to understand how social interactions shape pivots. In other words, an effectuation processual lens focuses our investigation on the entrepreneur's behaviour by zooming in on the social interaction processes through which nascent entrepreneurs understand the entrepreneurial context (Chalmers & Shaw, 2017; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007), and the pivots that occur as entrepreneurs go through shifts and changes in the course of direction during their entrepreneurial journey.

Moving on, it is crucial to shed light on how the effectuation logic functions and guides an entrepreneur's mode of action before diving into the revision of the literature on effectuation. To this, Sarasvathy (2001) questions the traditional causal decision-making logic, claiming that entrepreneurs follow an effectual logic that consists of five key principles:

- I. *bird in hand* - available means ("who I am", "what I know" and "who do I know") rather than by the predefined goal;
- II. *affordable loss* - focus on what the entrepreneur can afford to lose, rather than seeking to maximize returns;
- III. *lemonade* - leveraging unpredictable contingencies rather than exploiting pre-existing knowledge;
- IV. *patchwork quilt (also called crazy quilt)* - emphasis on building a network of self-selected stakeholders and possible partners rather than taking over the competitor; and
- V. *pilot in the plane* - control the uncertainty by interacting and co-creating the venture instead of predicting it.

Building on the aforementioned principles, in the next sections we begin by critically revising the creative process view of effectuation theory.

### 2.1.2. Effectuation in social entrepreneurship literature

Early studies on social entrepreneurship have focused on the investigation of the specificities of the social entrepreneurs and their characteristics (Fowler et al., 2019). Later, the literature on social entrepreneurship moved away from these questions of who the social entrepreneur is towards, *inter alia*, an appreciation of the venture creation process of social enterprises (Dees, 1998; Guclu et al., 2002; Perrini et al., 2010). In this regard, authors have mainly focused on how social enterprises create value, how their opportunities are exploited, and/or how different resources are pooled for social impact (Dees, 1998; Fowler et al., 2019; Guclu et al., 2002; Mair & Marti, 2006; Perrini et al., 2010). Apart from a few notable contributions such as Domenico et al. (2010) and Haugh (2007), who wrote about the process of venture creation in terms of social bricolage or community-led venture creation, few authors have used a process lens to analyse the social venture creation process (Fowler et al., 2019; Guclu et al., 2002; Perrini et al., 2010). Similarly, effectuation remains underused when investigating process of social venture creation (Akemu et al., 2016; Weerakoon et al., 2019; Yusuf & Sloan, 2015), perhaps, because authors continue to analyse the social entrepreneurship process through social bricolage approach (Desa, 2012; Di Domenico et al., 2010). We suggest that effectuation is a relevant approach to understand the venture creation process in social entrepreneurship context while encourages a wider dissemination of the effectual practice.

Therefore, in the following paragraphs we highlight the convergences in venture creation process between social entrepreneurship literature and effectuation theory. Both effectuation and social entrepreneurship reasonings consider entrepreneurs that focus on their (I) available means and (II) their capacity to use these means toward the creation of a market or an artifact rather than competing with others, considering (III) their loss affordability (IV) when interacting with the context. In the following paragraphs, we further discuss these four attributes.

First, in terms of available means, while social entrepreneurs may have a specific mission in mind, these missions often tend to be vague and/or broad in nature (Yusuf & Sloan, 2015). As such, social entrepreneurs begin from an idea, or as Corner & Ho (2010) argued from a “spark”. Therefore, the process of refining this venture idea evolves through the available resources (Yusuf & Sloan, 2015), as the entrepreneur takes a step forward to bring robustness to the venture idea. In order to take a step forward, social entrepreneurs use resources at hand rather than spending time designing a perfect program to tackle the mission. Similarly, in an effectuation reasoning, entrepreneurs start the venture

creation process not from predefined goals, but from the available means refining the mission according to the new information acquired and experimentation (Arend et al., 2015; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Sarasvathy, 2001).

Secondly, both reasonings focus on the creation of markets, rather than competing in existing markets. Even though social enterprises do compete with each other organizations for resources, competing in a pre-existing market for profit is not their main goal (Yusuf & Sloan, 2015). Perrini et al., (2010) explained this as social enterprises concentrate on the identification of opportunities to solve social unbalances while prioritising value creation rather than profit accumulation. In this vein, the provision of this innovative service may indeed create a new market. Similarly, the effectual entrepreneur focuses on creating partnerships and strategic alliances with stakeholders and/or competitors rather than taking over their market (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Sarasvathy, 2001). In this, empirical evidence by Corner & Ho (2010) explained that after the spark of the idea, entrepreneurs develop the work of the venture idea through interactions with a multiplicity of actors engaged in the social issue addressed by the venture. Moreover, Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019) recently demonstrated that entrepreneurs, instead of competing with other, focussed on the collective transformation of possibilities.

Thirdly, during the process of creating a social enterprise, the social entrepreneur, who normally has limited resources, is constrained to choose and adopt certain characteristics that will support the viability of the social enterprise (Corner & Ho, 2010; Yusuf & Sloan, 2015). In specific, social entrepreneurs must counterbalance venture components with scarce resources in the pursuit of viability. Similarly, in effectuation reasoning, entrepreneurs focus on what they can afford to lose, rather than seeking to maximize returns (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2008). Following this, using the lens of effectuation we enable the social entrepreneur to consider the resources constraint as a factor to increase network and boost the venture creation process (Corner & Ho, 2010; Malsch & Guieu, 2019). Given that anything can be a potential resource, entrepreneurs using effectuation are able to see resources where others see nothing of interest (Malsch & Guieu, 2019). In this line, social entrepreneurs can mobilise resources through their social interactions. Thus, as we explored in the attributes, the use of effectuation allows the entrepreneur to consider the lack of resources as a trigger to increase their network and improve their project. In other words, the lack of resources engages other stakeholders to obtain the missing resources and, thus, co-create other opportunities and the venture.

Finally, the co-ordination of many stakeholders is at the core of process models of social entrepreneuring (Corner & Ho, 2010). It indicates that the social entrepreneur starts from addressing a social need and moves forward, delineating how a general and inspiring idea can be developed into



an attractive opportunity (Fowler et al., 2019). This process is based on ongoing interaction with stakeholders in “*articulat[ing] linkages for establishing an operating entity with key activities, coordinating mechanisms among stakeholders, and recognizing resource requirements and how resources could be secured via the resource strategy in the operating environment*” (Fowler et al., 2019, p. 667). In effectuation, entrepreneurs interact with their context aiming to learn from the environment and to reduce uncertainty. In other words, effectual entrepreneurs identify a workable segment by constantly listening to stakeholders and building their network of customers and strategic partners (Yusuf & Sloan, 2015). Therefore, learnings from the context encourage interactions to happen among actors, and lead to the formation of alliances and partnerships (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007). In this issue, Reymen et al. (2015) noted that strategic alliances happen through accepting, gathering, and incorporating unexpected feedback, in turn shaping the next path of the venture creative process.

Overall, authors have outlined the correlation between effectuation research and social entrepreneurship literature attributes (Akemu et al., 2016; Corner & Ho, 2010; Malsch & Guieu, 2019; Yusuf & Sloan, 2015). Table 1 summarises the similar attributes and convergences between both research streams.

**TABLE 1 - SIMILAR FEATURES - BASED ON YUSUF & SLOAN (2015)**

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Effectuation reasoning</b>	<b>Social entrepreneurship reasoning</b>
<i>Starting from general ambition and available means</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entrepreneurs begin the venture creation process from goals non-predefined. (Arend et al., 2015; Dew &amp; Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001)</li> <li>- Entrepreneurs starting from the reassessment of means and resources (Arend et al., 2015; Dew &amp; Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social entrepreneurs often don’t have a clear vision of their organization’s XXX (Servantie &amp; Rispal, 2018).</li> <li>- Social entrepreneurs begin this clarification process from the resources available (Yusuf &amp; Sloan, 2015).</li> </ul>
<i>Focusing on market creation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effectual entrepreneurs focus on creating partnerships and alliances with stakeholders and/or competitors (Dew &amp; Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social entrepreneurs do not tackle profit in the existing market as their primary mission (Nicholls et al., 2015; Yusuf &amp; Sloan, 2015).</li> </ul>
<i>Assessing loss capability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effectual entrepreneurs focus on what they can afford to lose, rather than seeking to maximize returns (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2008).</li> <li>- By starting from given means, entrepreneurs listen to stakeholders, building their network of customers and strategic partners (Yusuf &amp; Sloan, 2015).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social entrepreneurs choose and adopt particular features of their social venture, before seeking the viability of the organization (Yusuf &amp; Sloan, 2015).</li> </ul>
<i>Interacting with the context.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entrepreneurs interact and learn from the environment in order to reduce uncertainties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social entrepreneurs tackle the social need delineating the general mission into a viable</li> </ul>

	<p>- Based on controlling the future, an effectual mode of action encourages more interaction with others towards the formation of alliances and partnerships (Dew &amp; Sarasvathy, 2007).</p>	<p>and attractive opportunity (Fowler et al., 2019).</p>
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In the following sections we conceive of effectuation as a mode of action, which allows us to review social interactions in order to better understand how it has been studied so far.

## 2.2. Conceiving effectuation as a mode of action: interacting with others.

In the previous sections, we explored how the creative process view of entrepreneurship orients effectuation theory. We found that effectuation theory offers a non-linear approach to understanding how entrepreneurs create their ventures under conditions of uncertainty. Following Grégoire & Cherchem (2019), we conceive effectuation as a mode of action aiming to foster consistent theory building and to clarify entrepreneurs' concrete behaviour.

Social interactions in effectuation theory are seen as being at the centre of the entrepreneur's mode of action through which s/he can control the surrounding context and foresee the future (Sarasvathy, 2001). Therefore, the use of effectuation theory in this thesis emphasizes this interactional behaviour as the core process of venture creation, as the entrepreneurs seek information and experiment with their ventures (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007).

Authors have explored effectuation theory in many subfields and directions beyond entrepreneurship, such as marketing (Coviello & Joseph, 2012; Galkina & Chetty, 2015), innovation (Berends et al., 2014; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007), and project management (Golicic & Sebastiao, 2011; Küpper & Burkhart, 2009), among others. For example, in the field of marketing research, scholars have used effectuation to explain entrepreneur networking activity based on non-pre-defined goals (Galkina & Chetty, 2015). They explained that *"firms enter markets wherever they recognize an opportunity to commit to a network relationship that will increase their means"* (Galkina & Chetty, 2015, p. 669). This underscores the view that in effectuation theory, partnerships are an important aspect of venture creation and market entry.

Other researchers have applied effectuation logic in relation to customer participation processes in marketing (Coviello & Joseph, 2012). Companies can benefit more from an effective capacity - based on trial and error, which can be learned – rather than from adapting to their field. In this sense, customer participation is viewed as a process of co-creation in which insights are brought to produce major innovations. It is worth stating that these findings contradict the traditional

marketing literature that sees customers as mere informants who cannot easily be involved in bringing innovation to the company (Coviello & Joseph, 2012).

In the innovation literature, research suggests that *“small firms’ effectual approaches design ongoing projects primarily to limit downside risks, adapting these in light of ongoing feedback.”* (Berends et al., 2014, p. 31). This has demonstrated the relevance of effectual interactivity in leveraging product innovation through constant feedback. Similarly, in the literature on project management, Golobic & Sebastiao (2011) present empirical evidence on the ongoing process of refining a supply chain strategy. They found that effectual logic is associated with incremental experimentation in a supply strategy that led to a final refined process.

Overall, research fields other than entrepreneurship have focused on the non-linearity of human behaviour and the relevance of ongoing effectual interactions. We now turn our attention to how these concepts have been tackled in entrepreneurship research. In this we verify that social interactions are a key feature of effectuation theory where individuals and/or firms seek and gather information, expanding their resources to transform their firms.

In the next sections, we move forward explaining social interactions in effectuation theory. Therefore, in the first subsection, we focus on entrepreneurship research to explore how social interaction has been researched through effectuation theory. In the second subsection, we concentrate on the intersection of effectuation and social entrepreneurship literature to better understand how interactions have been researched, considering our research setting.

### 2.2.1. Effectuation, social interactions and entrepreneurship research

While social interaction is considered a key component of effectuation theory, only a few papers have zoomed in on this specific aspect of the effectuation process. Mansoori & Lackeus (2020) state that “interactions with others” in this field remains a subject *“largely under-researched”* (p.16). The majority of empirical research in the effectuation literature has investigated social interactions mostly by focusing on stakeholder theory (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007), and, recently, other researchers have investigated interactions associated with social network theory (Kerr & Coviello, 2019). In addition to this, other authors discussed social interactions without a clear theorization, but rather using interactions as a strategy for mobilizing resources or expertise (Dew et al., 2018; Fischer & Reuber, 2011).

When looking from the perspective of stakeholder theory<sup>4</sup>, (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007) outline and discuss a dynamic model of effectual stakeholder networks. This model is adapted from the general perspective of the effectuation process demonstrated in Figure 1 below. The model suggests that entrepreneurs begin from the reassessment of means that is succeeded by the scrutiny of potential goals. This is followed by the establishment of pre-commitments through interactions with stakeholders, which may lead to creating new means and goals. Effectuation literature is explicit about the entrepreneurs' interactional mode of action, as entrepreneurs co-create and co-design their venture while narrowing down the market they want to enter, or create (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005). This dynamic process influenced further research on effectual logic.

The abovementioned empirical evidence from Reymen et al. (2015) demonstrated that entrepreneurs engage in a variety of stakeholder interactions to learn about the context and the potential of the market, as a way to assure the sustainability of the product they are developing. Other empirical findings from Keskin et al. (2020) use effectual logic to explain the evolution of the value proposition, as entrepreneurs engaged in short term value propositions driven by existing means - such as available network -, and conducting less-engaging test to experiment the potential of the market. This demonstrates how social interactions can provide new information to new venture feasibility.

Thus, at the heart of this entrepreneurial process is this network of stakeholders who are engaged in a constant process of supporting and co-creating, the venture. Following this, Dew & Sarasvathy (2007) presented empirical evidence that clarifies the outcomes of this mode of action – or interaction - arguing a chain of commitments that unfolds in two cycles and potential partnership opportunities. Regarding the two cycles, first, the entrepreneur may increase her/his resource availability by intensifying her/his network, and second, the entrepreneur may add constraints<sup>5</sup> to his/her goals and sub-goals that will eventually compose the structure or features of her/his venture. In a similar line, empirical evidence from Keskin et al. (2020) adds to it pointing out that experience and feedback acquired in experiments influence the next steps of the venture creation, allowing entrepreneurs to adapt their course of action. This notion to increase the chances of a desired outcome through social interaction is also present in Reymen et al. (2015) who exploited effectual logic, supporting entrepreneurs with a broader scope seeking several options at the same time. To illustrate this, Figure 1 represents the dynamic model of effectuation, describing the potential avenues in the effectuation process triggered by the interactions that the entrepreneur engages in.

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<sup>4</sup> Dew & Sarasvathy (2007) refers to stakeholder theory in interconnected relationships between who counts as a stakeholder and what constitutes a stake for the venture.

<sup>5</sup> Add constraints refer to external inputs such as negative feedback, or users' suggestions, that helps to refine the entrepreneurial goals.

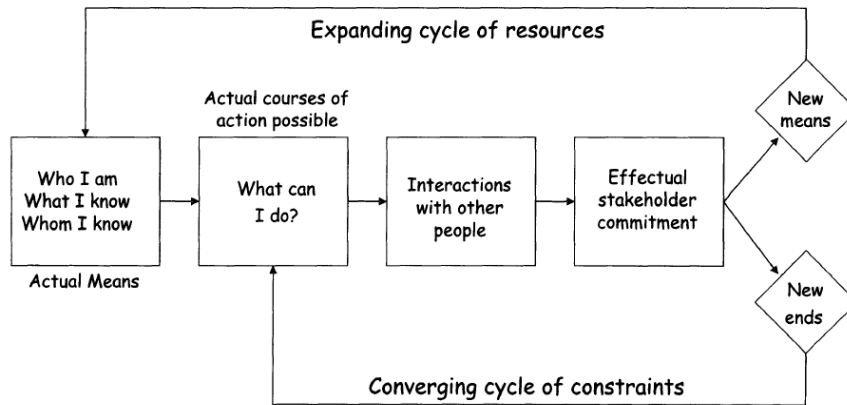


FIGURE 1 - DYNAMIC MODEL OF EFFECTUAL STAKEHOLDER NETWORK (SARASVATHY & DEW, 2007, P465)

In parallel, other scholars have explained that interactions may stabilize and destabilize the shared understanding, at different levels, of the entrepreneur in her/his venture creation process (Reuber et al., 2016). It stabilises in the sense that it confirms understandings about the entrepreneur's means and creative process, and destabilises when it calls into question previously understood elements. For example, this is similarly argued by Fischer & Reuber (2011), when they identify an “*effectual churn*” as an ongoing unproductive cycle of interactions without progressing in the effectual process. These last findings suggest that entrepreneurs may not always benefit from effectual cognitions as they over-engage in interaction with others without advancing to behaviours that result in their desired outcomes. After all, we identified that, using a stakeholder perspective, the effectuation process is centred on the social interactions and potential commitments that may arise from it. Now, we move on to the analysis of social interactions based in social network theory.

Recently, authors have investigated the interactions and the commitments from a network perspective, arguing a multilevel analysis that provides a distributed agency and a collective cognition perspective to the effectual network of individuals (Kerr & Coviello, 2019). This is similarly perceived by Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019), who reported that interactions should be viewed from an intersubjective level as entrepreneurs collaborate to transform realities. This suggests that the interactions are more complex than simple exchanges of information.

Kerr & Coviello (2019) described exploited interactions in the effectual process “*as the co-construction of knowledge, identity, and social capital within and across network levels*” (Kerr & Coviello, 2019, p. 15). This demonstrates the richness of social interactions that may leverage information, skills, build self-esteem, and help to construct the individual “self” of the entrepreneur. In a similar line, Jiang & RÜling (2019) explained that while entrepreneurs interact and negotiate with stakeholders, there is an “information processing”. In this, empirical evidence from Jiang & RÜling

(2019) shows that some entrepreneurs paid attention to real-time exchanges and some others paid more attention to the examinations of information based on what happened in the market. This ties up with our research aim, as we focus at the scrutinization of social interactions to understand how it shape the venture idea work.

Moreover, Kerr & Coviello (2019) broke down the dynamic model of effectuation (represented in Figure 2) into a multilevel analysis. In regard to social interaction, these researchers identified a dyadic relationship dynamic (Kerr & Coviello, 2019). This dyadic relationship puts “interactions with others” at the core component of the effectual model, however, it moves forward the discussion exploring a processual sequence based on network process literature. This sequence demonstrates that the entrepreneur goes through a sequential and iterative process where he or she identifies, negotiates, selects, expands, and/or deactivates network ties (Kerr & Coviello, 2019). This is aligned with the Jiang & Ruling (2019) study on how entrepreneurs interact, conduct the negotiation process, and terminate the process. Beyond that, this is empirically demonstrated by Prashantham et al. (2019) that reported effectual approach accelerate market entry in internationalisation context, as entrepreneurs develop this process iteratively.

Thus, by weaving the theory of the network into the effectuation model of action, Kerr & Coviello (2019) explained that in the early stages venture creators initiate interactions with the closest actors within their context and, then, regarding their entrepreneurial interpersonal relationships, the entrepreneur may alternate reasoning - from effectual and causal or vice versa. This means that pre-existing networks, and network building, can influence the cognitive and behavioural aspects of the effectuation process. In other words, depending on the interaction entrepreneurs engage in, they may take a more casual or effectual approach. For instance, empirical evidence from Tolstoy et al. (2021) illuminates the development of capabilities when entrepreneurs used effectual reasoning in international e-commerce creation. In this line, Tolstoy et al. (2021) demonstrated that access to new network relationships reinforced entrepreneurs marketing capabilities, for example. In correlation to this, Kerr & Coviello (2019) argued that collective cognition, which arises through the sharing of knowledge and development of ideas and goals and the characteristics of the network shape the interactions, and potential commitments, as represented in Figure 3 below.

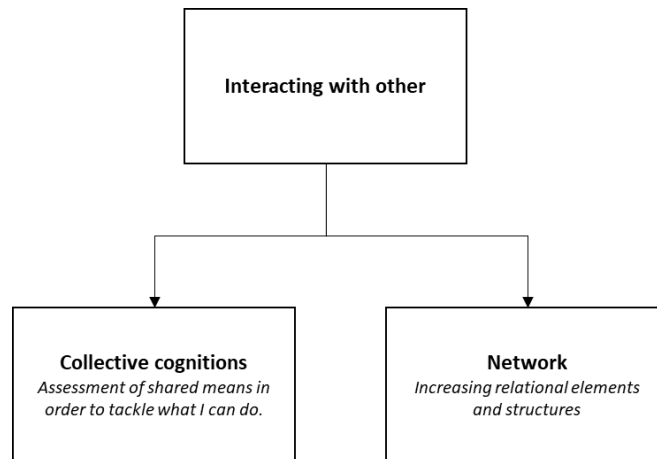


FIGURE 2 - SOCIAL INTERACTIONS BASED ON KERR AND COVIELLO, 2019

Therefore, stakeholder theory (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007) demonstrates how entrepreneurs convince others to join their ventures’ ideas, through repeated processes of interaction with other actors in order to refine their product (Reymen et al., 2015) or value proposition (Keskin et al., 2020). Social network theory helps us to visualise how the entrepreneur expands on this in the processes of identification, interaction, negotiation and expansion (Jiang & RÜling, 2019; Kerr & Coviello, 2019). These last studies suggested that interactions reflect on the entrepreneurs’ identity, changes in structure of networking practice, and information processing. This indeed provides more empirical information about how entrepreneurs behave and interact; however, the interactions happening in these exchanges remain blurred. In this line, we wonder about the effect of social interactions, as suggested by (Jiang & RÜling, 2019; Kerr & Coviello, 2019; S. Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019), on entrepreneurs’ idea work when it comes to changes in their venture ideass. Moreover, our study adds to effectual research that aims to translate effectual logic into effectual behaviour (Chandler et al., 2011; Fisher, 2012; Keskin et al., 2020).

Following that, we have identified some studies where social interactions are not clearly theorized as a step of the entrepreneurial process, but rather used as a strategy for mobilizing resources or a type of expertise. We now turn to these studies.

### Social interactions beyond a processual phase.

Empirical evidence presented by Fischer & Reuber (2011) suggested that the effectuation process begins from the social interactions entrepreneurs engage in, and not the reassessment of means as the traditional literature argues. Fischer & Reuber (2011) investigated how effectuation processes are affected when entrepreneurs use social media channels to increase interactions. This

study found that the majority of entrepreneurs “*appeared to be cognitively triggered to assess the means available to them after spending some time interacting with others.*” (Fischer & Reuber, 2011, p. 8). In practice, Fischer & Reuber (2011) showed that online interactions, as well as observations about the things said about entrepreneurs in these social channels, led entrepreneurs to reconsider aspects of their enterprise and clarified the values of the individual. In other words, this study informed us that entrepreneurs sharing online posts about their ventures sparked the reassessment of entrepreneurs’ available means. These findings showed that social interaction could be the starting point of the effectuation process. Recently, Fischer & Reuber’s (2011) findings were confirmed by Kerr & Coviello, (2019) – see discussion in the previous subsection - when they explained that the effectuation process has no starting point. Overall, this has brought to light the relevance of social interactions in effectuation, since it seems to us to be the driving force behind the effectuation process.

As a resource mobilization strategy, Dew et al., (2018) examined the constant social interactional behaviour of entrepreneurs as entrepreneurial expertise. This was named by the authors as “*effectual ask*” which means asking questions to a multiplicity of actors in order to orient their venture. This study raises the importance of how actively interacting with stakeholders may be fundamental entrepreneurial expertise during the venture creation process. Dew et al. (2018) use the “*effectual ask*” to justify the mechanisms of how entrepreneurs interact during the venture creation process. They explained that: “*Almost all of the interactions involve asks. Asks can cover a variety of inputs necessary to create a new venture that may include both intangibles (advice, introductions to network contacts) and tangibles (resources such as customer orders, supplier materials, labour, and money)*” (Dew et al., 2018, p. 398). In this vein, Dew et al., (2018) investigated the “*how*” question of the deliberate practice of interacting - or effectual ask - as entrepreneurial expertise that creates spontaneous feedback.

Alternatively, empirical research presented by Mainela & Puhakka (2009) demonstrated the emergence of the joint venture through effectual and opportunity discovery behaviours. When examining interactions entrepreneurial managers on an organizational level, Nielsen & Lassen (2012), argued that the amount and activity of social interactions provide substantial information to entrepreneurs, allowing them to anticipate the future and to evaluate different points of view towards new possible courses of action (Mainela & Puhakka, 2009). Furthermore, Nielsen & Lassen (2012), when investigating entrepreneurial identity, mentioned social interactions as a form to trigger entrepreneur’s inner learning process (Nielsen & Lassen, 2012). They also informed us that entrepreneurs move into new unexpected directions depending on the ongoing social interaction they engage in. It is important to note that social interactions were not the primary focus of the studies discussed above. Even so, we observed that Kerr and Coviello, (2019) also note that social interactions



affect the cognitive attributes of the entrepreneurs and, similarly, de la Cruz et al., (2018) stated that social interactions reflected on the self-identities of entrepreneurs.

Therefore, building on these authors' findings, we understand that these scholars encourage, and perhaps even reinforce, the effectual logic in which significant amounts of resources and information collected through social interactions can support the entrepreneur to develop strategies in the context of uncertainty.

Overall, we understand Sarasvathy's focus on social interactions through the idea of "talk to everybody and anybody". In this line, we understand that entrepreneurs don't assume they know who the customer will be or which precise goal they are tackling. Instead, entrepreneurs co-create the product with self-selecting stakeholders. Moreover, we found that social interactions have mainly emerged as an influence the self-identity of the entrepreneurs.

Therefore, building on the above, we suggest that interacting with others may directly affect the venture idea work. To do this, we propose that the concept of pivot - small shifts in the venture - can enrich effectuation study on social interactions. In this line, once we identified the pivot during the creative process of the venture, we can identify the triggers associated with particular social interactions. We aim to understand how interactions shape entrepreneurs' idea work in generating pivots. Before exploring these connections, we address the intersection of the effectuation and social entrepreneurship literature to complement our assessment of social interactions in the creative process of social enterprise.

### 2.2.2. Effectuation, social interactions and social entrepreneurship

In the previous section, we have critically examined social interactions in effectuation research, mainly in the entrepreneurship literature. Considering that our data collection took place in the context of social enterprise creation, in this section we revise the social interactions at the intersection of the literature of effectuation and social entrepreneurship.

Before diving into the revision of these studies, it is worth noting that when looking at social entrepreneurship, social value and positive impact are prioritized over the maximization of profit. Mair & Marti (2006) explain that social entrepreneurs are involved in an interactive process that implies a combination of a variety of resources that necessarily changes the existing modes of managing organizational issues. Following this line of thought, the literature argues that social entrepreneurs are exposed to collaboration and trust-based networks that increase the social interactions among the actors in this field (Mair et al., 2008; Perrini et al., 2010).

The starting point of this is Malsch & Guieu's (2019) study, which recently identified through a systematic literature review, only eight studies at the intersection of effectuation and social entrepreneurship. Following this, we identified that there are ten studies that utilized an effectuation approach in the social entrepreneurship context (Cf. Table 2). We look at them in the following paragraphs.

Within the studies identified, four do not mention social interactions explicitly. Of these four studies, Thiru et al. (2015) concentrate on the combination of effectuation reasoning into a social entrepreneurship learning program; Yusuf & Sloan (2015) offer an analysis of effectuation elements present in the process of social venture creation; Johannisson (2018) exposed everyday practices that support entrepreneurial sense-making in social entrepreneuring; and Rosca et al. (2020) show how women entrepreneurs engage in social entrepreneurship processes through mutual value creation in the core of the women's collaboration network. Conversely, the other six articles provide some particularities of interactions of effectual social entrepreneurs.

Empirical evidence showed by Corner & Ho (2010) demonstrates how opportunities to create social value are developed based on an effectual logic. Their findings moved forward the idea of opportunity identification and exploitation presenting opportunity "development" in social venture creation process as being influenced by collective actions and experience corridor knowledge, i.e., *"entrepreneurs' past life experiences created awareness of and information about particular areas that shaped opportunity development"* (Corner & Ho, 2010, p. 652). In this, Corner & Ho (2010) demonstrated a multiplicity of actors engaged in interacting with entrepreneurs that triggered the "idea opportunity" behind the creation of a venture. Therefore, Corner & Ho (2010) associate these collective actions with experience and knowledge that nourished entrepreneurs. Corner & Ho (2010) emphasize the development - not identification or exploitation - of an opportunity of a social venture that is nurtured by a multiplicity of actors engaged in the issue and their knowledge. Servantie & Rispal (2018) and Weerakoon et al. (2019) corroborate the Corner & Ho (2010) findings. Empirical data from Servantie & Rispal (2018) also demonstrated that effectuation is present during the whole process of social venture creation. For example, they found that entrepreneurs in the emergence stage used effectual logic to overcome resources constraint and in the scale up phase where entrepreneurs partnered with locals using the affordable loss principle.

Empirical evidence presented by Akemu et al. (2016) clarified interactions with stakeholders and their outcomes. In their case study, Akemu et al. (2016) explained that interactions with angel investors resulted in the accumulation of resources and adaptations of entrepreneurial goals. Akemu et al. (2016) have also explained that entrepreneurs interacting with members of the industry acquired knowledge and increased their entrepreneurial "means" about how to produce their product. This is

similarly found by Weerakoon et al. (2019). Empirical findings presented by Weerakoon et al. (2019) demonstrates that interacting with customers resulted in labour input, i.e., the engagement with customers and suppliers on the work of venture development. Conversely, interacting with other stakeholders led to skill input i.e. self-taught skills such as suggestions for designing course content. Yet, it is worth to note that Weerakoon et al.'s (2019) data do not show pre-commitment from stakeholders interactions, their data suggests that entrepreneurs begin endeavouring from the scarcity of resources.

Furthermore, Akemu et al.'s (2016) findings show that individuals can expand their means and even ignite their entrepreneurial intention by interacting with the network and by leveraging their contingencies. In this vein, they suggested that individuals may generate an entrepreneurial intention by first acquiring legitimacy in the field and creating their own resources. On this issue, their findings note that social interactions may also trigger entrepreneurial intentions, instead of starting from a reassessment of means, as effectuation theory suggests. In addition, Akemu et al.'s (2016) results indicate that a multiplicity of agents provide the incentive to effectual entrepreneurs to create social change. This seems to align with Corner & Ho (2010) in regard to collective actions towards social change.

Recently, Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019) advanced this discussion on collective action by integrating effectuation into Ostrom's<sup>6</sup> (2015) institutional analysis and development. In this conceptual study, Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019) have proposed an effectual mode of collective action. Furthermore, they suggest that interactions are based on cooperation rather than competition and trust. Regarding interactions with others, Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019) argued that interactions should be perceived on an intersubjective level. Intersubjective interactions refer to the fact that *"a large part of what makes them (entrepreneurs) individuals comes from past interactions with others, either explicitly or implicitly incorporated into their tastes, preferences, values, and other subjective variables of interest"* (Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019, p. 408). This evokes intangible aspects of exchanging with others. Therefore, Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019) propose that what comes out of entrepreneurial interactions is not simply a combination of possibilities already existing within each entrepreneur, but a transformation of possibilities or realities.

They indicate that every interaction with potential stakeholders is transformed into a deal or commitment which defines the relationship between the actors involved. For Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019), these deals and commitments are called artifacts at the effectual mode of collective action.

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<sup>6</sup> Ostrom (2015) empirical research around the globe evidenced collective action in medium size groups showing how individuals normally solve collective-action problems. This framework was constructed by Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019) when analyzing the historical case study of a sustainability problem investigated in depth by Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom.

These artifacts refer to sustainable new ventures, new institutions, and new rules. In Sarasvathy & Ramesh's (2019, p. 20) words,

*"effectual actors in the collective-action process pay attention to these principles, they not only act within the rules of the game that define action situations, they also co-create new rules and institutions that transform any situation to a sustainable collective-action situation where individuals act toward group goals."*

Hence, when looking at social interactions at the intersection of effectuation and social entrepreneurship literature, it can be argued that the collective aspect of interactions is important. In this regard, Corner & Ho (2010), Servantie & Rispal (2018), and Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019) demonstrated the development of a venture with the engagement of multiple actors. Conversely, Akemu et al. (2016) also presented some clarification of expansion of entrepreneurial means with angel investors. Weerakoon et al. (2019) briefly presented some clarifications of what is exchanged in interactions with others when they discussed labour input from customers and skill inputs from other stakeholders. Yet, we understand that this is not enough to bring clarity to what is exchanged, nor does it reveal the potential of social interactions. Table 2 exposes the research focus and what these studies contribute to our central research question.

**TABLE 2 - INTERACTIONS IN THE INTERSECTION OF EFFECTUATION AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP LITERATURE**

<b>Research question or research focus</b>	<b>Findings regarding "How do interactions shape the venture creation process?"</b>	<b>Authors</b>
How are social entrepreneurship opportunities recognized and exploited?	Empirical evidence highlighted that in opportunity development:  (i) opportunity was organically grown and nurtured by the actors linked to the social issue, (ii) collective action appears broadly at opportunity development, (iii) experience corridor relates to the collective actions raising the awareness and exchanges information, (iv) there is a moment of inspiration or spark of insight that engenders the opportunity development.	(Corner & Ho, 2010)
How is the emergence of the social enterprise theorized?	- Proposition of a model of social enterprise emergence focusing on how effectual network pre-committed produce material artifact. - Description of interactions with angel investors and other stakeholders. - Broader view on agency of the effectuators, as distributed agency is related to the multiple actors involved in the venture creation.	(Akemu et al., 2016)
How do the association of causation, effectuation, and bricolage shift over a particular venture's creation cycle?	- Effectuation logic is the only mode of action that was deployed along the whole process. - Suggest that social interactions should be investigated in a larger perspective to aggregate inputs.	(Servantie & Rispal, 2018)

<p>How can entrepreneurs tackle sustainability problems?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Development of an effectual model of collective action to identify sustainable solutions.</li> <li>-Highlight the presence of collective actions in the venture creation process</li> <li>-Entrepreneurs are not merely combinatory but it may transform realities.</li> </ul>	<p>(Sarasvathy &amp; Ramesh, 2019)</p>
<p>How does effectuation determine entrepreneurial action in the pre-emergence of a social enterprise?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effectual behaviour is at the backbone of entrepreneurs' action, complemented by causation and overlapped by bricolage.</li> <li>-Authors also describe labour inputs from costumers and skill inputs from other stakeholders</li> </ul>	<p>(Weerakoon et al., 2019)</p>

In this section, we have observed that social interactions in the context of social entrepreneurship have a collective dimension as well as an intersubjective spectrum (Akemu et al., 2016; S. Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019). Yet, interactions guided by this collective action make individuals transform their commitments and deals into artefacts (Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019). Still, this is in consonance with what we propose in this thesis, as we analyse the everyday social interactions occurring during the emergence of social ventures, outlining those which may provoke pivots.

Following that, we now summarise our learnings so far pointing out how pivot may enrich our understanding of social interactions.

### 2.3 Framing social interactions in effectuation.

Significant exchanges of information, and not specifically a pre-commitment as the literature says, may lead to consistent changes in the course of direction of a nascent venture (Grimes, 2018; Mainela & Puhakka, 2009; Nielsen & Lassen, 2012). Therefore, we suggest that social interactions, for example simple information exchanges, may lead to a considerable change in the venture path. However, up until now, the literature has mainly investigated the social interactions between the entrepreneurs and co-creators either as the method to gather information or as a phase of the effectual process. Empirical evidence remains unclear about what actually happens within entrepreneurial interactions and what their outcomes are in terms of the development of the entrepreneurial project. Therefore, this is at the core of our research as we aim to understand everyday social interactions and their outcomes.

We identified that an in-depth investigation of the social interactions landscape is yet to be explored. As the research reviewed above shows us, entrepreneurs interact with others to explore and exploit information; (i) expanding cycles of resources; (ii) adding cycles of constraint, in terms of receiving criticisms or negative feedback; and iii) aiming to create alliances and partnerships (Dew &

Sarasvathy, 2007). Still, this seems to be fairly intertwined. In this, researchers recently presented empirical evidence that the effectual process does not start from the reassessment of entrepreneurial means. Fischer & Reuber (2011) findings demonstrated that the social interactions that entrepreneurs engage in generate a process of reassessment of means. Moreover, Kerr & Coviello (2019) suggested that the effectual process may not have a point of departure. Therefore, we consider social interactions not as a static phase where entrepreneurs interact with others only to accumulate information, but as something that occurs systematically. In addition to this, literature has pointed to the neglect of studying social interactions in effectuation theory (Arend et al., 2015; Grégoire & Cherchem, 2019; Kitching & Rouse, 2020; Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019), suggesting that social interactions may help understand the entrepreneurial process.

Conversely, we understand that as entrepreneurs stitch their interactions in shaping their venture idea, each co-creator involved in (or touched by) this process may bring a range of means, resources, and/or constraints. Effectuation literature investigates the influence of the uncertain context in which venture creation occurs through the social interactions entrepreneurs engage in (Kitching & Rouse, 2020). In a similar line of thought, Chalmers & Shaw (2017) have been raising attention to the situatedness of social interactions as a way to understand the entrepreneurial context. This corroborates our research as social interactions are not extensively described and investigated in sufficient depth to be fully understood. In this, Kitching & Rouse (2020) reported that cognitions and actions of the entrepreneurs are also features to be considered when analysing the influence of social contexts on the venture creation process. This echoes with what Kerr & Coviello (2019) noted on collective cognition and network characteristics influencing entrepreneurs' behaviours. Furthermore, this is even more prominent when considering social entrepreneurship literature as Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019) argued that interactions guided by collective action create artifacts, referring to sustainable new ventures, new institutions, and new rules. Therefore, the literature suggests others outcomes of social interactions beyond those revised above.

Similarly, Dew et al. (2018) emphasize social interaction as an entrepreneurial expertise when entrepreneurs ask questions to others, seeking tangible and intangible resources. This concentrates on how entrepreneurs engage in exchanges to acquire resources but do not focus on "what" is exchanged in the practice of "the asks". While the "how" of the effectual ask "has repeatable elements capable of continual practice and improvement" (p399), acknowledging that is intrinsic to the early stages of the entrepreneurial process, the "what" of "the asks" varies according to the stage of the enterprise and the stakeholder and situation presented. Nonetheless, the literature has not presented empirical evidence about this matter.

In parallel, Mainela & Puhakka (2009) evoke the relevance of social interactions in gathering information and the potential of “opening doors” for new courses of direction in the venture creation process. This can be seen in the outcomes of interactions reported by Dew & Sarasvathy (2007), as they argued that interacting with others resulted in expanding resources, adding constraints and possible alliances. That is to say that the literature continues to generalise about social interactions, neglecting the potential for transformation and change that can be engaged through interacting with others. This is aligned with Fischer & Reuber (2011), who provide information about the impact of online interactions on the venture creation process. Figure 3 illuminates what we found about social interactions in the literature revised.

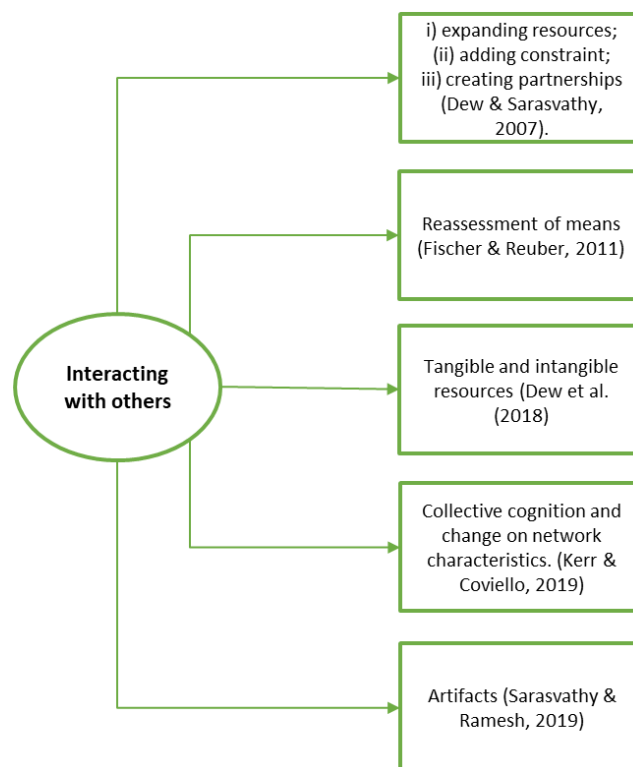


FIGURE 3 - FRAMING SOCIAL INTERACTIONS (MADE BY THE AUTHOR)

Overall, we found that social interactions are researched as a deliberate practice where entrepreneurs interact deliberately asking one other for resources (Dew et al., 2018). However, social interactions seem to be addressed mainly in reflections of the self-identity, cognition and subjective aspects of the venture creation process (Kerr & Coviello, 2019; Nielsen & Lassen, 2012; S. Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019). Yet, we consider that social interactions may go beyond these elements bringing more robustness to an entrepreneur’s venture idea (Fischer & Reuber, 2011). Interactions are inherent to the process of venture creation. Particularly in the initial phase of venture development where entrepreneurs seek to make sense of their ventures, we believe that interactions may be more linked,

for instance, to the reorientation of the venture's strategy or to the refinement of the business model than the literature currently presents.

Following this line, we adopted pivot (Grimes, 2018) - change in the venture direction - as a marker on the venture creation process in order to assess the potential outcomes of social interactions on it. While effectuation is based on social interactions for the development of a venture, pivot is based on testing the solution, where the venture emerges from the accumulation of information from users and marketplace acquired through social interactions. Therefore, the use of social interactions as a resource mobilization strategy appears to be similar in both literatures. Moreover, Ghezzi's (2019) empirical study reported that the use of pivot in the effectuation process provide an operational support to the emergent effectual literature. Thus, we find that the concept of pivot can help to clarify which type of social interactions may generate a future change in venture idea-work, and also affect the social venturing process of nascent entrepreneurs. This reduces the complexity for addressing what is a pre-commitment or a commitment and, once we can trace back the origins of pivot in regard to social interactions, we may provide a broader view of how social interactions shape the entrepreneur's venture idea work, and pivots.

Increasingly, researchers have been calling the attention to the study of the social interactions (Arend et al., 2015; Dew et al., 2018; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Grégoire & Cherchem, 2019; Høvig et al., 2017; Kerr & Coviello, 2019). While some authors have proposed examinations of the unexpected learning events along the venture creation process (Grégoire & Cherchem, 2019), others call to delve in more detail the role of co-creators (Arend et al., 2015). Again, many studies have called for more specification about the role and impact of social interactions (Arend et al., 2015; Fisher, 2012; Grégoire & Cherchem, 2019; Høvig et al., 2017; Kitching & Rouse, 2020; S. Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019). Therefore, this research contributes to this line of research by answering two questions: *“What are the social interactions early stage entrepreneurs engage in?”* and *“How do social interactions shape the venture creative process?”*.

Building on the abovementioned, we move onwards exploring the concept of pivots.

## 2.4. Pivots in entrepreneurship literature

During the venture creative process, this type of decision or reorientation of the course of action is called pivot (Hampel et al., 2019; Shepherd & Gruber, 2020). Following this, we introduce the concept of pivot into this thesis aiming to clarify how social interactions may shape the entrepreneurial



process. Therefore, in this section, we critically review this emergent literature of pivoting in order to explore how pivots might usefully enrich effectuation theory.

Pivot is one of the key components of lean management start-up. Ries' (2011) practice-grounded work originally defined pivots as *"a structured course correction designed to test a new fundamental hypothesis about the product, strategy or engine of growth"* (Ries, 2011, p. 149). In his best-seller, Ries (2011) encouraged entrepreneurs to pivot as individuals learned more about their customer's problems, needs, and preferences through experimentation, leading them to consider the proposed solution. Later, Boddington & Kavadias (2018, p. 4) conceptualize pivots as *"an evolutionary search manifested by shifts in varying components of the venture's business strategy with the goal to achieve a successful outcome."* Hampel et al. (2019) described pivots, in a similar line, as the shift or a change of direction, partial or total, of a product, a strategy, or any other element of a business model.

While pivoting has recently received attention from management researchers (Hampel et al., 2019; Shepherd & Gruber, 2020), this emerging academic literature indicates divergence on what constitutes a pivot (Flechas Chaparro & de Vasconcelos Gomes, 2021). In this, pivot may refer to a change in the firm strategy (Boddington & Kavadias, 2018), a structured correction of the course of action designed to test new hypothesis (Hampel et al., 2019; Shepherd & Gruber, 2020), or a replacement of aspects of the business model (Teece & Linden, 2017). Meanwhile, other authors have proposed other labels to explore the phenomenon of pivot, such as creative process (Grimes, 2018).

Recently, Flechas Chaparro & de Vasconcelos Gomes (2021) developed a systematic analysis on the literature of pivots, arguing that pivots are investigated through five conceptualizations; a type of change, a type of strategic decision, a mechanism related to correction or replacement, a process or an event, and a state or condition. Considering that Boddington & Kavadias (2018), Hampel et al. (2019) and Ries (2011) agree in positioning pivots as *"a strategic hypothesis"*, and not as simple strategic change, we adopted the Hampel et al. (2019) conceptualisation of pivot described above, in this thesis. Pivot will be useful to understand when and why social entrepreneurs are persuaded that their actual model is not feasible, or, perhaps, not viable anymore, and needs adjustment. As we previously mentioned, we use pivot in this thesis as a landmark in entrepreneurs' creative process in order to assess the potential effect of social interactions on it.

When focusing on the empirical research in the field of entrepreneurship, authors have been using the concept of pivots to explain small changes and shifts along the interactive process of venture creation (Grimes, 2018; Hampel et al., 2019; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2020). Research has been utilizing pivots in the management literature (Crilly, 2018; Grimes, 2018); in organizational literature (Bandera

& Thomas, 2019; Boddington & Kavadias, 2018); in stakeholder management (Hampel et al., 2019); and in strategic management (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2020). Thus, we now turn attention to this scientific interest in pivoting process and, after that, we frame the emergent literature about pivots to our research goals.

First, when looking at the management literature, Grimes (2018) borrowed the notion of pivots to investigate the revision of entrepreneurial creative process. Grimes' (2018) study focused on how entrepreneurs incorporated external feedback combining the notions of idea work<sup>7</sup> and identity work<sup>8</sup>. In line with our research goal, we will mainly focus on how pivots affect the idea work of nascent entrepreneurs. Therefore, focusing on the idea work, empirical evidence presented by Grimes (2018) demonstrated that entrepreneurs react to external feedback during the re-evaluation of the venture creation process, through: i) *Defending* ii) *Repairing* , iii) *Re-engineering*. The empirical evidence presented by Grimes (2018) indicated that:

- i) *defending* idea work posture refers to entrepreneurs reacting unwilling to adopt external suggestions and feedback. Then, the entrepreneur moves onwards clarifying, justifying and broadening any or all aspects of the business model.
- ii) *repairing* idea work refers to entrepreneurs expanding their possibilities by permitting shifts and changes in their ventures' idea without impacting the core value proposition. Then entrepreneurs question or narrow any or all aspects of the business model or replacing peripheral aspects of the business model.
- iii) *re-engineering* idea work refers to entrepreneurs reacting by actively incorporating feedback and suggestions to their venture's idea. In doing so, entrepreneurs adopt a re-engineering posture as they criticize or replace any or all aspects of their business model (Grimes, 2018). This means that entrepreneurs engage in full incorporation of the feedback and replace key assumptions of their idea work.

Furthermore, his empirical evidence has also highlighted the collective sensemaking aspects of social interactions. When Grimes (2018) mentions collective sensemaking, he refers to exchanges between entrepreneurs and peers – eg: other entrepreneurs involved in the incubation program - after feedback or mentoring sessions that increased the dialogue about ideas and feedback. Grimes (2018) demonstrates how informal discussions may shape the attention and intention of

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<sup>7</sup> Idea work relates to “efforts to enhance the novelty and usefulness of an idea (i.e., the cognitive representation of a creative solution)” (Grimes, 2018, p. 5)

<sup>8</sup>Identity work refers to “efforts to reconstruct and present one's identity in ways that enhance self-efficacy” (Grimes, 2018, p. 5).

entrepreneurs during interactions that triggered reflections. Hence, this collective sensemaking and increased dialogue seems to affect the revision of the entrepreneurial creative process.

When focusing on organizational literature, Boddington & Kavadias (2018) investigated the role of pivoting in the performance and growth of early stages entrepreneurial ventures. Boddington & Kavadias' (2018) study analysed qualitatively the evolution of early-stage ventures during opportunity identification looking from the initial idea to implementation. Boddington & Kavadias' (2018) empirical data provide information about local narrow pivots, such as shift to targeted customer or product/service alterations. As result, Boddington & Kavadias' (2018) empirical research proposed a typology of pivots, divided as: i) market, ii) product/service, iii) execution/operations and, iv) organization (team).

Boddington & Kavadias' (2018) empirical data indicated that knowledge of context is central to the performance of a pivot. Boddington & Kavadias (2018) described that those ventures that lacked knowledge of the market context had difficulty accommodating the venture's proposal, although the high level of technical knowledge or academic background of the team. Their empirical findings demonstrated that entrepreneurs who had more knowledge of the market and the context were more likely to reorient their venture ideas. This echoes with the effectuation mode of action as entrepreneurs interact with the context, seeking to co-create their venture (Arend et al., 2015; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007).

When looking at stakeholder management literature, an empirical study by Hampel et al. (2019) focused on the relationship with stakeholders when entrepreneurs pivot. Hampel et al.'s (2019) starting point is that while entrepreneurs pivot, sometimes they also have to redirect stakeholder resources. Following this, Hampel et al.'s (2019) empirical evidence demonstrated how radical pivots may endanger relationships with stakeholders who initially identified with the venture and, therefore, threaten the viability of the venture. In their case study, the authors associate identification management to mitigate the risk of reorienting the venture to a different direction and build new relationships.

Hampel et al.'s (2019) study suggests that pivots happen differently according to the dependence on stakeholder resources. For them, entrepreneurs have different challenges and struggles when developing a venture that has a more or less developed stakeholder network. Similar to Boddington & Kavadias (2018), Hampel et al. (2019) also argued that the viability of the venture depends on external resources as entrepreneurs face different challenges during the process of venture creation. This resonates with the Dew et al. (2018) perspective of "effectual asks", as social interactions are conceived as a deliberated practice of entrepreneurs asking questions to others

seeking tangible and intangible resources. On the other hand, the effectuation process is actor-dependent perspective by which entrepreneurs are in a constant process of seeking information and experimenting their venture (Arend et al., 2015; Read et al., 2009), differently, from pivot that relies on greater dependency from information of the context.

In the strategic management literature, Kirtley & O'Mahony's (2020) empirical evidence demonstrates how and when entrepreneurs pivot. Kirtley & O'Mahony (2020) found that entrepreneurs pivot when new information disagrees with or expands their beliefs. In practice, Kirtley & O'Mahony (2020) argued that pivots happen through strategic additions or strategic exits of information, where strategic addition is associated with unanticipated opportunity, triggering entrepreneur to incorporate the new activity or service, and strategic exit is related to a problem that endangers the actual belief of the strategy.

They demonstrate that either in strategic exits or strategic additions, entrepreneurs accumulate new information and small decisions to increment their strategies over time, leading to a pivot event. This suggests that pivots are rarely achieved through only one specific decision but rather by an aggregation of different inputs and a series of smaller decisions (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2020). This agrees with the notion of process studies in this thesis and, therefore, the effectual mode of action. Kirtley & O'Mahony's (2020) findings contribute to the focus and attention of our research, as in this thesis we empirically examine entrepreneurial pivoting processes looking at the social interactions related to it, in order to clarify the potential origins, and triggers, of pivots.

On a broad perspective, social interactions with customers, clients, peers, mentors, market context and other stakeholders are strategies to aggregate information in order to refine the venture process. Since effectuation and pivot agrees with this, we place good use of pivots to set a concrete change on the venture creative process in order to bring operational support to effectuation theory (Ghezzi, 2019). As we saw when revising social interactions in effectual literature, interacting with others is more associated to the subjective aspects of the venture or resource mobilization, therefore, the use of pivots is crucial to our research into the effect of social interactions in the venture idea work.

The above aligns with the focus of this thesis in understanding how entrepreneurs' interactions, experiences and behaviour lead to pivot. Looking at this stream at the entrepreneur level, authors such as Kirtley and O'Mahony (2020) and Grimes (2018) draw attention to how entrepreneurs adjust their business idea according to their behaviour and perceptions. We understand that pivoting also happens in an uncertain context, as well as in effectuation theory, since entrepreneurs may struggle to define the best strategy for a pivot - i.e. what, when and how to pivot - as well as in determining which social interactions might be involved at the pivoting process.

Following that, we move beyond the idea of pre-commitment or a commitment in effectuation theory, since once we identify changes in the idea work – or pivots - we can scrutinize the social interactions and signs that originated the pivot. Therefore, in the following section we frame the notion of pivots in regard to our research goals.

## 2.5. Framing the notion of pivot

Our starting point is that through social interactions entrepreneurs can adjust their venture ideas and pivot. This is at the heart of the effectuation notion which proposes that entrepreneurs interact with others as a way of progressing with the refinement of their ventures' idea work. In this, we draw our attention to how social interactions may shape the entrepreneurial process, and more specifically, how pivots play a role in this process. Thus, by shedding light on entrepreneurs' social interactions, we aim to illuminate pivots and their triggers, and how this may shape the effectual process a nascent entrepreneur engages in.

Empirical evidence in pivoting literature has reported that pivots emerge from; user interactions (McDonald and Gao, 2019); an accumulation of different decisions (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2020); feedback, influenced by a collective sensemaking (Grimes, 2018); or prior market knowledge (Boddington & Kavadias, 2018). While affecting the stakeholder's network structure of entrepreneurs (Hampel et al., 2020). In turn, all this reinforces the idea of pivot being intertwined with social interactions, and its outcomes. While Flechas Chaparro & de Vasconcelos Gomes (2021) and Kirtley & O'Mahony (2020) noted that these pivoting processes are not clearly associated with particular enactors, or triggers, and do not present precise origins of the strategic reorientations, our analysis of social interactions and changes in the creative process of the enterprise may help clarify this link.

Overall, we found a strong linkage between the pivoting process and the effectual logic in regard to social interactions. While effectuation relies on active stakeholders that engage through resources, the performance of pivot depends on users, customers and consumers as the key stakeholders targeted for the collection of new information. Therefore, pivoting may benefit from "effectual asks" (see discussion on section 2.2.1) as an entrepreneurial mode of action to search for information on the context. The literature on pivots is in accordance with what we found in the revision of effectual literature, as Mansoori & Lackéus (2020) also indicated that social interaction is a key aspect that remains largely underexplored in the majority of entrepreneurial methods literature, effectuation and pivot included.

Therefore, our research aims to clarify and qualify social interactions with a view to better understanding how interactions may help to gather information from the context and shape pivots, and, thereby, the entrepreneurial journey. In a similar line, Shepherd & Gruber (2020) have encouraged investigation into the activities involved in enacting a specific pivot, or as they call it, the information signals that triggers them. Thus, we note that by understanding this origin or information signals through interactions with others, we can contribute to entrepreneurship literature. We consider that social interactions are not only a source of information, constraints and shape self-identify, but they may also provide direct opportunities to refine and strengthen the idea work and its prototype.

Recent empirical findings demonstrated the relevance of resources and knowledge from the market, to pivot (Boddington & Kavadias, 2018). Beyond that, Boddington & Kavadias (2018), Grimes (2018), and Shepherd & Gruber (2020) have evoked the relevance of other elements besides the new information available in the pivoting process. Grimes' (2018) empirical evidence about collective sensemaking put light on the relevance of exchanges between peers following the mentoring and feedback session. In this, Grimes (2018) argued that increased dialogue affects the entrepreneurial process, highlighting the reflections and sensemaking of entrepreneurs during new knowledge acquisition. Moreover, this also reinforces the idea that performing a pivot is beyond the collection of information. While Grime (2018) focused on feedback, in this thesis we focus on social interaction as a way to open the doors to other potential outcomes, such as collective reflections, collaborations, social support during interactions, and pivot. We suggest that by understanding the interactions entrepreneurs engage in, we can clarify the path that leads entrepreneurs to pivot. This is also in line with the idea of information signs presented by Shepherd & Gruber (2020) above.

Based on the above, we emphasize the connection of interactions with others and pivots. The literature we have reviewed shows that interactions lead to self-identity, cognition and subjective reflections of the venture creation process (Kerr & Coviello, 2019; Nielsen & Lassen, 2012; S. Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019), we propose the use of pivots to understand how it shapes the work of the idea venture, as shown in Figure 4. This thesis takes into consideration the everyday social interactions that entrepreneurs engage in, and are influenced by, to deal with the complex dynamics of refining their venture ideas. In this line, by the investigation of entrepreneurial pivots we can explore the small changes in entrepreneurs' course of direction, resulting from social interaction entrepreneurs are engaging in (Grimes, 2018; Hampel et al., 2019).

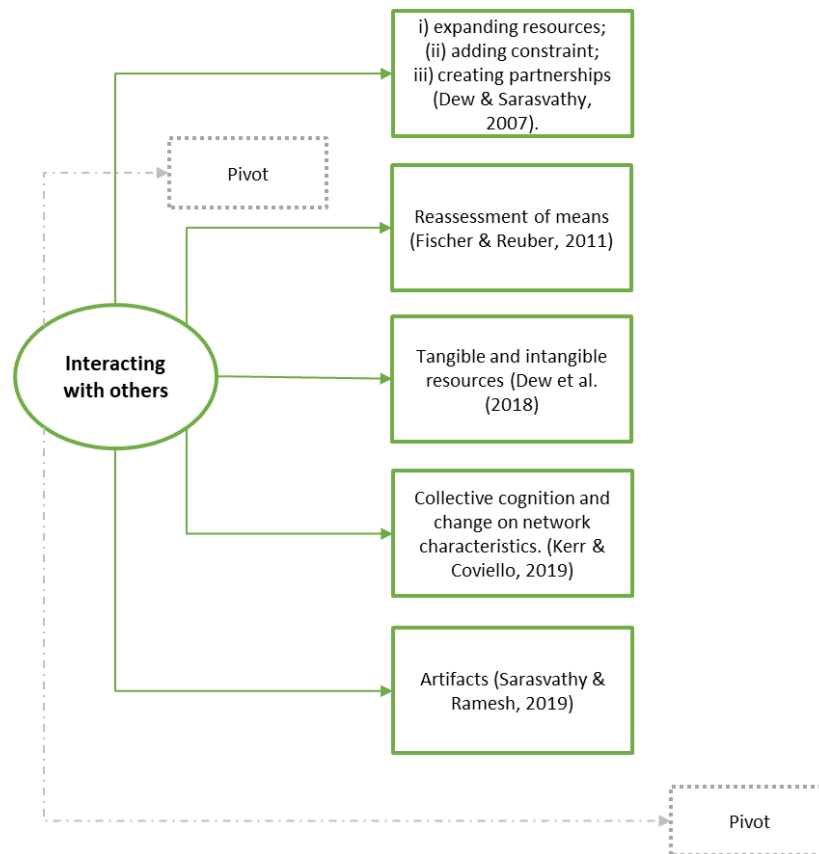


FIGURE 4 - FRAMING THE NOTION OF PIVOTS (MADE BY THE AUTHOR)

Therefore, after revising the literature on pivots, we explained why we address in this thesis the second research question: “How do social interactions shape the entrepreneurial process?” We conclude this chapter in the next section.

## 2.6. Conclusion

In this literature review chapter, we aimed to capture and critique previous research in which lay the theoretical foundations for answering our two research questions: “What are the social interactions entrepreneurs engage in?” and “How do social interactions feed entrepreneurial pivots?”.

Our starting point was the venture creation process in association with effectuation mode of action as entrepreneurs seek information to improve the venture idea. After that, considering the reality and the everyday social interactions which entrepreneurs are exposed to and influenced by, we deal with complex dynamics beyond the exchange of information. Later, we observed that current literature on entrepreneurship investigates entrepreneurial pivots through the small changes in

entrepreneurs' course of direction, depending on the social interaction entrepreneurs are exposed to. Thus, social interactions resonate with pivots as social interactions nourish the pivoting process, which may provide informational signs to the pivoting processes.

To build this argument, we adopted effectuation theory and the concept of pivot. Throughout this literature review, we learned that the effectuation process implies shifts in the effectual journey after interacting with others, in three different avenues: i) expansion of resources, ii) adding constraints, and iii) possible alliances (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007). This puts social interactions in the effectual process at the centre of the entrepreneurial journey as interactions are the mechanism where the entrepreneur gathers information and may develop alliances. We also learned that social interactions have different dynamic sublevels and that they are not placed in one moment in time during the effectuation process (Kerr & Coviello, 2019). In this, we found that social interactions are researched as a deliberated practice where entrepreneurs interact, asking one other for resources (Dew 2018), while other authors investigated social interactions mainly focusing on self-identity, cognition and subjective aspects of the venture creation process (Kerr & Coviello, 2019; Nielsen & Lassen, 2012; S. Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019). Building on this, we understand that social interactions are more complex than they have been portrayed in the current literature on effectuation as they may provide other inputs to the entrepreneurial pivots. This lies at the core of our research goals as we focus on the examination of the microlevel of social interactions, comprehending how they shape the pivoting processes.

Given that both effectuation and pivots work under the context of uncertainty, effectuation may enhance the understanding of how interactions happen and how its shape pivots. In a similar line, the literature of pivots call the attention to how entrepreneurs' behaviours, and/or interactions, are resulting into pivots (Flechas Chaparro & de Vasconcelos Gomes, 2021). Other authors claimed clarification of the informational signs leading to pivots (Shepherd & Gruber, 2020). Following that, as we mentioned, once we identified changes in the venture idea work - pivot -, we can scrutinize the social interactions and signs that originated the pivot. Therefore, by explaining which social interactions might be involved in the pivoting process we can contribute to both literatures.

Figure 5 combines the research questions that guided this study and the literature used to justify our empirical study.



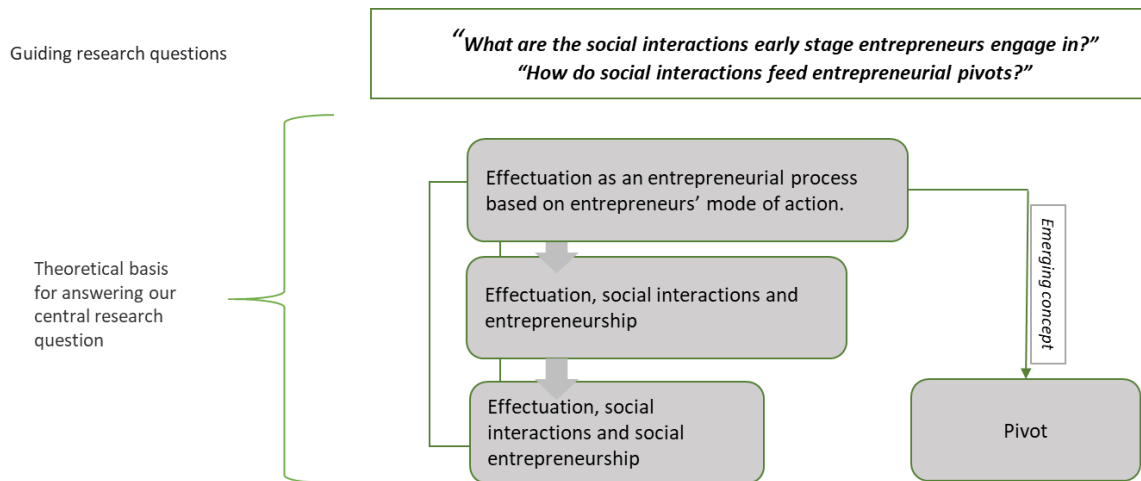


FIGURE 5 - NARROWING DOWN OUR RESEARCH QUESTION

Considering the processual lens of this chapter, we oriented the methods and procedures of data collection and data analysis through interpretative phenomenology to understand the everyday experiences of entrepreneurs. The following methodological chapter is built on the abovementioned review and is underpinned by the following considerations: i) the numerous scholars evidencing the issues within entrepreneurial processes and the call for better articulation between theory and method to bring clarity to concrete entrepreneurial behaviour; ii) the under-exploration of social interactions at the microlevel as a mode of action in shaping entrepreneurial process, iii) the complex dynamics of pivoting a venture in the early stages of the creation process as it goes through constant revisions.

Following that, we turn to the methodological chapter.

## Chapter III - Research methodology, strategy and procedures

In the previous chapter we critically reviewed the literature in which we laid the theoretical foundations for answering our research questions. As we learnt, remaining questions about everyday social interactions are yet to be fully explored. In this regard, we found that understanding specificities of social interactions may help us to understand the context of entrepreneurial action within which a venture is created (Berglund, 2007), and entrepreneurs perform pivots (Boddington & Kavadias, 2018; Shepherd & Gruber, 2020). Building on that, in this chapter we explain the research methodology used to carry out our research, focusing on the everyday experiences of entrepreneurs.

Congruency is crucial to create robust research design. The connection between elements of philosophy, methodology, and methods and procedures of analysis establish an aligned investigation approach (Crotty, 1998). For this matter, we paid attention in this thesis to the philosophical foundations of the research methodology to ensure a conductive logical thread in interpretative phenomenology. Therefore, phenomenology has a twofold role in this thesis, as a philosophical underpinning and a methodology. As Figure 1 illustrates, we adopted Benner's (1994) interpretative phenomenology as research methodology, which is underpinned by interpretivism and philosophical phenomenology, and concentrates on understanding entrepreneurs' everyday experiences.

We acknowledge that many authors reported different philosophical approaches and subdivisions to engage with research, raising controversies and lacking of fine consensus (Bryman, 2012; Crotty, 2003; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Moon & Blackman, 2014). To reduce these possible divergences, we have adopted Crotty's (2003) perspective, which suggests that researchers need to ask themselves four questions when developing a research design: *i) What methods do I propose to use? ii) What methodology governs my choice and use of methods? iii) What theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology in question? and iv) What paradigm or worldview informs this theoretical perspective?* (Crotty, 2003, p. 2). This is presented in Figure 6 below.

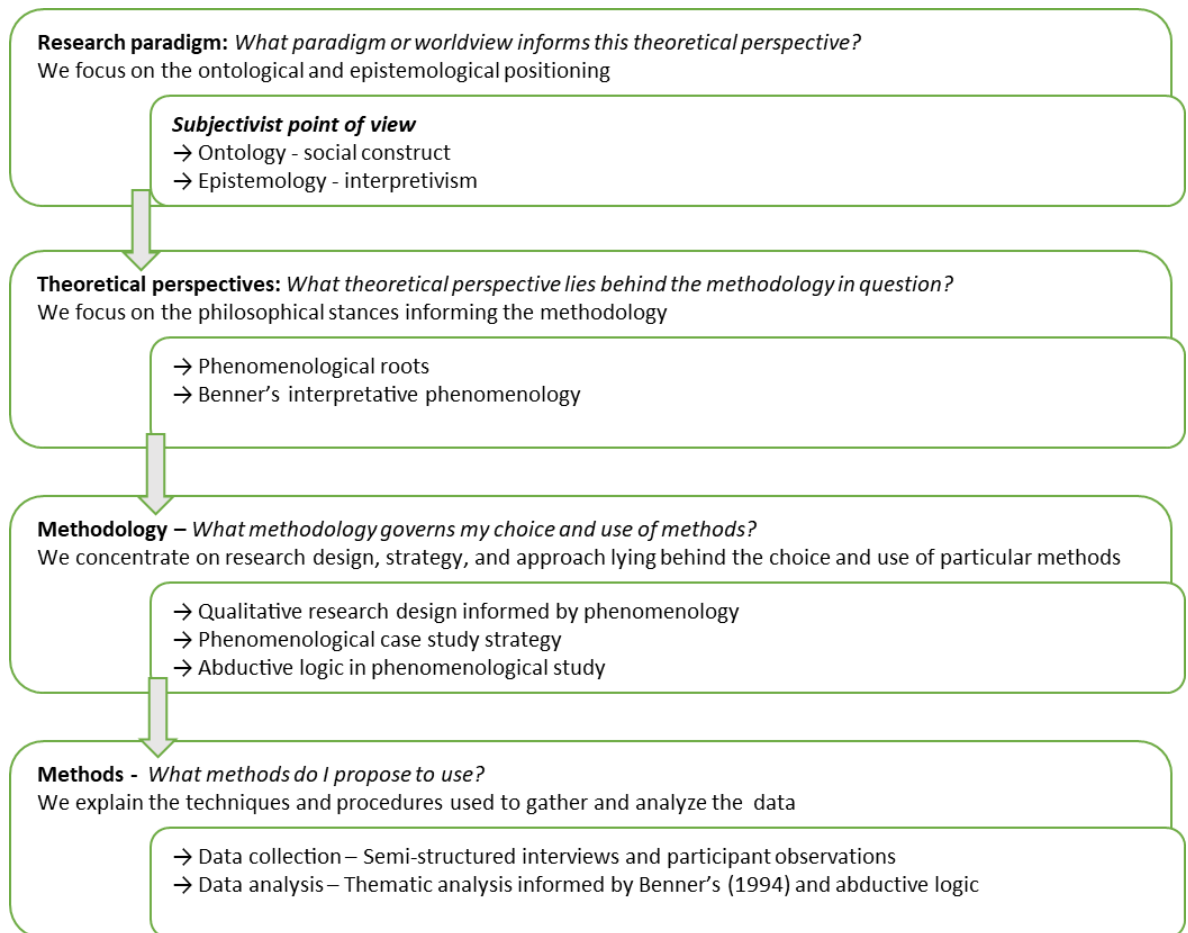


FIGURE 6 - APPROACHES OVERVIEW

Following Crotty (2003), Figure 6 summarizes the way in which this study was conceived. First, we explain the research paradigm exploring the social constructionist ontology of our thesis and our interpretive epistemology that are the baseline to our philosophical stances. We address the philosophical and methodological underpins. We start by explaining the phenomenological roots and then we describe Benner's (1994) interpretative phenomenology that informed our methodology. Given the dual role of phenomenology, we then discuss how the research design was influenced by interpretative phenomenology. We open this section by explaining the qualitative research design, then we turn to explaining the phenomenological case study strategy we used, and finally we describe the abductive logic in our phenomenological research. In the subsequent section, we detail the procedures of data collection and data analysis. We begin by the description of the field work preparation. Then, we describe the data collection methods where we first explain the participant observation we adopted, after which we describe the semi-structured interviews, considering the two rounds of interviews. After that, we discuss the data analysis procedures outlining the transcriptions and the thematic analysis used to scrutinise the data collected. We finish this chapter with final considerations to ensure the quality of the present research.

Building on that, in the following section, we will flesh out the epistemological and ontological stances that underlies our research paradigms.

### 3.1 Research paradigms: subjectivist point of view

A research paradigm pertains to the way in which researchers conduct their research based on their personal belief system. In this section, we briefly explain these belief systems, focusing on ontology and epistemology (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Then, we describe the theoretical perspectives that orient the methodology put in place for this research.

It is important to recognize that within traditional debates on research paradigms, two main assumptions are posited. Either the researcher takes an objectivist point of view where *“there is an external view point from which is possible to view the organization which is comprised of consistently real processes and structures”* (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 24); or a subjective point of view, in which : *“an organization is a socially constructed product, a label used by individuals to make sense of their social experiences, so it can be understood only from the point of view of individuals who are directly involved in the activities”* (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 24).

Considering these previous assumptions, we adopt a subjective perspective that frames the notion of reality as a projection of human imagination. As our research aims to unravel specificities in the dynamic entrepreneurial process, emphasizing social interactions and its outcomes, this thesis is concerned with how nascent entrepreneurs make sense of the world in which they live (Morgan, 2007), by creating meaning and patterns of their lived experiences. Building on this, we adopt a subjective point of view to investigate the ways in which entrepreneurs interact and pivot during the early entrepreneurial process.

In the next two sections, we explore the epistemological and ontological standpoint of the research to demonstrate our worldview.

#### 3.1.1 Interpretivist epistemological standpoint

The epistemological stance refers to *“how we know about what we know”* (Crotty, 1998, p. 8), thus the present discussion concerns the traditional debate on positivist and interpretivist standpoints

(Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2009). In this line, we explain in this section the epistemological standpoint of our thesis, focusing on this classical debate.

Following this traditional debate, positivists assume that the researcher and object researched are independent entities, and therefore the researcher is able to do the research without influencing it or being influenced by it (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). However, an interpretivist standpoint emerged from a subjective perspective in order to create a contrasting view to the positivist paradigm. Thus, interpretivism is rooted in subjectivism in which is the paradigm adopted in this present thesis. The study of interpretivism is about how individuals create meaning, found expression in Max Weber's work about the modern social sciences, and in particular to the explanation of how human actions may shape our society (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The interpretivist standpoint is developed through a subjective perspective which decrees that the individual is separated from the social world because human beings create meaning (Saunders et al., 2009) through their own comprehension of the world. This philosophical perspective puts greater emphasis on understanding the individual experience and their interpretations of the world around them. The interpretivist view allows the researcher to make sense of the context and process by interpreting the participant's point of view on the researched phenomenon. In saying so, an interpretivist study of the social world *"requires a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order."* (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 16). For this matter, we adopted an interpretivist epistemological standpoint to comprehend the everyday social interactions and everyday pivoting processes of entrepreneurs in the early phases of their venture creation.

This is followed by the recognition of a more complex, interactive and contextual understanding of the venture creation process (Hjorth et al., 2015; Moroz & Hindle, 2012; Shepherd, 2015; Steyaert, 2007). Since our research unveils specificities of the complexity of the everyday life of entrepreneurs, our findings and conclusion are derived from the participants' point of view and not from the theoretical world (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Yet, we paid attention to our theoretical and methodological approaches in order to create a coherent alignment to the study of the everyday life of entrepreneurs. Hereafter, we now move forward to the debate about the nature of the reality in this study.

### 3.1.2. Social constructivist ontological standpoint

The ontological standpoint discusses the nature of reality and existence. In other words, the central ontological mode of questioning is based on “*whether or not social reality exists independently of human conceptions and interpretations*” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 11). The key question is whether organizations can and should be considered as “*objective entities*” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15) that have an external reality to individuals, or whether the organizations should be considered as “*socially constructed*” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15) from the understanding and interpretations of the individuals. These opposing positions are often called objectivism, constructionism and constructivism (Bryman and Bell, 2011).<sup>9</sup>

The constructivism ontological stance relies on this debate of how the social actors understand and interact to create meanings of social entities (Bryman, 2012). The emphasis on meaning creation and comprehension of their experiences for constructivists indicates that individuals have a worldview that is socially constructed and understood (Creswell, 2009). The constructivist ontology follows an interpretivist philosophy in which it is crucial to explore the subjective meanings motivating the individual actions in order to understand endeavours (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornwill, 2009). Constructivism holds an ontological standpoint that rejects the existence of truth, objective facts and specific laws of human action. Likewise, the creative view of effectuation theory, to which this thesis aims to contribute, is rooted in constructivist that pursue the “*becomingness*” notion of social reality (Fletcher, 2006).

The constructivist view is “*not more or less true, in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated*” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). This idea of tailored reality or “*associate realities*” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111) is one of the starting points of the present research, since we investigate the relationship of everyday social interactions to entrepreneurial pivots. The constructivist standpoint instigates reflection on the way in which individuals socially construct their social realities (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This constructivist ontological position as a constant re-examination of the reality encourages the researcher to reflect on how the entrepreneurial process was refined from the entrepreneur’s own perspective. This is pivotal to the transition of entrepreneurship as process since authors have been claiming entrepreneurship as a journey and not as a single act (McMullen & Dimov, 2013; Moroz & Hindle, 2012).

Following the above-mentioned, authors have identified a relatedness ontology in entrepreneurship when investigating correlations between contextual aspects (Chalmers & Shaw, 2017; Hjorth et al., 2015). Thus, we take into consideration the relatedness aspect of the ontological worldview to our research. This allows our research to comprehend from the perspective of the

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that many of the discussions around the ontological, epistemological and paradigms typologies lack terminology consensus.

entrepreneur how the interactions within the acceleration program helped them to make sense of their ventures. Moreover, we also follow the call for research that explores more interactive, dynamic and contextual elements of the venture creation process (Hjorth et al., 2015; Steyaert, 2007). Dealing with the fundamental nature of existence and reality, constructivists believe that realities are understood in varied and subjective ways through personal experiences and interactions. This then asks the question of which way our philosophical underpinnings of the current research are applied in order to comprehend the entrepreneur's perspectives. For this matter, the subsequent section explores our philosophical and theoretical positions.

### 3.2. Philosophical and methodological underpinnings

In line with our epistemological and ontological stances, we explore in this section the theoretical perspective that underlies our research methodology. Following Crotty (2003), a theoretical perspective is conceived as the philosophical positioning that informs the research methodology. In this regard, the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of our thesis are informed by interpretative phenomenology. This is in line with Gill (2014) who explains that phenomenology is both a philosophical movement and part of the family of qualitative research methods. Likewise, phenomenology is one of the strands conveyed in the interpretivist perspective (Berglund, 2007; Crotty, 1998). Therefore, our interpretative research is rooted in philosophical phenomenology and phenomenologically inspired methodologies. As a result, we reinforce the coherence between elements of philosophy, methodology, methods, and analysis to build a robust research approach (Crotty, 1998).

Hence, given this dual capacity of phenomenology in our thesis, we begin by describing our philosophical roots in phenomenology. Then, in the next section, we explore the pillars of interpretative phenomenology philosophy. Next, we move on to Benner's perspective of interpretivist phenomenology from which we borrow some elements for our research methodology. After that, we turn the focus to elements of our research design informed by interpretative phenomenology, such as qualitative research, phenomenological case study, and abductive logic.

Before trying to understand interpretative phenomenology as a method it is important to build the foundation of phenomenological roots of the philosophy. We discuss this in the next paragraphs.

#### *Phenomenological roots.*

As we mentioned, the main philosophical tradition informing the framework of this research is phenomenology. Despite Franz Brentano (1838 - 1917) and Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938) being considered the founding fathers of phenomenology (Sanders, 1982), the majority of phenomenological research draws from the Husserl's descriptive approach and Heidegger's (a disciple of Husserl) interpretive approach (Gill, 2014). In this section we draw a few paragraphs on the foundations of phenomenological philosophy, and then focus on the interpretivist strand of phenomenological research.

Authors recognized that exploring the phenomenon of human consciousness is not a simple task (Gill, 2014; Sanders, 1982). Gill (2014) describes that phenomenological approaches share five interrelated commonalities: (i) foundation of phenomenological philosophy, (ii) emphasis on meaning of individual's experiences, (iii) focus on grasping the "experiencers'" point of view, (iv) a purposive sampling, and (v) thematic analysis that brings researchers' creativity and imagination together. The issue (i), (ii) and (iii) are explored in the following paragraphs, and in the subsequent section, as we discuss interpretation as creation of meanings and lived experiences of participants. The issue (iv) is discussed in the section 3.3.1.2. and the issue (v) is explained in the section 3.3.3., when we treat the procedures of research.

- i) Phenomenological research is *"the study of lived or experiential meaning and attempts to describe and interpret these meanings in the ways that they emerge and are shaped by consciousness, language, our cognitive and non-cognitive sensibilities, and by our pre-understandings and presuppositions"* (Van Manen & Adams, 2009, p. 614). Therefore, phenomenology is rooted in the questioning of how people make sense of the world around them (Cope, 2005).
- ii) As phenomenological approaches seek to illuminate and clarify implicit meaning of human experiences through interpretation, Sanders (1982) described that phenomenology *"it is the search for "essences" that cannot be revealed by ordinary observation."* (p.354). This implies that phenomena are actively constructed through human consciousness. In this matter, phenomenologists perceive humans as intentional beings, with language, word and existing objects with which interpretation give meaning to them (Berglund, 2007). This means that phenomenologists seek to comprehend and interpret individuals' experiences, clarifying what is already known and making explicit what was perhaps forgotten.
- iii) In addition to the meaning creation interpretation, there are other elements and objects of human intentions to be interpreted. This means that phenomenology aims to uncover the everyday experiences of individuals as *"the meaningful ways in which things are experienced,*



*made sense of and enacted in everyday life*" (Berglund, 2007a, p. 75). Phenomenologists refer to human behaviour "*as a product of how people interpret their worlds*", (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.19), or as "*participants' lived experience*" in which the experiences need to be interpreted (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 149). The sense making process and creation of meaning in phenomenology underscores the relevance of everyday life experiences. As such, it encourages to examine, and re-examine, everyday taken-for-granted life experiences to uncover new and/or unravel omitted meanings (Laverty, 2008).

Phenomenological philosophy has been present in a diversity of fields, however, mainly in teaching pedagogy (Van Manen & Adams, 2009), in nursing and ethical issues (Benner, 1994), and as general methodology in psychology (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Furthermore, it has been increasingly evident in organization research (Gibson & Hanes, 2003; Gill, 2014) and, only recently, appearing in entrepreneurship literature (Berglund, 2007a). It is important to note that phenomenology underpins several concepts related to management, organizational and entrepreneurship research (Gill, 2014). Following this, Cope (2005) has claimed that the investigation of the everyday life of entrepreneurs may bring a closer perspective of the interactive process that happens in practice (Cope, 2005). Berglund (2007) and Gill (2014) have suggested that phenomenological studies and process thinking are useful and reliable to elaborate coherent interpretative research. In the case at hand, it opens an avenue for investigating everyday life experiences of entrepreneurs and examining what are the social interactions and to what extent they nourish entrepreneurial pivots.

Phenomenology is not a uniform philosophical school of thought (Cope, 2005). As we briefly mentioned, phenomenological research has evolved either through descriptive or interpretative strands (Gill, 2014). In consonance with our interpretivist epistemology, we design this research grounded on interpretivist phenomenology. The use of interpretative phenomenology emphasizes the entrepreneurial experience and concentrates on capturing the entrepreneur's point of view, and its intertwined elements. Therefore, we now turn to Benner's (1994) interpretivist phenomenology in order to introduce more practical application of our research methodology.

### 3.2.1. Benner's interpretive phenomenology informing methodology

Given this dual capacity of phenomenology in our thesis, we first explore the philosophical foundations of phenomenology, and then we describe its influence in our research methodology. This thesis adopts a Heideggerian interpretivist strand focusing on Benner's (1994) interpretive phenomenology to inform our methodology. Benner's (1994) approach aims to understand the world of the participant, or events. The goal of investigating people, events, experiences and practices in

their own terms is to comprehend their world and self (Benner, 1994). Following this, in this section we differentiate Benner's (1994) interpretative phenomenology from the other approaches, exploring the 'whys' and 'hows' of our methodology.

The use of interpretative phenomenology in empirical research emphasizes the meaningful ways in which things are experienced in order to make sense of everydayness (Berglund, 2007). Therefore, interpretation is a crucial process to understand the individual world through back and forth between foreground and background (Benner, 1994), or through the historically learned practices and background understandings (Berglund, 2007b; Cope, 2005). Table 3 describes the interpretative phenomenology applied in organizational studies. On a related note, we included Van Maanen's hermeneutic phenomenology as an illustrative example of a hybrid approach, since it combines descriptive and interpretative stances.

**TABLE 3 - TYPOLOGY OF INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGIES**

	<b>Descriptive phenomenology (Husserlian)</b>	<b>Interpretive phenomenology (Heideggerian)</b>	
	<b>Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology</b>	<b>Benner's interpretive phenomenology</b>	<b>Smith's interpretative phenomenological analysis</b>
<i>Disciplinary origin</i>	Pedagogy	Nursing	Psychology
<i>Methodology as</i>	Poetry	Practice	Craft
<i>Aims</i>	To transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence	To articulate practical, everyday understandings and knowledge	To explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world
<i>Participants (sampling)</i>	Unspecified	Until new informants reveal no new findings	1 or more
<i>Key concepts</i>	Depthful writing, Orientation and thoughtfulness	The background, Exemplar, Interpretative teams and paradigm cases.	Double hermeneutic, Idiographic and inductive
<i>Applications in organization studies</i>	Gibson (2004)	Yakhlef and Esse'n (2012)	Murtagh, Lopes, and Lyons (2011)

Source: adapted from Gill (2014)

In adopting interpretive phenomenology, the researcher seeks to hear and understand the voice of the participant (Benner, 1994). Benner's interpretative phenomenology particularly "*places a significant emphasis on exploring practice, seeking to observe and articulate the commonalities across participants' practical, everyday understandings and knowledge*" (Gill, 2014, p. 14). Benner's (1994) approach differentiates itself from others' approaches because it focusses on investigating the commonalities between participants' everyday actual practices and processes. Table 3 also highlights the particularities of Benner's perspective such as the preoccupation with the background history, in recognition of Heidegger's notion of the taken-for-granted background meaning. This was allowed by the use of tools such as exemplars that we explain further on this section.

It is important to explain that interpretative phenomenology as a research methodology cannot be explained as a set of procedures and processes to implement. This approach aims to enter an interpretation circle in the most propitious way to study the phenomena under investigation (Given, 2008). Building on that, we explore three important elements that orient our research methods: uncovering and articulating commonalities, everydayness participants' practices, and marker tools.

### *Uncovering and articulating commonalities*

Interpretive phenomenological researchers should seek for meanings to uncover commonalities and differences between the various worlds of the study participants (Gill, 2014). The interpretative researcher attempts to capture precisely the voice of the participant. This happens by the collection of data in which, after organizing it, the researcher moved forward establishing further notes and comments in order to make the entrepreneurial meanings explicit. This is the first step of description and articulation, after which, this ongoing process, the researchers read and reread the interviews towards the refinement of common themes. As Given (2008) explains, "*the interpreter seeks to discover commonalities, incongruities, puzzles, and repeated unified concerns*" (p.463).

Benner (1994) argues specific sources of divergences and commonalities to access the narratives of the participants: (i) Situation: understanding how the individual is situated, historically and at the current context; (ii) Embodiment: perception of the individual as a body of skills, knowledge, behaviour and practices; (iii) Temporality: Time is more than a linear assumption - the individual considers the experience regarding to its background, current situation and future projections; (iv) Concerns: relates to what is meaningful in the situation for the individual, what matters to the person; and (v) Common meanings: present shared linguistic and cultural meanings between individuals that might create potential tension, problems, or disagreements.

These sources of divergences were explored during interviews and during analysis of the transcriptions. This was captured by asking questions about interviewees' backgrounds, going back and forth in time to understand their struggles, how they overcame them and the situation at the time of the interviews. Likewise, as detailed below, we conducted semi-structured interviews that allowed in-depth questions towards the identification of nuances, languages and their everyday life as a venture creator. On a related note, the adoption of an abductive approach also permitted this back and forth not only into the empirical world, but also at a theoretical level in order to create these meanings.

### *Everydayness participants' practices*

The subject matter to be uncovered, articulated and interpreted is the everyday practices of individuals. At the core of our analysis, we adopted a process sensitivity to the social interactions occurring during the acceleration program and the pivots enacted. As we have discussed, interpretive phenomenology focuses specifically on this understanding of the experiential and practical world, skilled know-how, and embodied lived experiences of individuals (Given, 2008). Therefore, the phenomena to be interpreted are found in the practicalities, the use of words, cultural nuances, bonding experiences, shared meaning and habits of the individual (Benner, 1994). The use of an experiential philosophy is inherent to the core of our research goal in capturing the pivoting of entrepreneurs. Capturing the affectation of relational experiences that the entrepreneurs were facing permits a close look into the everyday practices of building up a venture (Benner, 1994). This was done by the use of semi-structured interviews, participant observations during workshops activities, and external events that allowed the researcher to grasp the common language and nuances within social interactions. It is important to note that focusing on the actual practices of the entrepreneurs, we accessed particularities of their individual processes. The idea was to understand the diversity of social interactions and pivoting process from an entrepreneur's perspective.

### *Exemplars in thematic analysis.*

Interpretive phenomenology considers the historicity of our learned experiences and background as it shapes the understanding of the future (Berglund, 2007; Cope, 2005). Considering this relevance of the background, Benner (1994) recognizes the use of "marker" tools such exemplars during the thematical analysis. Exemplars are markers that exemplify shared meanings, common patterns, similar situations and the embodiment of skilled know-how of the participants. Exemplars are valuable *"in presenting the interpretation so that the readers understand the practical world(s)*

*being articulated*" (Given, 2008). This is done by finding the common themes in the everyday experiences of the entrepreneurs and then exemplifying these common themes with their illustrations. In practice, the exemplar served to amplify the quotation and citation, bringing relevance to the empirical data on social interactions and pivots. The exemplars in this thesis were used through the long citation of entrepreneurs' answers to capture deep specificities and intertwinement of their interactions. Thus, quotations and citation are still used in thematic analysis while exemplars improved clarity about these common themes (Benner, 1994). This iterative process entails engaged reasoning and dwelling in the liveliness of the everyday engagements of the respondents (Gill, 2014).

Still at the token of presentation design, thematic analysis is suggested to be adopted in interpretive phenomenological methodology permitting to *"express meaningful patterns, stances of the participants, or concerns"* (Given, 2008, p. 463). As we mentioned before, thematic analysis is a common approach in phenomenology that will be further explored in the section on data analysis.

On a final note, we find it important to explore the saturation point of this thematic analysis. Different from other interpretative approaches that suggest small samples sizes, Benner (1994) advocates that when the interpretation is clear and rich, and the new data participants do not reveal further findings, the adequacy of the sample size is achieved. Benner (1994) categorially states that when the data collected shows *"redundancy, clarity and confidence"* (p.107), it is more reliable and credible than smaller texts that inadequately cover one single situation. This thesis employed the saturation approach by conducting two rounds of in-depth interviews with each participant of the acceleration program divided into two moments in time. In addition, in the section 3.3.3, we explain clearly how the thematic analysis came along, reaching the saturation point.

Building on the abovementioned, we adopted an interpretative phenomenological approach informed by Benner (1994). This section has explained the particularities of Benner's perspective and how it was applied. Following this, the next section presents our research methodology and reasoning and how it is informed by Benner's phenomenology. As we mentioned before, we intend to create a coherent thread and alignment along the choices of research theories and methodologies.

### 3.2.2. Research design informed by interpretative phenomenology

Taking an interpretative phenomenology also as a research methodology provides a connection between philosophical underpins, theories and methods. In the previous sections, we explored the philosophical perspectives and belief systems that underpin our phenomenological study. The following sections explore another pillar to build a strong foundation of a research - the research

methodology and reasoning put in practice. This section outlines the methods and our strategy that informed how we collected and analysed the data in order to answer our research questions. To do this, we find it important to clarify our qualitative research approach influenced by phenomenology. We understand that a qualitative approach research informed by interpretive phenomenology allows the understanding of the holistic web of interrelated things and ways of being of the entrepreneurs in the study (Berglund, 2007). Secondly, we draw on Benner's (1994) interpretive phenomenology to design phenomenological case studies. Thirdly, we explain the use of abductive approach throughout our research, in specific at our data analysis, allowing to go back and forth between prior understandings (and theory used) and the empirical phenomenon.

### 3.2.1. Qualitative research design informed by phenomenology

Phenomenological methods are inherent to the nature of qualitative research (Cope, 2005). For that reason, we find it important to draw few paragraphs about the nature and features of qualitative research informed by interpretative phenomenology.

The research design describes the methodology that governs the process through which the researcher will collect and analyse the data (Creswell, 2007). The grand debate on methodological design occurs between qualitative and quantitative research. In a simple way, quantitative and qualitative research are indiscriminately described as: quantitative research as numerical data that are analysed using mathematical and statistical methods; and qualitative research focus on non-numeric data, it often involves words or language (Bryman, 2012).

Qualitative research provides a closer relation to our research needs and philosophical underpinnings. As qualitative research strategies tend to put a greater emphasis on words, Creswell (2007) elaborates on its pivotal characteristics:

*"Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that both deductive and inductive and establishes a pattern or themes." (p.7)*

These characteristics of qualitative research are similarly described by Saunders et al.( 2009) as *"based on meaning expressed through words"*; *"collecting results in non-standardized data requiring classification into categories"*; and *"analysis conducted through the use of conceptualization"* (p.482). In regard to our research, Thompson et al. (1989) highlight that the world of 'lived experience' does not relate to an "objective" world simply because, frequently, objectivity attempts to investigate an

event or experience detached from the contextual settings. For that reason, adopting a phenomenological approach to our qualitative research design allow us to make sense of the lived experiences of participants. Thus, qualitative research provides the focus on interpretation and meaning creation of individuals and phenomenology is placed as a powerful research strategy that emphasizes the study of the individual's lived experiences within the world he/she inhabits. Authors have argued that a qualitative design informed by phenomenology is well suited for exploring challenging problems within the social venture creation process (Berglund, 2007).

The role of the researcher is to interpret and tell the story of another group of individuals. In this regard, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describe the researcher as "*a bricoleurs, as a maker of quilt, or, as in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages*" (p.5). Being a qualitative researcher involves the comprehension of the complex issues of the social world, attempting to understand the meanings of social events for those who participate in them (Esterberg, 2012). Therefore, this methodological choice supports our investigation of the lived experiences of nascent social entrepreneurs, emphasizing the interpretation of the individuals' experiences within their own social reality.

In conclusion, our research has the specific sensibility to everyday practices of entrepreneurs in which the researcher aims to capture the essence of their lived experiences during interaction, going back and forth in their historicity, to uncover its commonalities and affectations in the pivoting process. Thus, qualitative research is analogue to the type of study we elaborated. Hereafter, the next subsection explains how we draw the cases in this study oriented by phenomenology.

### 3.3.2. Phenomenological case study strategy

In this thesis we opted for a phenomenological multiple case studies research strategy to organize our data collected and data analysis. This section explains the combination of these perspectives in alignment with our research goals.

Firstly, case studies bring the interconnectedness between social actors, in multiple perspectives, and the contextual perspective of the phenomena under investigation. Traditional research in interpretative phenomenology research normally adopts case study as research design rather than isolated qualitative interviews. By the inclusion of case study design in the interpretive phenomenological methodology, we enhance a complete overview on the social and historical context of individuals while focusing at the lived experiences (Bolat & Strong, 2015). The present thesis advocates that phenomenological case studies can provide a broader overview to the subcases by

collecting multiple rounds of semi-structured interviews, participant observations and documentary analysis through an iterative lens of “lived experiences”.

Considering the emergence of the literature on effectuation and the concept of pivots, and given the scarcity of contextual investigation of venture’s acceleration, the utilization of case study research seems appropriate for the present thesis. To investigate the very early stages of the phenomenon field, case study design appears specifically suitable, where other approaches seem inappropriate (Saunders et al., 2009; Yin, 2011). Building on that, this research uses multiple data collection methods in an interpretive phenomenological case study design to learn from the experiences of entrepreneurs and challenge the phenomenon under investigation.

Combining both perspectives, phenomenological case studies have been used with a limited extension in the literature on management and entrepreneurship (Bolat & Strong, 2015). The utilization of case study design permits the comprehension of the landscape through the multiple perspectives, in order to make sense of the background and context of the lived experiences of entrepreneurs. This is particularly relevant for the phenomenological research approach as we aim to gain rich and strong comprehension of individuals experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Given the abovementioned, we have opted for a phenomenological case study in our thesis. Hereafter, the next sections explore the abduction logic applied in our research design to support the back and forth between the theoretical and the empirical world.

### 3.3.3. Abductive logic in phenomenological study.

Researchers have been confronted with the dilemma of mixing different research logics as they test or build theory in a particular context of study. This being so, the researcher must consider the relationship between the theoretical and the empirical world to conduct this research process (Esterberg, 2002). This relationship and its level of understanding will orient the study’s design, findings, and conclusions (Saunders et al., 2009). Given that, we chose an abductive approach to our data collection and data analysis. This section explains our reasons for adopting abductive reasoning as the strategic research logic.

The main debate on the research reasoning is inherently polarized between researchers adopting deductive and inductive logics, while few other researchers use abductive logic. Following this, first, the deductive logic relies on the possession of a theoretical knowledge of a specific domain, in which the researcher deduces hypothesis to prove during the empirical part of the research (Saunders et al., 2009). It is noteworthy that the hypothetico-deductive approach is the most



commonly used approach to build robust theoretical knowledge, in specific among quantitative researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Secondly, the inductive logic assumes that knowledge is systematically generated from data. The inductive researcher aims to better understand the nature of the problem without preconceived considerations (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2009).

The third research reasoning is called abduction, where the researcher typically starts from an incomplete set of observations and proceeds to the possible explanation for the set. Saunders et al. (2009) treat the abductive logic as a combination of deductive and inductive logics, while Dubois & Gadde (2002) have been advocating that abduction is a different approach to qualitative inquiries. To reduce divergences in the literature, we follow Dubois & Gadde's (2002) instructions to apply abductive logic in our research.

Following Dubois & Gadde (2002), Morgan (2007) argued that abductive reasoning relates to a prior inductive inference that may, therefore, be assessed and based on the researchers' ability to work and deepen the subject before defining future lines of the research. Thus, rather than being merely a combination of inductive and deductive approach, abductive reasoning has an ability to stimulate the discovery of new relationships, variables and things (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Morgan, 2007). This strength of abductive approach implies that its dynamic process must be closely interpreted to uncover the potential new discoveries.

The abductive process involves iteration between our prior understandings (theory) and the phenomenon (empirics) (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In this line, the abductive approach encourages the researcher to enter the empirical world with the largest theoretical grounding possible (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), as these are the fundamental preunderstandings that orient the construction of interview guides and its interpretation. In practice, the researcher's previous experience in venture incubation, along with pre-understanding garnered from the theory, contributed to the development of this research.

Following the abductive approach adopted here, we guided our process of data collection through this logic. Therefore, as a result of preliminary meetings, we referred back to the theory to refine the dimensions of the data collected. To interpret and analyse our empirical case, we followed an iterative process where we considered the insights of the literature and the inputs from the phenomenon (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). We uncovered associations between the empirical and theoretical worlds, guided by the field to improve our academic understanding of the processes. For instance, after the first round of interviews, we searched for theories in the literature of entrepreneurship that would help us to make sense of the data collected. As we mentioned, effectuation theory was adopted to bring this interactivity to the analysis of the first-round data, also

guiding the questions of second round of interviews. The same occurred after the second round of interviews, where we kept effectuation to analyse the data and we chose the concept of pivots to map the changes during the venture creation process. This constant dialogue between the empirical world and the theoretical world aimed to expand the understanding of theories and practice, building new relationships. The thematic analysis sections explore in details this dialogue explaining the coding process.

One of the standpoints of our research is the investigation of everydayness in entrepreneurs' journey, emphasized through the lens of effectuation theory and the concept of pivots. We addressed it by adopting the interactive process of abductive logic (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), in which we constantly considered the theoretical and the empirical world in a loop. Notwithstanding, in thematic analysis, the extraction of meanings and patterns of the data collected also demanded this iterative process of "matching", and "direction and redirection" of research (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This relates to the consideration of the historicity and backgrounds of entrepreneurs in Benner's interpretative phenomenology, supporting the choice of the abductive process as we provide a reflective interpretative analysis of theory and first empirical finding. In the next section, we develop the procedures and data collection processes for the present thesis.

### 3.3. Procedures of research

In this section, we describe the procedures and methods of data collection and data analysis. We start by exploring the field work preparation in order to explain how we chose our empirical case. Next, we explain the purposeful sample and its suitability to our case study. After that, we describe the data collection methods where we begin by the participatory observations and, then, semi-structured interviews used to collect the data. Next, we explain how we analyse the data collected. In this, we first explain the transcription and translation processes. Then, driven by abductive approach, we demonstrate in detail how we thematically analysed the data collected. We finish by demonstrating how we ensured quality in this research.

#### 3.3.1. Field work preparation

Field access and negotiating data are challenges faced by many researchers, and we experienced the same. The focus on the Lille region was predetermined by one of the financiers of this research, the MEL - *Metropole Européene de Lille*. One case study in Lille was started in October 2017

looking into the conceptualization of a new regional support program for social entrepreneurs. Yet after months of exchanges, we had to select another field to collect data.

Later in February 2018, we had contact with a national acceleration program that had held its selection process in Lille, France. Considering the time and resource constraints of the present thesis, we agreed upon a research study over the 2018 cohort of entrepreneurs participating in the six-month acceleration program. An agreement was reached between the programme manager and the researcher whereby the programme manager gave the researcher access to: (i) observations of the three-day seminars organised by the program, (ii) email addresses of the entrepreneurs participating in 2018 program, and (iii) access to the support documents used during the six months of program. The researcher compiled an evaluation report after each seminar, gathering fresh insights and improvement suggestions for the acceleration program. A final full evaluation report of the support program, including feedback about the entrepreneurs' participation, was handed to the program manager in February 2019.

We have selected this programme considering two fundamental aspects for the development of our research in this context. The first aspect concerns the large network of entrepreneurs they belong to. Entrepreneurs have said that they have chosen to participate in this programme because of its positive reputation at the national level, and because it has a dynamic ecosystem among entrepreneurs and supporters. For us, this means that entrepreneurs will be exposed to a wide range of interactions. This relates to the initial problem of our research.

The second aspect concerns the programme's focus on developing the potential of the entrepreneur. This means that the programme, rather than just focusing on creating an enterprise, was concerned with aligning the interests of the entrepreneur with his or her enterprise. For us, this appears as one of the crucial components of a creating a pivot. Thus, these two points demonstrate the legitimacy, and the great value of this acceleration programme, to study the effects of social interactions in pivots. Building on that, the subsequent section explains in detail the acceleration program we selected and then we explain the purposive sampling process.

#### 3.3.1.1. The acceleration program: introduction to the case in study

Before moving to the next phase of data collection, we briefly introduce the research setting. This present research was undertaken at a French acceleration program based in Paris with itinerant nationwide sessions for nascent entrepreneurs. The organization is a French social start-up (as they describe themselves) with seven years of experience. In its early days, this social start-up used to

provide general support for early stage businesses with consulting services. Over the years, and with incorporation of other people to the board of directors, it expanded and now promotes a range of support services focusing on revealing the unrevealed talents of the entrepreneurs. The organization works towards market transformation by actively encouraging local intrapreneurship and entrepreneurship. While they propose a range of workshops focusing on corporate change, social entrepreneurial learning for social actors and mindset transformation, we opted for our research purposes to concentrate on the six-month acceleration program they offer. From now on we will call it 'the acceleration programme' or 'the support programme', or short 'the programme'.

The acceleration programme consists of six months of personalized on-line and on-site support involving: 17 days of face-to-face training; access to mentoring with experts; personalized follow-up and coaching; and unlimited access to the organization's resources. The support program targets very early-stage social entrepreneurs, providing access to a range of resources that aim to prepare entrepreneurs for action. The main goal of the program is to support the entrepreneurs in refining their venture ideas, and then move to action in the six-month period.

The six months support programme unfolds in three phases: (i) inspiration, (ii) introspection, (iii) implementation.

- i) *The Inspiration phase* focuses on the encounter with other social entrepreneurs and the identification, and refinement of the venture's opportunity.
- ii) *The Introspection phase*, which occurs after the entrepreneur's immersion in the field, refers to the phase in which the programme participant seeks to align his idea of the enterprise with his internal values and motivations.
- iii) *The Implementation phase* relates to the stage of moving the idea work forward in order to develop the first stages of the prototype.

Each phase takes two months, with all three taking a total of six months. Each two-month segment includes a three-day workshop to follow-up on the entrepreneurs' development. [Figure 77](#) explains the timeline of the online and onsite support. In total, the support program proposes 17 days of face-to-face training, which include two three-day trainings seminars, one ten-day immersion training session, workshops, and one final networking event. The sessions are organized according to the stages of the enterprises.

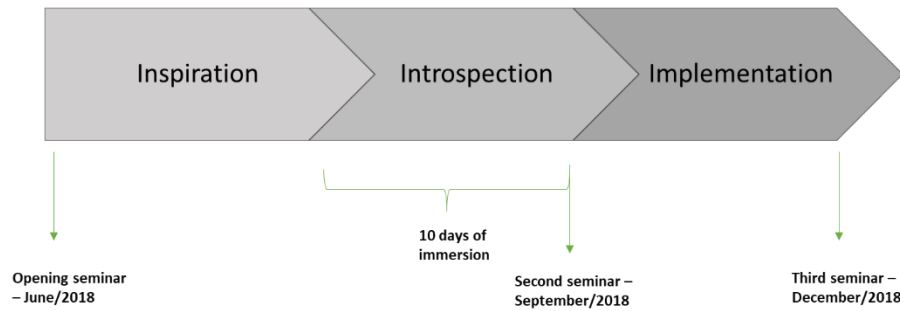


FIGURE 7 - TIME LINE ACCELERATION PROGRAM

Besides the meetings already mentioned, it is important to note that the entrepreneurs receive ongoing online support in order to maintain direct contact and create the pathway of the venture's development. The online support included weekly activities, exercises, and training, comprising (i) weekly newsletter – containing information and interactive news regarding the stage of the entrepreneur; (ii) Master Classes – in-person training every two weeks (also broadcast online); (iii) selected mentor - the person who follows the entrepreneur along the six months of support in which a 30 minutes per week meeting was proposed; (iv) online workplace - online guides and information to share in google docs; (v) social media's exchange groups – different online platforms put in place to exchange, previous alumnus was already in the platforms; (vi) access to a hotline – access to the mentor once a week during 30 minutes; (vii) focus groups - workgroup defined by the entrepreneurs to discuss a specific issue in common, similar to peer-to-peer sessions focusing on exchanging about a specific topics and creating synergies between the participants of the cohort.

The hybrid support was put in place to permit all 40 entrepreneurs, and 35 early-stage ventures, to interact since they were based in different regions. Following this, in the next section, we explain the population we were exposed to.

### 3.3.1.2. Purposive sampling

To answer a research question and objective it is crucial to have a clear definition of the sample analysed. This being said, this section explores the purposive sample we selected in this research.

Before explaining our purposive sampling, we find it important to draw some paragraphs about the relevance of purposive sampling to our research. First, sampling strategies are generally categorized as probability sampling or non-probability sampling (Bryman, 2012; Saunders et al., 2009). While probability sampling involves a randomly selected sample, a non-probability sampling involves taking a sample without using random selection methods (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In business research

it is difficult to elaborate a randomized selection since the specificities of the research questions and objectives often suggests a non-probability sample.

Considering our research aims, we adopted one category of non-probability sampling called purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used as the sampling method when the researcher has a clear idea of which unit is needed for the research objective (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Purposive sampling uses a strategic way of choosing the cases, so that those cases selected are essential for the research purposes (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This also relates to the philosophical foundations of this research as phenomenological research advocates the use of purposive sampling to capture the “lived experiences” of participants (Gill, 2014). On a final note, a purposive sampling design is commonly used in qualitative research for information-rich cases, ensuring representativeness in the most effective way (Patton, 2002).

Our research aims to understand the everyday social interactions and their effects during the venture creation process. In line with this, we used purposive sampling in a homogenous specific group of entrepreneurs, the lived experiences of the acceleration programme’s 2018 cohort. Following this, purposive sampling involving a homogeneous sample of similar individuals intends to describe a specific subgroup in depth (Patton, 2002).

We had access to all 40 entrepreneurs of 2018 cohort and four mentors, which include one co-founder and three other mentors. However, due to resource constraints of the present thesis we interviewed 25 entrepreneurs and two mentors (including the co-founder of the program). Table 4 presents all 40 entrepreneurs as illustrative matter. In the section 3.2.2.2 we have detailed in Table 6 those we interviewed in the first and in the second round, also explaining our exclusion process due to lack of information for data analysis.

**TABLE 4 - PURPOSIVE SAMPLE**

Social enterprise	Participant	Region	Sector
SE1	P1	Savenay - Bretagne	Work / Employment
SE2	P2	Lyon	Environment / Social Inclusion
SE3	P3	Paris	Education
SE4	P4	Tours	Education
SE5	P5	Paris	Health and Work/Employment
SE6	P6	Greater Paris	Environment
SE7	P7	Greater Paris	Education
SE8	P8	Paris	Social Inclusion / Health
SE9	P9	Paris	Social Inclusion / Health
SE10	P10	Paris	Social inclusion / Housing
SE11	P11 and P12	Lille	Environment
SE12	P13	Lyon	Education and Health
SE13	P14	Paris	Environment
SE14	P15	Greater Paris	Environment

SE15	P16 and P17	Paris	Mobility
SE16	P18	Marseille	Work / Employment / Health
SE17	P19	Greater Paris	Mobility
SE18	P20	Greater Paris	Environment
SE19	P21	Greater Paris	Energy and Social Inclusion
SE20	P22	Marseille	Education
SE21	P23	Lyon	Environment /Agriculture and food
SE22	P24 and P25	Greater Paris	Education and Social Inclusion
SE23	P26	Lyon	Environment / Social Inclusion
SE24	P27	Greater Paris	Education and Social Inclusion
SE25	P28	Greater Paris	Housing / Energy
SE26	P29	Lyon	Environment / Social Inclusion
SE27	P30	Greater Paris	Social Inclusion/ work employment
SE28	P31	Lyon	Social Inclusion
SE29	P32	Paris	Social Inclusion
SE30	P33	Paris	Environment
SE31	P34 and P35	Paris	Environment
SE32	P36	Greater Paris	Mobility
SE33	P37	Paris	Education
SE34	P38	Antibes	Citizen Engagement
SE35	P39 and P40	Lyon	Education

We have included a larger table with more information about the social entrepreneurs in the annex. Following this, it is important to mention that by focusing on the interactions within the acceleration program, we have also taken into consideration alumni, programme managers and assistants of the acceleration programme as secondary sources to better understand the interactions of the programme. On a related note, these sources represent six members of the programme team. This means that they provide relevant information about the environment of the social interactions. In addition, we have also engaged constantly with three members of the program team that worked in assisting the entrepreneurial process. It worth noting that these decisions were taken with the acceleration programme manager after discussing the future lines of the research and analysis. These stakeholders mentioned helped us to better understand the process the entrepreneurs went through during the acceleration programme process.

To provide an overview of what our research is covering within the internal ecosystem of the support program, **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.**<sup>8</sup> illustrates the sample used to gather the data necessary for our research.

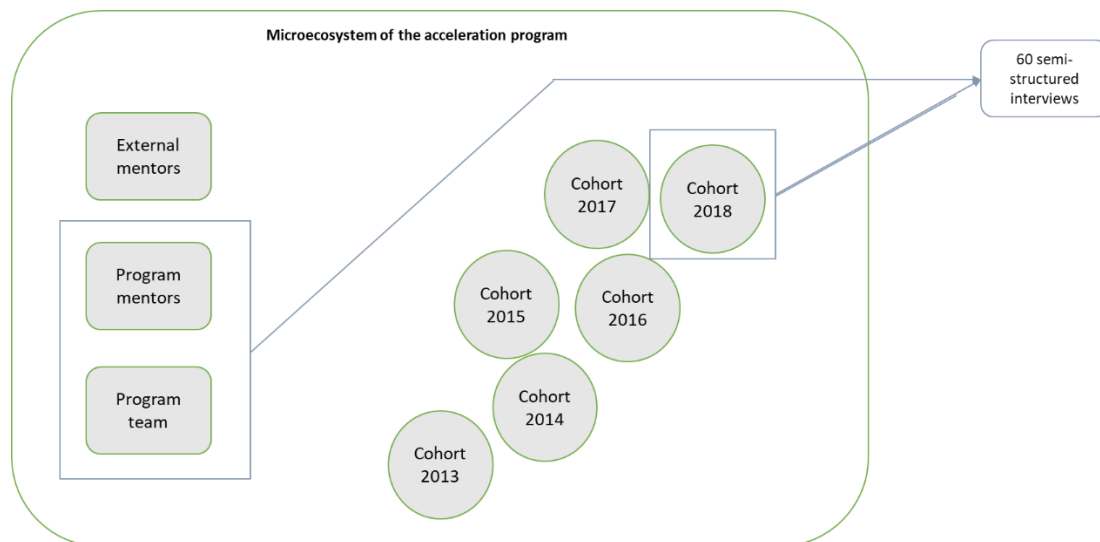


FIGURE 8 - PURPOSIVE SAMPLING

The figure above represents the population in which our sample is embedded. This demonstrates a small part of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem they are participating in, considering that this was the sixth edition of the acceleration programme in the Parisian/French entrepreneurial ecosystem. We call attention to the fact that this program is part of a wider ecosystem of support initiatives in France involving public sector, private corporations and civil society in promoting organizations that a positive societal impact. However, we have focused in investigating the internal dynamics of the community in order to capture these microlevel social interactions in the acceleration programme. After we set the sample to collect the data for our research, we moved onwards to the data collection methods, in which we observed the seminars and collected semi-structured interviews. The following sections will explain in detail how we collected this data to answer our research questions.

### 3.3.2. Data collection methods

During the immersion in the field, we stepped into the main data collection activities for which we participated at the seminars as observants and interviewed the participants of the acceleration programme. Building on our philosophical choices as well as our research approach and strategy, in the following sections we will explain the methods adopted to collect the data, informed by phenomenology. This section begins by describing the participant observations in the field, then we explain the semi-structured interviews, outlining how we carried out each round of interviews.



### 3.3.2.1. Participant observations

Observing what people do may provide straightforward, highly rich and informative data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Benner (1994) advocates that observations in interpretative phenomenology are required in order to provide a clear overview of the situations since taken-for-granted action, competences and modes of action are sometimes disassociated from the “lived experiences” discussed in interviews.

As participant observation puts emphasis “*on discovering the meaning that people attach to their actions*” (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 288), this observational method attempts to capture participants’ life worlds by interpreting meanings of entrepreneurs’ lived experiences. The observant participant is immersed in the research setting to exchange with informants (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). This is in line with the philosophical assumptions of this thesis that emphasize the everydayness of the entrepreneurs to understand their “life experiences”. For these reasons, we adopted a participant observation method, watching distinct moments of interactions within the acceleration programme as we outline in Table 5, counting a total of 72 hours.

Some scholars note how unusual it is to use observational data in business and management research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2009). However, it is agreed that observational methods may be very useful to understand study areas such as team work, negotiation or decision-making processes. The use of observation data in entrepreneurship, specifically in effectuation theory, is supported by many authors (Arend et al., 2015; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Fisher, 2012; Read & Sarasvathy, 2005). For this matter, we aimed with these observations: i) to understand the internal dynamics of the acceleration programme by observing training sessions on site and, ii) to build a strong and trustful relationship with the informants and participants of the programme. The observations of empirical world were also material to refine our research questions, as we used abductive reasoning.

As a participant observant at seminars and training sessions, the researcher had the opportunity to watch discussion panels, face-to-face mentoring sessions, and group activities. We recorded field notes in Word format (amounting to 34 pages) to keep track of the activities and insights from the observations. Field notes are generally used “*as detailed summaries of events and behaviours and the researcher’s initial reflection on them*” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 488). The field notes also supported the evolution of the research questions, moreover encouraging reflections on the data analysis. **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.**<sup>5</sup> presents a description of the observation hours completed during the empirical study to collect the necessary data necessary to overview the field landscape.

TABLE 5 - PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS

When?	What was the focus?	Hours observed
<b>1° Seminar Juin/18</b>	- Focus on understanding the social entrepreneur's needs	24 hours
<b>2° Seminar Oct./18</b>	- Understanding the learning acquired and competences development - Focus on understanding the interactions with external partners.	16 hours
<b>3° Seminar Déc./18</b>	- Focus on understanding the dynamics of support provided and workshops. - Collect participants' feedbacks, knowledge and skills absorbed.	16 hours
<b>Networking events - Oct/18 and Dec/18</b>	- Focus on understanding the interactions in the group.	16 hours
<b>Total</b>	-	72 hours

Our empirical data collection consisted of 72 hours of observation (9 full days), including training seminars, face to face mentoring sessions, workshops and networking events. The observations took place mainly at the bi-monthly seminars organized by the acceleration programme. The research was carried out on the 2018 cohort of the acceleration programme, composed of 35 social enterprises and 40 entrepreneurs. The next sub-section will explore the description of the interviews we conducted, outlining the rounds of interviews, the interviewees, and data collected.

### 3.3.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are probably the most widely used method in qualitative research (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Bryman and Bell, 2011). As a conversation between two or more people with a specific objective, *“the use of interviews can help you to gather valid and reliable data that are relevant to your research question(s) and objectives.”* (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 318). By following such a method, the researcher aims to gather the maximum amount of information about the lived experiences of the entrepreneurs, leaving a margin of flexibility to consider the historicity and background aspects that might influence their life-worlds (Berglund, 2007). This section explains our interview choices, exploring how we conducted this part of the research.

In practice, interviews can take different forms; from unstructured to highly structured. There are several types of interviews, depending on the researcher's level of control and the format s/he creates (Esterberg, 2002). Structured, semi-structured and unstructured are the most frequently used (Saunders et al., 2009). For our data collection we elected semi-structured interviews because the researcher has more flexibility to gather more details focusing on the specific events and the lived experiences of the interviewees.

Semi-structured interviews refer to an environment where the interviewer has a sequence of questions that give structure and format to the interview but s/he also has the possibility to ask further questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011), depending on how the interview unfolds. Semi-structured interviews, being less rigid than their structured counterparts, aim to explore a subject more openly, allowing the interviewees to get in-depth about their beliefs and thoughts (Esterberg, 2002). In these interviews, the primary source of information was the entrepreneur's narrative with self-description of experience and behaviour. The plasticity of the interviews relied on understanding specifics about the everydayness and affectations during the ideation phase entrepreneurs were in.

Even though phenomenology advocates for in-depth phenomenological interviews (Benner, 1994; Gill, 2014), we have opted for semi-structured interviews in line with the abductive logic of the research. The use of abductive logic and semi-structured interviews permitted more flexibility, and opportunity to the researcher and to the interviewee explore and/or narrow down the topics discussed. In this line, we also developed an interview guide in advance, ensuring that the interviewer has gone through all the scheduled topics.

It remains important to explain that in conducting the semi-structured interviews, the researcher must listen attentively to the interviewee's responses (Esterberg, 2002) in order to guide the conversation. This idea of orienting the interview or take the lead of the conversation "*means that you (researcher) may omit some questions in particular interviews, given a specific organizational context that is encountered in relation to the research topic*" (p.319). Therefore, the interviewer has a leading role on the interviewee's answers to broaden their understanding of a topic and to steer the discussion towards the most relevant questions, all while considering the historicity and background of the entrepreneurs (Berglund, 2007).

To explore the specificities of the conducted interviews, we divided the next paragraphs in regard to our two rounds of interviews. The first round of interviews was conducted in the first month of the acceleration programme - June 2018 - where we gathered information about the background of the nascent entrepreneurs, and their needs and expectations for the support programme. The second round of interviews was conducted after the end of the programme - January and February 2019 – focusing on the entrepreneurs' interactions within the programme and its outcomes. During the second round of interviews, we also conducted semi-structured interviews with the programme managers, who had a mentoring role in the acceleration program.

Following the above mentioned, we describe the preparation and how we conducted the two rounds of semi-structured interviews.

### *Planning and carrying out the semi-structured interviews*

In data collection, the question of how much structure to put into an interview is the first problem a researcher must solve (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Taking into consideration that we used a semi-structured interview format, the interviews were shaped through an analysis of themes and patterns found in the field observations. Therefore, we considered both literature and field insights to develop the interview guide. For example, we noted that mentors closely supported entrepreneurs in their decision-making process, so to explore this in more depth, we asked questions about the what the entrepreneur brought out from these interactions, their effect on the venture idea work, and to what extent mentors supported them. This process is also related to the refinement of our research question, as the more we explored the field, the more our research question narrowed down. Overall, this planning process is further detailed in the sections dedicated to the specific round of interviews.

Access to the field was given through a list of email contacts of the acceleration programme participants. Each participant was contacted at least three times to set up the interview. The majority of the participants were not based in Lille, which meant that most of the interviews were conducted through video-call, usually through Skype.

Each interview in the first and second round, started with an overview of the research objectives and interests followed by the introduction of the topics of discussion of the day. The researcher interviewed 27 social entrepreneurs between June/July of 2018 and 21 social entrepreneurs and two program managers after the acceleration program ended in January 2019/ February 2019.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, by Skype or by phone call. These specificities are explained below in the first round and second round of interviews. Considering the geographic location of all participants and available time, it became necessary to use video or phone calls to conduct the interviews. In the next subdivisions, we explain how we developed our two rounds of interviews, clarifying a few peculiarities of each round of interviews.

#### *First round*

This first round of interviews happened between June and July of 2018, during the first month of support by the accelerator. The main objective of this first round of interviews was to explore the participants' perspectives of the programme and to build the background for their historicity. At this stage, we also aimed to build a trusting relationship with the participants in order to conduct deeper discussions in the next rounds.

In every interview, we opened up the discussion by introducing ourselves and our research objectives and interests. After setting the scene, we followed with open questions about the entrepreneurs' backgrounds, and their motivation, needs and expectations of the acceleration programme. While we gathered this information, we were careful to be transparent while communicating with the entrepreneurs in order to build trust and collect honest responses. We paid attention to recognize relevant subjects and orient the discussion towards them. This is recognized as an important interviewing skill to apply in qualitative research (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). This flexibility in guiding the conversation, and the perception over the discussed events, were considered to define the future lines of the research. In this vein, we were careful to the ask open-ended questions and guide the ensuing discussions according to the answers of the participants to explore possible avenues of interest.

During the first round, we conducted 27 interviews in which five were recorded and transcribed. Hereafter, the other 19 interviews were only annotated without being recorded. These 19 participants did not give permission to be recorded at this stage. The entrepreneurs did not explain why. It worth noting that, at this stage, the 27 events of collection of interviews occurred in a variety of methods; 10 out of the 27 interviews were by phone, six were face to face meetings, six were over Skype, and the remaining five were by entrepreneurs responding emails. It is relevant to say that between the two rounds of interviews, a few informal and unstructured interviews with entrepreneurs from the cohort and programme manager took place in order to understand the participants' environment and the support received from the acceleration program.

### Second round

The second round of interviews took place between December 2018 and February 2019, after the support programme ended. The data from the first round of interviews, and the observations and information collected since the first round shaped the development of the second round of interviews. Following an abductive logic, the researcher also looked at the literature for theories and concepts that could help to build the framework of the second round. This better understanding of the internal environment of the acceleration programme and the understanding of the literature of effectuation was crucial to create the interview guide for the second round. Following these insights, the interview guide of the second round of interviews focused on the social interactions that occurred during the acceleration programme, while seeking to understand the evolution of ventures' ideas and outcomes

of the programme. However, we still ensured to ask open questions in order to recognize possible discussions and relevant subjects.

At this phase, we also conducted interviews with the programme managers. We conducted two interviews, one with a program manager of this acceleration program and one with a program manager that was also one of the co-founders of the social start-up. Both had roles as mentors and coaches in the acceleration program. These interviews aimed to provide an inside view of the program, the challenges faced gathering information about the background of the program and its vision.

For the second round of interviews, the interviewer conducted 23 interviews in which 21 were with social entrepreneurs and two with program managers who also had a role as mentors in the programme. The majority of the interviews in the second round were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Only one entrepreneur did not allow the recording, so we took notes during this interview to aggregate in our data. In this second round of interviews, eight interviews occurred by face-to-face meeting, six were conducted by telephone, and other six were by Skype call.

Table 6 below compiles all the information about the specificities of the interviews. We used a grey highlight to represent the participants that we did not interview and green highlight to represent the participants with whom we conducted interviews. It is important to mention that two participants abandoned the programme because of time constraints since both entrepreneurs found a second job and couldn't dedicate enough resources to develop their venture ideas.

TABLE 6 - INTERVIEW SPECIFICITIES

Social enterprise	Participant	1 <sup>o</sup> round of interviews						2 <sup>o</sup> round of interviews			
		Contacted	Interviewed	Method	Recorded	Notes	Transcribed	Interviewed	Method	Recorded	Transcribed
SE1	P1	Yes	Yes	Skype	No	Yes	Notes	Yes	Notes	No	Notes
SE2	P2	Yes	Yes	Telephone	No	Yes	Notes	Yes	Skype	Yes	Verbatim
SE3	P3	Yes	Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Yes	Verbatim	Project merged with P29			
SE4	P4	Yes	No	No answer				Yes	Telephone	Yes	Verbatim
SE5	P5	Yes	Yes	Telephone	No	Yes	Notes	Yes	Skype	Yes	Verbatim
SE6	P6	Yes	Yes	Telephone	No	Yes	Notes	Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Verbatim
SE7	P7	Yes	No	No availability				No answer			
SE8	P8	Yes	Yes	Telephone	No	Yes	Notes	Yes	Telephone	Yes	Verbatim
SE9	P9	Yes	Yes	Questions by email	No	Email reply	Notes	No answer			No
SE10	P10	Yes	No	No answer				Yes	Telephone	Yes	Verbatim
SE11	P11 and P12	Yes	Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Yes	Verbatim	Done	Face to Face	Yes	Verbatim
SE12	P13	Yes	Yes	Telephone	No	Yes	Notes	No answer			No
SE13	P14	Yes	Yes	Skype	No	Yes	Notes	Yes	Skype	Yes	Verbatim
SE14	P15	Yes	Yes	Skype	No	Yes	Notes	Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Verbatim
SE15	P16 and P17	Yes	Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Yes	Verbatim	Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Verbatim
SE16	P18	Yes	Yes	Skype	No	Yes	Notes	Yes	Telephone	Yes	Verbatim
SE17	P19	Yes	No	Left the program				Left the program			
SE18	P20	Yes	Yes	Telephone	No	Yes	Notes	No availability			No
SE19	P21	Yes	Yes	Questions by email	No	Email reply	Notes	Yes	Skype	Yes	Verbatim
SE20	P22	Yes	Yes	Questions by email	No	Email reply	Notes	Left the program			
SE21	P23	Yes	No	No availability				Yes	Skype	Yes	Verbatim
SE22	P24 and P25	Yes	Yes	Telephone	No	Yes	Notes	Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Verbatim
SE23	P26	Yes	Yes	Skype	No	Yes	Notes	Yes	Skype	Yes	Verbatim
SE24	P27	Yes	Yes	Telephone	No	Yes	Notes	Yes	Telephone	Yes	Verbatim
SE25	P28	Yes	Yes	Skype	No	Yes	Notes	No answer			No
SE26	P29	Yes	Yes	Questions by email	No	Email reply	Notes	Project merged with P03			
SE27	P30	Yes	Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Yes	Verbatim	Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Compleat
SE28	P31	Yes	Yes	Questions by email	No	Email reply	Notes	Yes	Telephone	Yes	Verbatim
SE29	P32	Yes	Yes	Face to Face	No	Yes	Notes	No availability			No
SE30	P33	Yes	No	No answer				No availability			No
SE31	P34 and P35	Yes	No	No answer				Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Verbatim
SE32	P36	Yes	Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Yes	Verbatim	Yes	Face to Face	Yes	Verbatim
SE33	P37	Yes	Yes	Telephone	No	Yes	Notes	No availability			No
SE34	P38	Yes	Yes	Telephone	No	Yes	Notes	No answer			No
SE35	P39 and P40	Yes	No	No answer				No answer			No

### 3.3.3 Data analysis - capturing the experience of being accelerated

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, this research aims to understand how social interactions shape the entrepreneurial process. In analysing and scrutinizing our empirical data, we found strong need to include the notion of pivots in order to enrich effectuation theory. Therefore, since the previous section explained how we collected the data, in this section we present the procedures we used to analyse and interpret the data collected. Before proceeding to our analysis, we first explain how we transcribed and translated the data collected, considering the specificities of working in two languages. After that, we explain our approach to thematic analysis.

### 3.3.3.1. Transcriptions and translations

Transcription is the process of capturing an audio-recorded document into a written version (Saunders et al., 2009). As a very time-consuming activity, transcription is the first step of our data analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). For this study, the interviews were conducted in French as the participants were French speakers; however, the analysis, and coding of these interviews were conducted in English. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, eliminating the pauses and filler such as “hmm”, laughs and other sounds, since these were not relevant to the research questions.

During the first round of interviews, we recorded five interviews out of the 27 – of these, five interviews were transcribed and the other 22 were annotated during the interviews and revised after the end of the interview. In the second round of interviews, we recorded 20 of the interviews, thus all recorded interviews were transcribed. After all data transcribed, the documents were inserted into Nvivo for coding and analysis.

It is important to mention that both the data collected and the preliminary analysis of the themes were conducted in French. However, for the writing of the results and the present thesis we opted to write in English. In this sense, we have decided to translate the quotes and exemplar of entrepreneur’s experiences when demonstrating and justifying our results and arguments. These translations were double checked by one French-speaker in order to reduce any loss of meaning in translation.

The subsequent section explains the thematic analysis influenced by abductive reasoning applied in the procedures utilized to code and analyse the data collected.

### 3.3.3.2. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is vital to the process of interpretation in interpretive studies (Benner, 1994; Gill, 2014). Thematic analysis is “*a method of systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of means (themes) across a data set.*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 57). As phenomenological studies advocate thematic analysis as a fundamental approach, this section highlights the influences of Benner’s interpretive phenomenology and abductive logic on the process. Moreover, we explain the process of thematic analysis through which the present research went through.

Through thematic analysis, the present research aims to create meaning to and identify the patterns and themes from the data collected. This process of clustering meanings and themes in our



research is inspired by Benner's interpretive phenomenology. Benner's (1994) perspective has a specific focus on the voice of participants and the lived understanding of individuals.

When analysing data in interpretive phenomenology there are two elements to be considered: (i) an 'ethical stance' in which the researcher must respect the voice of the participant described in the texts, and (ii) a 'reasoning stance' in which the researcher monitors the participants' understandings, this refers to "*understanding*" as the participants' experience and must be comprehended historically to avoid taken-for-granted interpretation of participants' "understandings" (Benner, 1994). After this reporting stage, we read the interviews, adding comments to clarify the first level of data articulation. In doing so, these comments are inherently part of the thematic analysis applied in the present research.

Before explaining how the process analysis was conducted, it is important to note that the researcher who collected the data was also the one who analysed the data. This means that the researcher had previous knowledge of the data and had already some analytical thought with his field notes. On this subject, Benner (1994) advised to read and reread the interviews in order to capture the lived understanding of the interviewees. Therefore, we elaborated the data analysis in three iterated phases. In practice, the analytical process was an ongoing procedure that evolved through time. But, to better explain this procedure, we divided the thematic analysis in three waves of data analysis.

First, as the first round of data analysis was mostly inductively oriented, initial codes were created in order to give sense of the information we had at hand. This first round mostly looked for field insights and to build the background and history for the following round of interviews. As an outcome of this first round of interviews, we had a data reporting entrepreneurs' backgrounds, motivation, needs and expectations. This reporting was used as the starting point of entrepreneurs' information to create the second robust inquiry.

At this point, we put our data in dialogue with existing literature to refine our understanding of what we observed. This brought us to effectuation theory as a theory that would explain the entrepreneurial process in a dynamic way as our first data analysis demonstrated. We included effectuation theory (S. Sarasvathy, 2001) to bring its main features of means, goals and social interactions to support the second round of data collection. Given that, in the second round of interviews - abductively oriented by effectuation literature and previous empirical understandings - we focused on questions related to competence development, social interactions, and outcomes of the programme.

We then started the second wave of analysis. The examination of the second round of interviews combined the primary themes found in the first round into a reorganization of data and

creation of new themes forming first round interview data (T1) and second round of interviews data (T2). We first divided the data as follows: means (resources acquired during the program), the goals (evolution of the idea work), and social interaction, in order to bring sense to the effects of the social interaction within the program.

This first division between means and goals of the entrepreneurs have evolved to a second coding frame, such as: (i) Means – a) *what I know*, b) *whom I know* and c) *who I know*; (ii) Goals – a) current stage of the venture, b) Project’s idea evolution and, c) Future plans; (iii) Social interactions – a) Peer to peer, b) Cohort – entrepreneur, c) Community – entrepreneur; d) Programme team – entrepreneur, e) Mentors (Coaches) – entrepreneurs, f) External partners – entrepreneur; g) Alumni – entrepreneur. The codes of T1 and T2 were reorganized into the family codes demonstrated in Figure 9.

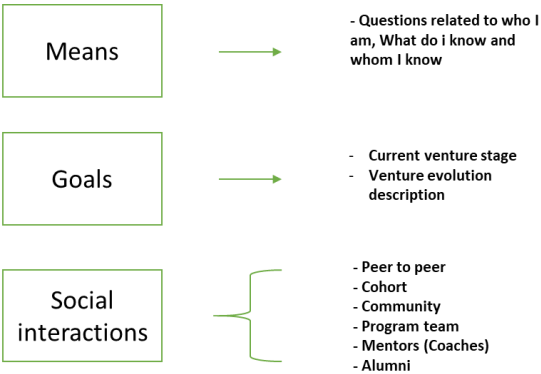


FIGURE 9 - INITIAL FAMILY CODES

These family codes have node variances between T1 and T2, which is related to the evolution of entrepreneurs and the increase social interactions within the program. In this, we have organized social interactions considering two aspects: first, the type of the social interactions as the relationships takes “one to one” approach or “one to many” approach, then, secondly, the role of the second party in the social interaction, as the entrepreneur interacted with external partners, mentors, program teams and others. Table 7 illustrate this coding organization.

TABLE 7 - CODING ORGANIZATION

ROLE	EXEMPLAR
<b>ONE-TO-ONE</b>	
<b>Peer to peer</b> Refers to interactions between participants of the same cohort (entrepreneur – entrepreneur)	"I am thinking of P23 and P24 who had much more advanced levels of maturity. For them I don't know, but for me as I still had a lot more to learn, I was at the very beginning of the project when I entered [program name], so for me it was really rich to be next to people for whom the project was more mature." (P10)
<b>Alumni</b> Refers to interactions between members of the cohort in study and members of previous cohorts.	"with the alumni, it went well with [alumni venture], we exchanged, we made a collaboration together which went very well. Afterwards, I had a girl on the phone, too, who is in the same sector as me, so of childhood and mothers. We exchanged and it was very pleasant too." (P27)
<b>Selected mentor</b> Refers to interactions between the entrepreneurs and the mentor assigned to guide and orient them over the program journey	"[Mentor name] at the end, challenged me several times, saying "now we have to go, now we have to get going". So you see, he challenged the prototyping phase, yes. I come from the human and not from the tools." (P15)
<b>Program team</b> Refers to interactions between the members of the acceleration program team and the entrepreneur.	"so it's very good to have [program member] who gave us a presentation in Nantes on the means of financing etc... it gives a global vision, you are up to date, you have the information, but it was more than enough for me." (P06)
<b>External partners</b> Refers to interactions with mentors, coaches, potential partners and others that are not insert in the program team members.	"The day in Marseille, someone from the [network name] network and an entrepreneur who created the community called [name of community]. And both of them were great. They asked me good questions, and when I didn't have the answers I wrote them down and I told myself that I had to find them." (P15)
<b>ONE-TO-MANY</b>	
<b>Cohort</b> Refers to interactions between participants of the same cohort in groups.	"[...] the other people who were in the same situation as us, there really is solidarity and community. We learned from everyone, and we continue to be in contact with everyone." (P11)
<b>Community</b> Refers to the interactions between the community and the interviewer (entrepreneur).	"there is a huge ecosystem at SSE level, at higher level, which is very very dynamic. Secondly, all the communities are acculturated to my sector, i.e. participatory housing, co-management, so I don't have to "explain" what I do and people understand. So it goes super fast." (P08)

After that, we scrutinized the interactions in relation to our research questions: “What are the social interactions early stages entrepreneurs engage in?” and “How do social interactions feed into entrepreneurial pivots? In doing so, also influenced by Gioia et al.'s (2013) structural coding process, we defined first order categories, second order categories, and aggregate themes to develop a robust empirical results. This is illustrated by Figure 10 below in regard to our first research question.

Coding is a process analogous to the thematic analysis that supports the idea of organizing a large amount of data into themes, categories and/or segments of text in order to create meaning of the participants’ perspectives (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Creswell, 2007). In order to ensure an interpretative analysis and the focus in the everydayness, all the interviews were transcribed or annotated, and inserted in QSR Nvivo. Nvivo is data management software that supports a robust approach to the thematic analysis. The idea of using Nvivo as a facilitator to organise the data and conceptual categories and themes permitting to draw strong conclusion is supported by many authors (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Ghauri, 2004).

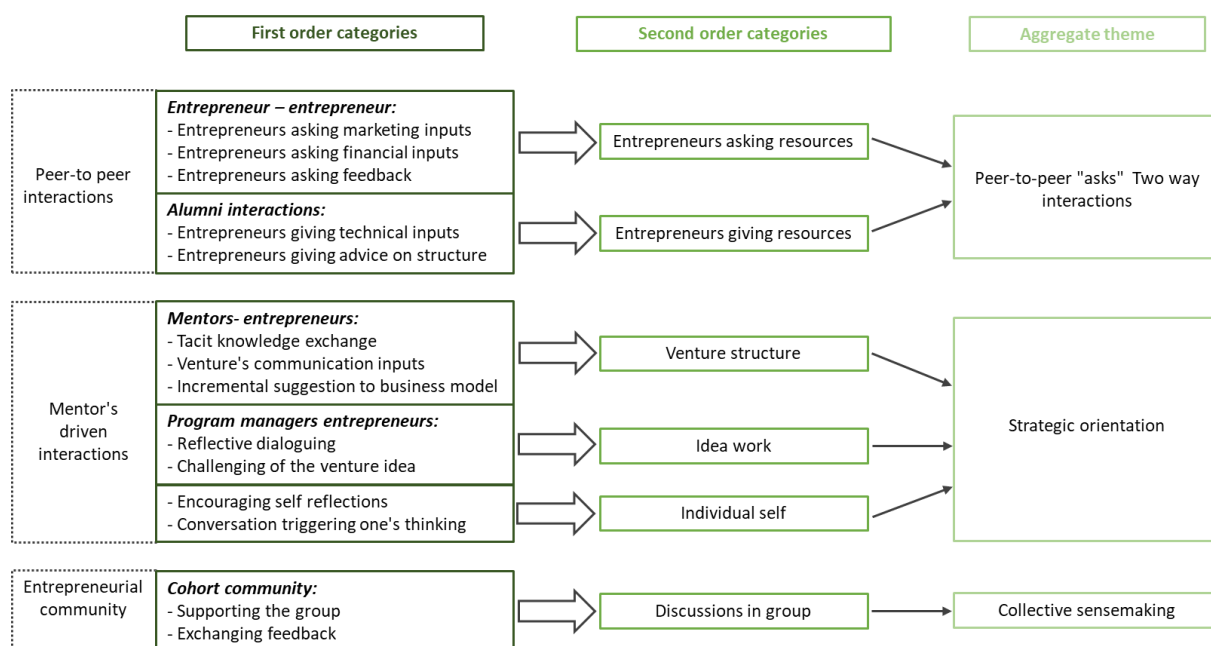


FIGURE 10 - CODING STRUCTURE "WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL INTERACTION NASCENT ENTREPRENEURS ENGAGE IN?"

Figure 10 summarizes how we perceived the interactions by the role and the approach - in this sense we could trace back how it relates to the future shifts in the venture creation process. Then, once again, we went back to the literature searching for a concept or a theory that might help us to make sense of the analysis we initiated. At this stage, the concept of pivots emerged as a mechanism to map out the evolution of the venture creation process. We therefore decided to use pivot events as a "marker of venture change" (Boddington & Kavadias, 2018). This means that we clarified the nature of the social interactions and then we investigated how they fed into entrepreneurial pivots. This resulted into outcomes of social interactions described in Chapter V.

We have also taken the processual thinking at the core of this process as we seek to bring movement to social interactions and pivot event. For us, the pivot event was the climax of the pivoting process. This means that when all – or the majority of - the components available to change were present, the entrepreneur could create a pivot.

The inclusion of the notion of pivots ignited a final round of data analysis, which means that in this ongoing process between literature and our data, we then focused in seeking the enactors of the shifts and the changes of entrepreneurs' idea work venture. In this third wave of analysis, we expected to capture the evolution of the venture through the triggers of the pivots and social interactions associated to it. This abductive reasoning and thematic process is represented by the Figure 1111 that combines the three phases of analysis.

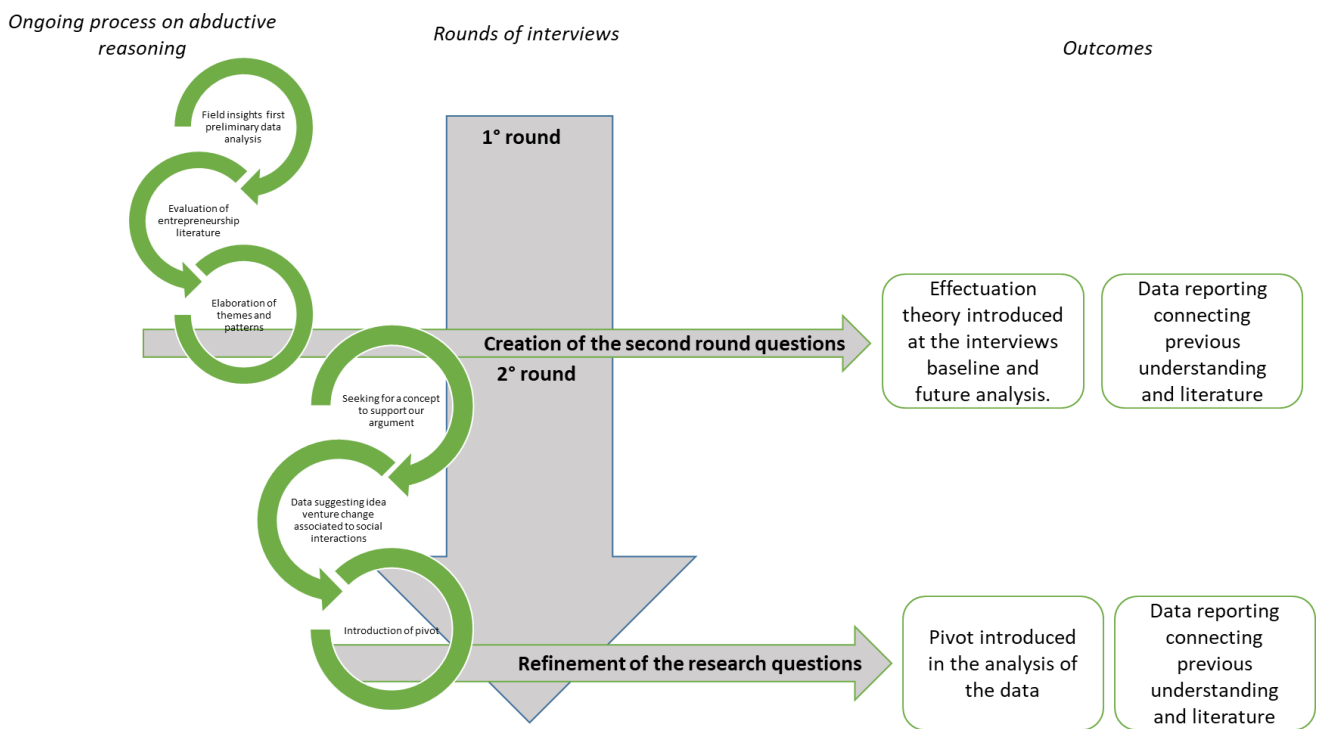


FIGURE 11 - DATA ANALYSIS CHART

The use of thematic analysis oriented by abductive logic allowed flexibility and reflexivity in this iterative process (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The thematic analysis enabled us to explore the patterns and themes that emerged from data. Also, the analysis being abductively oriented permitted constant consideration of literature and previous understandings to capture the historicity, background and lived experiences of entrepreneurs. Following this, we emphasized meaningful patterns and concerns of entrepreneurs' experiences rather than words and phrases to identify common themes and categories in our thematic analysis. In doing so, this approach supported the creation of exemplars advocated by Brenner (1994). Exemplars were used in analysing the phenomenological cases to illustrate the lived experiences of everyday practices of entrepreneurs' when interacting and pivoting. Following this line, in practice we coded rich descriptive information of each entrepreneur's journey to capture the specificities of everyday interactions and their future impact. For example, one entrepreneur shared the experience of pivoting his/her venture associating the reflective thinking moments enacted in workshops and the close support with the selected mentors as crucial to perform a pivot. This is represented in the section 5.4.3 of the everyday pivoting chapter by the long exemplar where the entrepreneur reflects over the period of when s/he was pivoting the venture.

By following the abductive logic in our thematic data analysis, this thesis created the codes considering the theory and the previous understanding of the field. This constant interaction between theory, transcribed interviews, documents collected, theoretical insights allowed a relentless adaptation of the codes to better portrait similarities and differences in this research.

### 3.4. Ensuring quality and final consideration.

During the entire process of this research, we attempted to carefully choose each step and provide a structured and robust research methodology and strategy. Thus, in this chapter we aimed to bring rigor to our phenomenological research by presenting how we collected and analysed our empirical data in line with philosophical underpins.

However, it remains important to acknowledge that some authors question quality in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Patton, 2002; Saunders et al., 2009). These critics are traditionally concerned by three elements: credibility, dependability and generalisability. The following paragraphs discuss these elements that undermine the potential qualitative inquiries.

Credibility refers to the coherence between the social constructed realities of respondents and the realities represented by the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Criticisms of credibility are related to the abstraction in qualitative research. Some authors argue that qualitative inquiries are too intuitive or subjective (Saunders et al., 2009). However, defenders of qualitative research argue that this abstract aspect is the essential element of interpretation and understanding of human action (Stake, 2010). Therefore, this constructionist and interpretivist strand of reality is highly relevant for us. This issue was treated by the choice of an interpretative phenomenology approach in a longitudinal case through which we could validate our queries about entrepreneurs lived experiences. The constant exchange with the participants of the programme allowed us to orient our theories and better understand their experience during the acceleration program. In a similar vein, authors advocate the use of software to support the coding process to give the robustness in methods of extraction.

The second criticism refers to dependability of the study which relates to reliability, which intends to point out the issue of repeatability of the study across particular settings. This criticism relates to difficulties in replicating research across a number of settings, considering that coded data is often a product of the researcher's interpretations (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This issue was carefully treated by the influence of the theoretical grounding on effectuation theory and pivot in our interpretations. Moreover, we administer this by using semi-structured interviews and recorded data

(either on audio or through field notes), making sure to ask similar questions in order to capture the essence of our research goals.

Generalization is the third criticism of qualitative research which relates to generalizing the findings to other places. The underlying critique here concerns the transferability of research findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Qualitative research might hold findings about one context but not others. However, Flyvbjerg (2001) goes against these concerns, explicating how the “power of the good example” may magnify generalizations. This issue is treated by a thick and rich description of the case and finding. The results chapters aims to overcome this issue by providing the thick descriptions of the lived experience of acceleration by the perspective of the entrepreneurs.

In addressing these criticisms above, it is important to note that interpretive phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of entrepreneurs, or how they understand, interpret and deal with the phenomenon through a robust description, rather than seeking numerical generalisation of the case study (Berglund, 2007). Moreover, the classical notions of validity and reliability are inadequate when utilizing interpretive phenomenology (Laverty, 2003).

In this chapter we presented our research choices, demonstrating the coherence between theory, philosophy, methodology, methods of data collection, and data analysis. At a theoretical level, this research draws on phenomenological studies focusing at the everydayness of entrepreneurs to understand the how interactions shape the entrepreneurial process. At the methodological level, given to the dual role of interpretative phenomenology, the choice of Benner’s (1994) interpretive phenomenology as the research methodology emphasized on the understanding this life-worlds and everydayness (Cope, 2005) . At the data collection and data analysis level, we used participant observation, semi structured interviews, and thematic analysis that appear as appropriated procedures in interpretive phenomenological studies (Benner, 1994).

We consider it important to share our experience in conducting this research and in the choices we made. We attempted to create a logical line between them to provide this robustness of the research. Phenomenology as a philosophy and method allowed to create this coherence between the everyday life of entrepreneurs and theory. Thus, moving onwards, in the next two chapters we present the results of our empirical study.

## Chapter IV - Empirical findings

This chapter describes and discusses our empirical findings. It is divided in two parts in order to better answer our research questions. In the first part, we focus on answering the first research question: *“What are the social interactions early stage entrepreneurs engage in?”* where we scrutinize the microlevel of social interactions. Then, in the second part, we concentrate on answering the second research question: *“How do social interactions shape entrepreneurial pivots?”* where we examine the outcomes of social interactions and how this feed into entrepreneurs’ venture idea work. As it follows, we begin by exploring the first research question.

### Part I - Drivers, content and form of entrepreneurs’ social interactions

In this part I of the empirical chapter, we concentrate on the question: *“What are the social interactions early stages entrepreneurs engage in?”* We recognize social interaction as a mechanism where the entrepreneurs explore the uncertainty of the context, as effectuation theory taught us. With a view to getting a deeper insight into pivots and how they shape the early stages of the venture creation process, in this first part of chapter, we examine social interactions at different levels. Therefore, we zoom in on the interactions between entrepreneurs and their peers, entrepreneurs and their mentors, and entrepreneurs and the community they are embedded in.

To better present the social interactions we observed, we organized the next sections considering the drivers, content and form of social interactions. Therefore, we first explore the antecedents of interactions where we discuss the entrepreneurs’ drivers when they initiate interactions with others. After that, we examine the content and form of interactions where we refer to the questions about “what” entrepreneurs interact about and “how” they go about doing it. The outcomes of these social interactions will be treated in the second part of the empirical findings. In every section of part I, we explore the three levels of social interactions: peer-to-peer, entrepreneurs-mentors and entrepreneurs-community.

#### 4.1. Drivers of social interactions

As we saw in our literature review, authors have recently deconstructed the “interacting with others” axis of the effectual model claiming that social interactions begin from “initiating interactions” (Kerr & Coviello, 2019). This emphasizes how entrepreneurs reach out to others to attain their goals.



These authors also explain that venture creators initiate interactions with the closest actors within their context.

#### 4.1.1. Drivers of peer-to-peer interactions

We found entrepreneurs reaching out to others was mainly driven by affinities and not necessarily seeking knowledge or competencies. Fourteen participants reported how the social interactions occurred organically and were sparked by general affinities amongst the interacting parties. Following this perspective, we considered affinity when interviewees explained “drivers” associated with “approachability” and “sharing themes”. In addition to affinity, we also identified two entrepreneurs, P11 and P12, who described reaching out to other entrepreneurs in search of complementary skills. These entrepreneurs seem to strategize their interactions in regard to the competencies of their peers in order to achieve their personal entrepreneurial goals. We explore these set of drivers in the following paragraphs.

First, looking at approachability, which relates to openness to interacting with other peers, P10 reported not being extroverted, which means that she/he did not take the first step in reaching out to others. This entrepreneur declared that s/he waited for participants to come to her/him, and, after getting to know the entrepreneurs better, P10 affirmed being more comfortable to interact and discuss issues with other participants. We have also observed that P10 interacted in the first place with those being in “difficulties”. These difficulties are associated with entrepreneurs struggling with their venture, and/or the acceleration program, that reached out to P10 to talk. By doing so, we could say that P10’s relationship with those entrepreneurs in difficulties was associated with the potential support s/he was perceived to be able to provide. This may also relate to P10 experience as a “listener” for some entrepreneurs seeking reassurance.

*“(…) I think that in the beginning, from the affinities I had with a few people, I wasn't in contact with many entrepreneurs, I would say that out of ten or so maybe. After a while, it was also the case [contact with others]. I'm not hyper extroverted, so I don't think I'm going to see a lot of people immediately. Afterwards, there were really individuals, I think of (P19), more individuals that I felt were in difficulty. So concretely I'm going to go towards those with more difficulties, so I had more links like that to support them, (...) also think of (P27) who expressed difficulties to me, so I was more in touch with people like that, after the moment when everything changed and I was in touch with many more entrepreneurs, it was from the seminar until the end of the program, after the immersion phase when we were at the [city name], that I personally felt I was open to many more people and I got in touch with many more people.” (P10)*

P10's case is representative of interactions that are initiated by approachability since she/he navigated within the cohort as entrepreneurs approached her/him to share and express their difficulties. It is worth noting that we will further discuss reassurance as an outcome of social interactions in section 4.3.4. P11 complements this notion of interacting by approachability by indicating that the first seminars were crucial to set the tone of peer relationships. This entrepreneur also informed us how participants organically interacted looking for similarities emerging within the different groups in the cohort. These similarities are based on the perceptions that these individuals shared certain values. In addition, P11 stressed the fluidity and the perceptible openness to exchanges between entrepreneurs. As we mentioned, we perceive this openness of exchanges as approachability. Furthermore, this may suggest that starting conversations with other participants and creating relationships was easier because of the approachability.

*"The kick-off meeting, the first two days in Paris, when it all started. It didn't take much more to cement the group [of entrepreneurs]. So, within the community itself there are different groups, it's normal because there are many of us, some have more affinities than others, others are more reserved, but there was never any exclusion, if someone went to see someone from another group, he was welcomed without any worries." (P11)*

In a similar vein, we have also observed – in interviews and during observations – the creation of groups that clustered around shared themes, which bring entrepreneurs together. For instance, P08 pointed out how s/he engaged in exchanges with those who were working in the same sector, in this case, construction. P08 also mentioned that s/he learned the most from those people working in the same sector. In parallel, we identified some entrepreneurs working on high-tech (P14, P18 and P27) that interacted actively among each other. In this token, P14 explained that: *"we call each other every week, and I think we're going to be friends for a long time to come. That's it! There were participants with more affinities but there you go. (...) I discussed it with people with whom I had affinities; I didn't try to network."* This supports our field observations of the creation of small clusters, centred on shared affinities.

*"(...) let's say it was people who were a bit in the same sector as me, so you had contributors, P33, you had P21, who was more in construction... that's it. Afterwards, with people who... because, at the stage of the immersion phase, everyone came up with an idea, in fact, some of them were perhaps more advanced than others [questioning if alliances were created relating the venture stage], but globally, the affinities were more on the sector in which you were, etc. After, obviously, me, where I learned the most, with people who were more in finance..." (P08)*

This contributes to what we found with the vast majority of entrepreneurs who did not primarily seek complementary skills to strengthen their portfolio of skills, in the first instance. P36 reacts to this by claiming a sense of community created around these interactions “initiated” by shared affinities. In this dynamic, P36 explained *“It's true that it depends on the affinity in all the human community where people who were closer to you, who shared more with you, so you're more aware of what they're doing and what they are working...”* (P36). This may suggest that initiating interactions by affinities, approachability and shared themes, could contribute to create a sense of community among peers. This is similarly found in the one-to-many social interactions in section 4.1.3.

It's worth mentioning the few entrepreneurs that seek complementary skills in the first place, when initiating interactions. P11 captured this essence of how participants may engage in these exchanges. In the exemplar below, P11 describes that some entrepreneurs, through simple dialogues and exchanges, identified a complementary skill in a fellow entrepreneur and went to talk with that person. Likewise, entrepreneurs spot a potential entrepreneur beforehand and then seek to initiate a talk with this person. The exemplar below captures the “informality” and “spontaneity” of the interactions. This also reinforces what we discussed above about interaction occurring organically sparked by affinities. This is illustrated below with the exemplar of P11 reflecting about how the entrepreneurs interact:

*“either we had spotted that someone had a skill and we hadn't, so we went to the person, and they helped us with great pleasure. Or on the other hand, it was by discussing, by talking about our projects that we realised that we could bring things, but also face to face, it is through dialogue, through discussion, through exchanges on the project, that things are done naturally, without any constraint and in complete freedom, and it was in a spontaneous way, it was a bilateral, multilateral offer of aid.”* (P11)

It is important to point out that we verified two aspects influencing the initiation of interactions between entrepreneurs. First, a range of different activities was created by the acceleration programme with the aim of stimulating interactions and mutual help. For example, the three main strategies implemented are: (i) *co-coaching* – pairing up peers to create a follow-up dynamic and setting weekly goals; (ii) *social media workplace* - one central online platform of exchange, also groups on WhatsApp and Facebook between the cohorts; (iii) *“tribus” (tribes)* - workgroups defined by the entrepreneurs to discuss a common specific issue. This is observed in many interviews where entrepreneurs categorically mention the relevance of these strategies put in practice to create synergies among them. In addition, we also observed during events that this allowed entrepreneurs to leave their comfort zone in order to meet other entrepreneurs and explore potential partnerships.

This brings us to the second aspect which is the uncertainties observed in entrepreneurs. At the same time this is also related to the early stages of venture creation, and this uncertainty means that entrepreneurs are perhaps “groping in the dark” because many uncertainties about venture idea and perceptions of the individual-self are in development. This shared sense of groping in the dark among some of nascent entrepreneurs also may have sparked interactions. This can be seen by P10 earlier in this section who illustrated that some 'struggling' entrepreneurs used to reach out to her/him to talk.

We recognize that this is also one of the objectives of the acceleration program, to surround entrepreneurs with peers so that they can feed off these exchanges. Entrepreneurs expressed that they were not looking to network, in the first place, and that the exchanges were based on affinities and friendly exchanges. This can be seen when P23 explains that his/her interactions were based on "feeling" the other entrepreneurs.

*“Afterwards, I think it's also a question of feeling, but I talked a lot with P27... And then, we did the Tribes, and I think it helped, it gave a boost. And honestly, I did not necessarily seek to be close to a person. I rather let them come [to me], and it was a bit of a feeling.” (P23)*

In our perception this idea of interacting by "feeling" can also be considered as interacting by an "abstract" affinity for the other. This is because, "feeling" is a sensation or a belief based on instinct and emotions. That is, entrepreneurs initiate interactions based on their emotions and assumptions about the individual they face. This also corroborates with our argument that entrepreneurs do not begin interactions within peers seeking for knowledge or skills, in the first place.

#### 4.1.2. Drivers of entrepreneurs-mentors' interactions.

In the next few paragraphs, we discuss the antecedents of interactions between mentors and entrepreneurs. Most of these interactions were motivated by a prescriptive nature. Beyond these recommended interactions, very few entrepreneurs describe that interactions were led by affinity.

It is important to recall that the acceleration programme assigned a mentor to each entrepreneur (see chapter III), suggesting a prescription-based interaction and reducing the voluntary character of it. Moreover, it was a requirement of the acceleration programme that entrepreneurs and mentors should keep periodic interactions, in various forms (face-to face meetings, video calls, phone calls). Entrepreneurs stated the following:

*“We [entrepreneur and mentor] met every three weeks.” (P08).*

*“I saw [mentors name] for an hour every 14 days.” (P02)*

*"Every time we saw each other it was very useful for me! But we agreed on an hour every two weeks." (P06)*

*"Listen, we [entrepreneur and mentor] had telephone exchanges, we had email exchanges, we had face-to-face exchanges. (P23)*

Therefore, we verify that this prescriptive nature characterises the antecedents of most interactions between mentors and entrepreneurs. Yet, a very few entrepreneurs described that they solidified the interactions with their mentors due to the affinities and shared themes. Our empirical data showed that over time, when affinities between mentors and entrepreneurs emerged, their relationships grew stronger and exchanges became more frequent. In specific, three entrepreneurs said:

*"For me, having a mentor worked well. With [mentors' name] because we had sensibilities concerning our themes. [...] We had a lot in common, we talked a lot, even beyond the project! I really enjoyed talking to him. And even today I send him WhatsApp." (P06)*

*"With the [program name] mentors it also depends, because it's a matter of affinity, there are people I've received help from, we've seen each other outside, so it's really a matter of affinity, basically." (P10)*

*"[...] [mentors' name] came to Lyon because there was an event with [partner name] and she invited us to take part in order to put us in touch. So we were able to talk to [mentors' name], she came to our house, she came to the house, we were able to meet her for a long time outside the program." (P23)*

We conclude that interactions with mentors derived from an established requirement of the acceleration programme; and that only three entrepreneurs clearly note that that affinity grew during the programme due to shared themes.

In the next subsection, we aim at exploring the drivers of interactions at the level of the entrepreneurial community.

#### 4.1.3. Drivers of entrepreneur-community interactions

In this subsection, we look at the overall interactions between entrepreneurs and the community, that is, all participants of the acceleration programme (entrepreneurs, mentors, program team, alumni, external partners) - from now a denominated entrepreneurial community. Similar to the previous sections, we explore what drove entrepreneurs to interact with the community. The majority of the interactions within the entrepreneurial community were driven by shared values and the idea of being part of a community, as we describe in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, one of the main drivers that entrepreneurs point out is the ease of interacting with the community. Going beyond the mere easiness of interactions, we found that entrepreneurs interacted

mostly with members of the community with whom they shared values and principles. This is similar to what we identified as drivers of peer-to-peer interaction. Moreover, being part of a community where values and principles are shared among members allowed entrepreneurs to quickly interact and exchange with one another. Below, we present a few exemplars that demonstrate this easiness in interactions moved by shared values and principles.

*"all our projects were different, maybe there was a selection of projects, so that they were different enough so that there is no competition, but there is complementarity, so we all have different projects with the same principles and values, it allows us to exchange more quickly from the start, and to find the community very, very quickly". (P11)*

*"all the communities are familiar with my sector, i.e., participatory housing, co-management, so I don't have to "explain" what I do and people understand. So, it goes super-fast." (P08).*

Our empirical data demonstrated ten entrepreneurs who described to us that being part of this entrepreneurial community gave them a sense of community and sense of belonging. When explaining what this means to them, five entrepreneurs added that this community allowed them to overcome the loneliness of the entrepreneurial journey. As P02 and P15 describe below:

*"The same thing at [program name], being able to say to myself: 'I am part of a group, I am not alone'. Even if I am alone in my project, I am not alone in this experience." (P02)*

*"You feel that you are not alone and that you belong to a community, and this has been gained thanks to [program name]" (P15)*

For other entrepreneurs being integrated in the entrepreneurial community, aside from decreasing the feeling of loneliness, became a source of enthusiasm, inspiration and motivation in the pursuit of their ideas and ventures. As we can verify in the following exemplars about the interactions with the entrepreneurial community:

*"It's very inspiring already, very inspiring, very motivating, I think it gave me the strength to continue the project (...)." (P21).*

*"(...) for me the good point of the [program name] is really that, to create this collective dynamic, if you are alone in your corner you can quickly get demoralized." (P02).*

*"Having the network, to be with people who want to create ventures that are a bit similar, etc., it makes you want to do too [create your own venture] because if you're all alone in your corner, you say to yourself: "Why am I doing this? Nobody is motivated, it's too hard... "And then you see that you're not the only one, you help each other, etc., that's too good." (P16)*

*"Then, there are plenty of times when I want to quit, but that's because of my character. But I think they've been very supportive of us on this, and I'd also say that the whole community is really helpful. It's really supportive, I think." (P30)*

*"Because the mission of [program name] is to break this loneliness and it's important to give that push." (P34)*

From the above we can conclude that the drivers that lead entrepreneurs to engage with the community were mainly the opportunity of reducing loneliness, and to get motivation oriented by shared values.

#### 4.1.4. Conclusion of drivers of social interactions

When analysing social interactions of the program, we also looked at understanding what the drivers behind these interactions are. From the data, we conclude that entrepreneurs' answers vary according to the type of interactions they engage in. As we saw above, entrepreneurs related with their peers because of affinities and shared themes. In turn, we verify that interactions between entrepreneurs and mentors had mainly a prescriptive character. This is explained by a specific component of the acceleration program; that is, at the beginning, a mentor was assigned to each entrepreneur. Yet, it was possible to see that for certain entrepreneurs they referred, as well, to affinities and shared themes emerging over time. In turn, looking at interactions amongst all participants, we noted a sense of community, in which entrepreneurs satisfied their needs of belonging, and consequently, reduced their feeling of loneliness. As such, this community worked as a source and place of enthusiasm, motivation and inspiration for the entrepreneurs.

Now that we understand the reasons why entrepreneurs engage with others in the acceleration program, it is important for our research to shed light on what entrepreneurs exchange in these social interactions and how they do so.

#### 4.2. Content and form of entrepreneurs interacting.

In this section, we explain the content and form of social interactions of our empirical case. As we saw in our literature review, many authors have recently called attention to entrepreneurial social interaction as a manner to describe the entrepreneurial context (Arend et al., 2015; Fisher, 2012; Grégoire & Cherchem, 2019a; Høvig et al., 2017; Kitching & Rouse, 2020; S. Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019). Therefore, in this section, we emphasize the "what" and "how" entrepreneurs interact with others in order to attain their goals in terms of: peer-to-peer interactions, entrepreneurs-mentors' interactions and entrepreneurs-community interactions.

#### 4.2.1 Peer-to-peer “asks” - two-way interactions

In this section, we concentrate on what and how peer-to-peer interactions are about. Building on Dew et al.’s (2018) findings, we consider entrepreneurs interacting with others through the “effectual ask”, as these “asks” create natural and spontaneous resource inputs. In regard to resources, we have adopted that a resource can be anything that would help entrepreneurs to develop their ventures (Carvalho, 2015). This broad definition of resource is adopted in order to include all types of sources of information, skills, abilities, competences and knowledge for the entrepreneur. Therefore, in this section we scrutinize the social interactions between peers occurring in an acceleration program.

Most of these exchanges occur in an informal context, meaning that they happen casually during seminars, events or at workshop coffee breaks. In this line, we found 19 entrepreneurs who pointed out experiencing an expansion of their resources while interacting with other peers. To bring more analytical clarity, we first clarify the particular behaviour of entrepreneurs interacting and, then, we discuss the content of what is exchanged between the actors uncovering the input of the interactions.

We start by exploring: i) entrepreneurs asking for resources and, then ii) entrepreneurs giving resources. Peer-to-peer interactions are reciprocal, i.e. an entrepreneur who asks a resource, also gives a resource. Therefore, we analysed this dyadic dynamic between peers. However, with regard to giving resources, we have no information whether the resource was necessarily requested. In essence, this zoom aims to put a light on the particularity of what is exchanged, and how, during these peer-to-peer interactions.

##### 4.1.2.1. Entrepreneurs asking for resources

Our empirical data indicated that entrepreneurs exchanged tools and support materials for setting up their ventures. We found 13 entrepreneurs describing interactions where they ask for resources to refine their venture in terms of tools and materials, marketing communications, and feedback to their venture idea work. Since entrepreneurs were in the early stages of idea development, we found that resources that helped them organise the venture and its activities were shared in the light of their previous experiences. In specific, P05 referred to having interacted with a peer that has a large experience working in entrepreneurial incubators. Therefore, P05 obtained from the colleague



materials and tools used in other training programs, as well as knowledge on how to use these resources in setting up her/his venture. In turn, P15 demonstrated interest mainly in the personal experience gained by her/his colleague, who had set up a business previously. P15 wanted to obtain information on what had worked and what hadn't worked, and what were the main learnings. We have also noted that discussions on potential financial structures was a common content of discussion as entrepreneurs aimed at refining their business model. This is represented by the exemplars below:

*"Now, for example, just before our call I was with [entrepreneur name] who works at [incubator name in another city] which gives a lot of resources in social entrepreneurship, so I know now that he is sharing the knowledge he acquires during his training courses and that helps me a lot." (P05)*

*"I once called a contributor because I wanted him to tell me how he set up his business, why he thought it worked, why he thought it didn't work, what he learned from it [...] in the same way, once I took a meeting with an entrepreneur to discuss where we were at, and to get his feedback and recommendations. And I went looking for another entrepreneur on the financial/business aspect, to challenge my business model. I went to look for something fairly targeted, I told myself that these were people who could help me, and they did." (P15)*

Another resource exchanged between peers was marketing communication. This also seems in line with the early stages of development of their ventures, as we found entrepreneurs seeking more information on how to communicate their venture and product/service. In this case, P34 explicitly expressed her/his lack of knowledge in marketing communication and how she/he searched for peers with expertise in digital marketing to support her/his venture. P34 stated that this same entrepreneur who worked in digital marketing belonged to a CSR community, which in turn ended up being a potential resource of networking for P34 to communicate the venture and, perhaps, engage others. In addition to this, P23 also illustrated advice from P04 about marketing communication in his/her venture. The exemplars below demonstrate what we discuss in this paragraph.

*"Yes, [entrepreneur name], on issues of communication and social networks, [another entrepreneur name], on marketing issues, things that I don't have any skills in. And, us, [entrepreneur name], [...], he is at the heart of SSE, he knows a lot of players and he is very, very good at awakening, etc., something that we were already doing, so we didn't really need him." (P34)*

*"P04, who we [P23 and cofounder] talk to very often, she has a lot of skills in communication and social networks, she gives us a targeted look each time we ask her a question." (P23).*

Another resource that emerged from our data is feedback on their venture idea work. While interacting with others, the majority of the entrepreneurs asked for feedback on their ideas, product and/or service. This idea of feedback is inherent to the social interactions, as entrepreneurs informally discussed their entrepreneurial projects. In this, our data demonstrated that this occurred in the form

of targeted feedback and through informal exchanges. For example, P27 sought the opinion of his/her target about his/her product. P27 has a podcast for mothers-to-be and young mothers, and in this way, P27 describes to us conversations with various women in the programme to better refine their value proposition and gather information. In a more informal way, P15 also described that regularly she/he debriefed about her/his project with entrepreneurs in order to gather recommendations to her/his venture idea work. This is represented by the exemplars below.

*"In fact, as I have a project aimed at women, it is true that I have got much closer to female entrepreneurs who are my target, directly. So, they have given me a lot of ideas for developing my project, since they are directly concerned." (P27)*

*"And similarly, I once had a debriefing with an entrepreneur to discuss where we were at, and to get his feedback and recommendations." (P15)*

In this section, we illustrate our empirical findings in regard to entrepreneurs asking resources. As we can see, most of these exchanges rely on exchanging advice on how to structure entrepreneurs' ventures and asking for feedback and recommendations about their venture idea work. Therefore, we noticed that the entrepreneurs asked for help to better understand their market or to get to know a certain important aspect for the development of their enterprise, in which they had little knowledge.

Finally, our data indicated that entrepreneurs seek information and knowledge within the group when necessary. This means that entrepreneurs use peers as a source of feedback or advice for their venture idea work. Thus, this section aimed to demonstrate situations where entrepreneurs were acquiring (and sharing) resources during informal interactions, bringing more clarity about the exchanges taking place between peers.

In the next section, we explore the other exchanges of resources however, we take the perspective of those who provided the resources.

#### 4.1.2.2. Entrepreneurs giving resources.

While in the previous section we explained situations where entrepreneurs request help from peers, in this section we clarify the exchanges where entrepreneurs were in the position of giving advice. We identified 11 entrepreneurs providing recommendations on the venture structure, advising on technical skills and communication to their peers in the acceleration program.

Three entrepreneurs referred to recommendations of peers' venture structure. While some entrepreneurs entered in the acceleration program with a product in mind, others were still conceptualising their products or services. In this line we found more experienced entrepreneurs

helping others to structure their business plans. For example, we identified P23 who mentioned having given recommendations in writing an entrepreneur's project proposal. We also identified entrepreneurs still at an early stage of ideation who were also contributing to the structure of other projects. We identified that entrepreneurs need to interpret messy situations and find guidance on seemingly unsolvable problems. Thus, by helping others explore potential solutions to their problems, entrepreneurs sought motivation and exercised their problem-solving skills. This is the case of P15, who explains that he helped to solve other struggles as exercise to find potential solutions to her/his own venture advancement. Our observations showed that entrepreneurs fed up with their ventures also helped others as a form of distraction/exercise for their own issues.

*"We also brought [entrepreneur name] a file to the [bank name] that we had already submitted. So, he asked us if we could take a look at what he had done and maybe correct it, a big brother's look maybe, I don't know if I can say it like that." (P23)*

*"For some entrepreneurs, when I'm tired of taking the lead on my project, I like to take the lead on other people's projects. So, several times I've found myself having coffee with entrepreneurs who were really fed up with their project, who were just about to stop, and I found myself doing what I had to do for my project, "you have to do this, you have to check this, and you have to call this". And that's cool, it worked well and people were happy." (P15)*

Another resource provided by entrepreneurs was technical inputs. The entrepreneurs who participated in the accelerator program had different backgrounds and, as a result, many made their technical skills available to help other entrepreneurs in how best to carry out their daily activities. In specific, three other entrepreneurs, P18, P02 and P27, mentioned giving advice on technical aspects of their peers' venture. Specifically, P18 provided technical advice to support other peers. As P18 is an engineer, and he/she could provide technical tips to those with less skills and competencies in this field. Similarly, P02 described having provided tips on IT to other peers where requested. This entrepreneur seeks to facilitate the entrepreneurs' daily tasks through IT tool recommendations. We have also identified P27 who described giving advice on Excel and PowerPoint presentations to peers.

*"So, all the people who had technical questions, clearly, I gave my time and I gave them leads, even information on the state of the art in their current technique, advice on that. So, this is mainly the added value that I could bring. And if not, beyond the right skills to bring, it's probably reciprocal in terms of friendliness and friendship, that is." (P18)*

*"I know quite a few small tools from a computer point of view, so if there were people who asked for things, I tried to direct them to the right tool to solve the problem, or to help them make things easier that they used to do by hand: "yeah, you don't know that, but there are tools that do it all by themselves". (P02)*

*"To an entrepreneur, I explained how to make his PowerPoint presentation... In fact, in terms of work, I'm quite procedural, so I try to give frames, in fact, according to their project." (P27)*

Some other entrepreneurs have also mentioned exchanging communications inputs. Our data demonstrated that communicating was a resource requested and provided between peer interactions. This demonstrates the relevance of this resource in the initial phase of project development, as showed in the previous session. Precisely, P04 mentioned answering the call for help from P23. Here, P04 explained that she/he provided some technical recommendations about the marketing communication strategy of P23. Overall, these entrepreneurs presented situations where they provided guidance in management tasks. This data indicates that entrepreneurs exchange practical advice on processual issues of their daily management tasks.

*"On [ventures' name], I know that on Friday we are going to talk about communication, because P23 and his/her associate are not very good at it, and I like it, and I have already done some training courses in this field, so I hope that I am going to help them at least in this area. We had already talked about it, we had already given them some advice, so I know there were some things they had listened to us about, so maybe that." (P04)*

Building on the abovementioned, we found entrepreneurs providing recommendations on peers' venture structure and advice on technical aspects of the venture. This reinforces the idea of the previous section that entrepreneurs share knowledge, skills, abilities and information between them. We also verified a spontaneous aspect when talking about giving advice, meaning that, advising other peers takes place during informal conversations about their venture idea work. This is in consonance with the idea of "effectual ask" producing immediate resources inputs.

In this section, we aimed at bringing more clarity to situations where entrepreneurs provide advice to other peers. In the next section, we turn to mentor-driven interaction.

#### 4.2.2 Mentors' strategic orientations.

In this section we explore the mentor-driven interactions which refers to exchanges between entrepreneurs and mentors as specific supportive individuals. It is noteworthy that the acceleration programme where we collected our data used coaches and mentors to support the progress of entrepreneurs. Since entrepreneurs presented confusion in defining the role and function of each type of support while explaining their interactions, we analysed coaches and mentors interchangeably. Following that, we found that these interactions were based on strategic orientations in which refers to "*principles that direct and influence the activities of a firm and generate the behaviours intended to ensure the viability and performance of the firm.*"(Hakala, 2011, p. 200). This agrees with our empirical findings as mentor-driven interactions were aimed at guiding and feeding the entrepreneurs with tools and knowledge about the venture creation.

In this section, we scrutinize how entrepreneurs and mentors interact, and what they discuss. The following sections are organized according to the nature of the content exchanged between mentors and entrepreneurs. In our empirical data, we found mentors' strategic orientations focused on: i) the venture structure, ii) venture idea reflection and iii) individual-self reflections. We start by addressing the venture structure.

#### 4.2.2.1. Venture structure

This exemplar represents mentors' strategic orientations for structuring the venture. This advice presented clarifications on the path of the entrepreneur that generated exchanges of tacit and explicit knowledge. Our empirical data demonstrated that most of these interactions took place during mentoring and training sessions. It's worth noting that mentoring sessions also took place in an informal context, meaning that the majority of these interactions were not scheduled, not even programmed before. This signifies that entrepreneurs received this counselling during speed dating events, informal conversations, and networking events.

Our empirical data demonstrated that mentors counselled entrepreneurs by sharing their experience and tips. Zooming into these interactions, P04 reported mentoring sessions in which mentors shared their experiences to explain business models. This entrepreneur mentioned a specific training session where a practical business model was scrutinized in detail. This helped to clarify the process of creating the business model. After that, P04 described financial inputs during these training sessions that illuminated the potential financing structures of his/her venture. This can be seen when P04 says:

*"So, I don't have a business model yet, although [that is] where [program name] helped me, it was [program manager/mentor name], and I think it was [mentor name] or [program founder name] with her, but it doesn't matter, especially [program manager/mentor name], where it helped me is to think that you can have several entries. In your business model there is not only one model, it's not: well, my business is just going to be twenty-two products", it can be: "I'm going to sell products, next to that I'm going to do some consulting", a bit like the same [program name] model, where there are several ways of making money, several ways of making money, like sponsorship, consulting, etc. [...] It helped me to be able to say to myself: "you won't have only one way of doing things". (P04)*

Another matter treated in mentors' strategic orientation was communication. As we noted in the previous sections, this appears frequently in our empirical data. We found mentors advising on the creation of social media networks and the landing page of ventures' websites. Entrepreneurs began the acceleration program with an idea and, therefore, during the program entrepreneurs envisioned how to communicate their venture to potential clients or stakeholders. In this, P11 has recognized the

importance of strongly structured marketing communication for his/her venture. In turn, our data suggests that this is associated with the exchanges of tacit knowledge and encouragement from particular mentors. Also, we noticed that during strategic interactions about the venture structure, mentors encouraged entrepreneurs to develop communication skills, particularly to support the presentation and marketing of their venture.

Beyond the venture communication, our data also demonstrated that entrepreneurs have also received advice on 'focusing' during venture creation. In the early stages of the venture creative process, it is common for entrepreneurs to find different ways to test their ventures or even different potential products to market. Considering this, the strategic orientations of the mentors supported them in this decision-making process. In specific, P11 uses an analogy of pruning a tree to explain that the mentors' advice served to realign and bring more focus to the enterprise. At this point, the entrepreneur explains that the mentor helped her/him set priorities and create clear objectives for the advancement of the venture. This may relate to the fact that P11 and his/her associate had doubts about which path to take with their enterprise. This entrepreneur mentioned that mentors – with their external view - helped them to maintain the chosen decision. In the following exemplars, we illustrate P11's experience of strategic orientations about the venture structure.

*"Communication, social and digital networks. Already we didn't dare to open a Facebook page because we thought we didn't have any content to put on and that we weren't good enough. If it hadn't been for [program name], our Facebook page would still not be here. And then we were put under a lot of pressure to implement it, and that got us started. I also appreciated the intervention of [program mentor], it was in Marseille on the landing pages and websites, and it was great! [...]"*

*The support program is in terms of structuring and framing, and advice, when we went in different directions, they [mentors] cut our branches but kept the main body. We reviewed our priorities with [selected mentor]. And when P12 and I were going around in circles, they gave us the solution, we needed this external eye to be able to move forward. It was also [selected mentor] who told us to set ourselves three objectives to be achieved before the end of the year. And this principle worked. It taught us to make choices, you always have to make them, and choosing means to renounce, but you have to make them, and stick to them, is a discipline. And then the advice, and it's tailored for us, whether we follow it or not, it's not educational, we do what we want, but the advice we received was really to help us." (P11)*

Another aspect that emerged from the strategic orientation on venture structure was legal support. During interactions with mentors, entrepreneurs raised questions about the use of legal persona, legal ways of building the business model, and other important aspects to guarantee the rights of the entrepreneurs and their products. In specific, P26 described strategic orientation by clarifying to us legal instructions for his/her company. In this case, the entrepreneur described the points of attention emphasized by a mentor, who is a lawyer, about the creation of formal documents

for partnerships. Following that, P26 explained us that after meeting with the mentor, she/he began to track records of exchanges with potential partnership agreements. This small type of procedural clarification to entrepreneurs brings relevant knowledge to the development of enterprises on a daily basis. P26 exemplar is represented, as it follows:

*"And I also remember, when we were in Paris, for the return trip, I met a lawyer during the mentoring sessions, and she explained to me what the points of attention were when you're going to find a partner. To make a partnership agreement... well, it was things... and at that time, she told me: "If you need, I can help you with the agreement. "And I think it's important, it's things so that we can be a little more vigilant. For example, on Tuesday, I met a girl photographer, and she told me: " If you want, I can do the pictures of your stuff, but there are this, this, that..." I think we know how to be a little more vigilant today. And that helped. So, I know that, for me, it's not just like that, it's like saying: " If you want my photos, in return, there are this, this, this, this..." You have to put everything on paper. But this, you see, it's the lawyer who told me: "It's better to write everything down, and that way, you have a proof, if there's a problem. "It doesn't necessarily say that there will be a problem, but at worst, it's written down, and that's important." (P26)*

Thus, during interactions related to counselling the venture structure we identify the transmission of tacit knowledge in which entrepreneurs learn, or grasp knowledge, through the personal experiences of the mentor and their knowledge of the context. These interactions regularly took shape as informal advice or suggestions. We often identify this tacit knowledge as the starting point for the entrepreneur to make his or her choices, or even to introduce another relevant aspect in the structuring of his or her business. Some examples of resources exchanged are communication skills, tips on the financial means of a business model and legal issues. Figure 12 represent these exchanges.

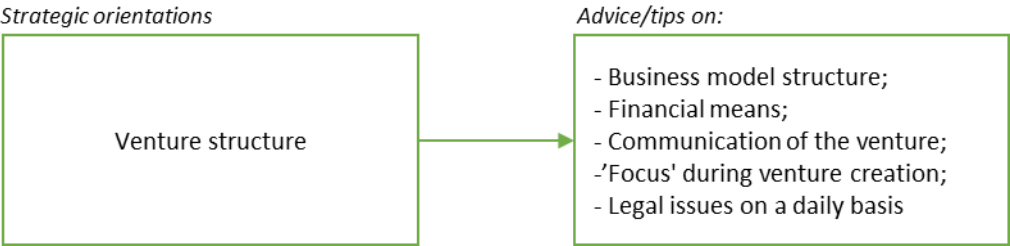


FIGURE 12 - VENTURE STRUCTURE

We then explore strategic orientations in regard to the venture idea work.

#### 4.2.2.2. Venture idea work

In this section we explore strategic orientations in regard to the venture idea. This refers to social interactions between mentors and entrepreneurs, which focused on helping entrepreneurs to clarify their venture idea work. Our empirical findings demonstrated this in two forms; i) by entrepreneurs being constantly challenged about their venture idea and, ii) by entrepreneurs being encouraged to either develop their prototype or to pursue their creative process.

Many mentors' driven interactions during the acceleration program were based on refining the venture idea. This manifested by entrepreneurs "being challenged". This that means mentors questioned and assessed the actual state of the venture, or contributed to the validation of each entrepreneur's hypothesis. Observational data also identified many entrepreneurs going through a process of revising their goals, solutions and means in order to refine their venture idea. To grasp this underlying principle when interacting with mentors of the program, we draw our attention to P02 that informed us of being constantly challenged about his/her venture solution, target and need. This entrepreneur indicates that this was a common, and relevant, practice in the creative revision process that saved her/him time. This evokes some particularities of the literature on the "asks" (Dew et al., 2018) as entrepreneurs went through this process of being challenged and questioning themselves, to mature their venture idea. This is illustrated by the P02 exemplar below:

*"The principle of always challenging yourself: "is your solution really in line with the people you are targeting? Does your solution really respond to an identified need? "That's it, it helped me to ask myself the right questions every time. (...) it made me think about it because now we're sure of the solution we've found, and the principle of being questioned every time saves time."*  
(P02)

Being questioned about their project idea was a part of the support for the acceleration programme. In this line, mentors instigated the reflection of entrepreneurs to verify how robust and/or relevant their product or service was in relation to the entrepreneurial need. In addition, our data showed that mentors were also pushing for reflection on whether the problem being addressed was real. For example, P34 exemplar below demonstrates mentors' questioning the target and the venture's value proposition. These interrogations seemed to spark strong reflection over their venture idea. These interactions based on questioning the core of the venture idea triggered a drastic change in the venture. We address this issue in part II of this empirical chapter when we analyse entrepreneurial pivots. Moreover, in another exemplar P34 demonstrates strong disagreement with his/her associate. This discord between both seemed to be a key obstacle in the venture creation. P34 described negative feedback on their pitch of the venture as mentors claimed lack of clarity and lack



of a “social problem” to solve. Again, these outcomes of exchanges will be further developed in Part II of the chapter. By any means, interactions that sparked entrepreneurial reflections of the venture idea to affect the creative process.

*“Afterwards, as a result, we got some good slaps in the face, including a mentor named [mentors' name], who said: "Look, it's simple, your project, I don't understand anything. I don't understand who the target is, I understand what your point of departure is, etc.". "And we realized that in fact we didn't have a problem, or else we imagined that people needed to consume better, except that this may be true for 1% of the French, and even I don't even agree with this assertion, there's a debate with P35 on this subject. Me, I think we still need... the initial motor of consumption is a selfish one. And then, perhaps, altruistic.” (P34)*

Beyond that, it is important to note that the questionings associated with the venture idea also resonate to entrepreneur's values and ambitions. In this line, our data indicated that reflections on the ventures’ idea work and the entrepreneurs’ individual-self occurred in parallel. Entrepreneurs were oriented to follow the creative, and explorative, process of the venture and their personal drivers. This can be seen on the extract below where P06 described that mentors oriented to “*trust the process*”, when P06 demonstrated hesitation about the paths he/she chose. This relies on the fact she/he followed the process of questioning herself about her/his venture idea in order to create a sustainable venture. We use sustainable not only in the sense of a self-sustainable venture, but as a venture idea that is aligned with the entrepreneur’s core values. This means that while the entrepreneur clarifies how to prototype his/her venture, P06 also aimed to incorporate his/her self-identity to it. This is further developed in the next section when we address strategic orientation on individual self-reflections. Therefore, we illuminated P06 being challenged about the venture idea work, as it follows.

**TABLE 8 - CHALLENGING THE VENTURE IDEA WORK**

Exemplars	Content
<p><i>“As [program mentor name] would say, "Trust the process! "The problem for me remained the same. It's about reducing the environmental impact of our food. So, the problem has remained the same, except that as I progressed, by doing the field immersion, I was already guided by it. In the end I realized that I needed inspiration.” (P06)</i></p>	<p>Reassurance by validation.</p>
<p><i>“I would say that it was more [program mentor name] my mentor who guided me. He told me even when I doubted about my problem at the beginning, when I was hesitating between going on the plastic reduction and staying on my ... He told me "No, but really ask yourself the right question when you go on holiday, really take the time to think about it because it's the problem you're going to stay on for the next three years of your life". He is really my red thread, when I really doubted, it was rather towards him that I would turn.” (P06)</i></p>	<p>Intertwinement of venture idea work and entrepreneurial drivers</p>

Focusing on the venture idea work reflections, some entrepreneurs have demonstrated the relevance of being followed during this process. Our findings indicated that entrepreneurs found perspective of their ventures when it came to their individual drivers. In this, P06 mentioned having a “conductive thread relationship” during his/her creative process that allowed him/her to be reassured on the ventures’ changes and his/her mode of action. This idea of conductive thread relates to the close support from a particular mentor that supported P06 during the venture creative process. This demonstrates that when entrepreneurs hesitate or are uncertain about which path to choose, they could turn over a mentor in order to orient them. Also, this may suggest that constant exchanges with mentors may reassure entrepreneurs and create a positive environment to explore the uncertainties of their venture idea.

Our data indicated that these questionings also helped to validate entrepreneurs’ venture hypothesis. In this case, P26 referred to positive feedback to her/his venture idea that encouraged them to advance on the creation of the venture. This entrepreneur reported exchanges with a mentor that pointed out the consistency and quality of her/his venture products. This demonstrates entrepreneurs’ search for validation. On another line, P26 highlighted the relevance of mentoring sessions in receiving tips from experts of the field. This could indicate that during informal discussions with mentors, entrepreneurs may mirror mentors’ experience and learn from their mistakes. This also evokes the exchange of tacit knowledge between more experienced entrepreneurs and early stage entrepreneurs, in this case mentors who were entrepreneurs, and cohort members. A P26 illustrative exemplar follows:

*"It gave me confidence that what I do makes sense and that I can move forward. So, there you go, that was just confirmation... it was a girl who has a shop where she sells recycling stuff. So, I showed her the pictures, and she said, "It's really nice, I can put it in my shop. "So that was already great. I think that the mentoring sessions helped a lot because, at the same time, we were with people who were giving us the lines, the things we shouldn't do." (P26)*

When looking to being challenged to prototype, our empirical findings demonstrate that entrepreneurs who were in later stages of ideation were stimulated to test their products in order to validate their solution. In turn, this relies in precise questioning to the feasibility of the product. In this line, P18 described being encouraged to develop his/her prototype. In practice, the entrepreneur described targeted feedback and precise encouragements from the mentoring interactions. This is in consonance with entrepreneurial reflection to the venture idea, since P18 seemed to hesitate about his/her product but, after strong encouragement from the mentor, P18 could prototype his venture during the immersion phase. P18 reported appreciating this straightforward/frank aspect of interactions with the mentor, for him/her this was a driver of the evolution of his/her venture.

Moreover, we associate that encouragements and tacit knowledge exchange with mentors may stimulate reflection on their own ventures and, thus, help entrepreneurs to move to the next step of their venture creation process. In the next chapter, we explore more about how the entrepreneurs prototyped and incorporation of feedback implicated in the pivot process of the entrepreneur. Nevertheless, it remains relevant to demonstrate the stimulation to prototype sparked during questioning the venture idea, as P18 described below:

*"Then I was followed by [selected mentor name], and the exchanges with her, where I was very convenient because it was clear, precise and concise, since she didn't have a lot of time according to her schedule. And then, every time we called each other, it was concentrated and we went straight to the point, to avoid wasting a bit of time. ...] she had already guided me well... it was precisely [selected mentor name] who told me: "But if you can, make the prototype, and that way you come with it to the immersion phase." She motivated me well. And then, the other people in the [program name] team, the interaction I had, it wasn't so much during the immersion phase, it wasn't so much in the evening or at lunchtime or whatever, during the evenings or whatever, it was mostly during the training sessions and the small lectures or the small training sessions on this or that subject. So yes, it was very formal, I didn't necessarily create any particular links with the [program name] team. » (P18)*

Overall, strategic orientations about the venture idea work relies in this reflective dialoguing that stimulates entrepreneurs' reassessment of their means to operate their ventures in regard to the product/solution. These interactions took a shape of questioning as entrepreneurs were challenged about their venture idea work. Also, these interactions are more associated to entrepreneurial pivots. Our empirical data have described how this actually happens in practice, bringing clarity to the potential effects of social interactions in nourishing pivots in the venture creation process, as represented in the Figure 13. This will be further discussed in section 4.3.5.

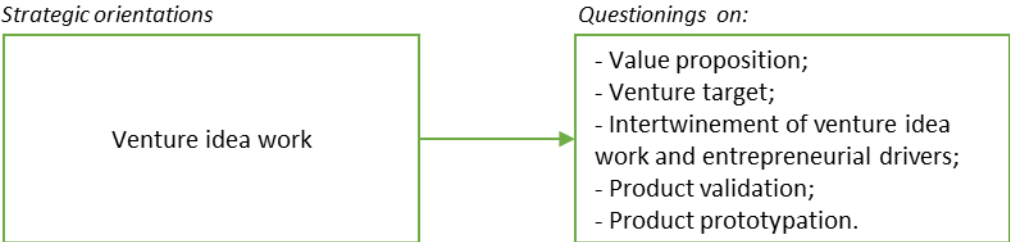


FIGURE 13 - VENTURE IDEA WORK

Next, we scrutinize the interactions in support of individual-self reflections.

### 4.2.2.3. Individual self

While the previous section focused on interactions that helped venture idea reflection, in this section we expose interactions where mentors encouraged self-assessment practices emphasizing the individual self. In turn, these reflections also affected the venture idea work. Nevertheless, we focus on this particular entrepreneurial self-assessment practice to entrepreneurs' individual-self, mainly, enacted by social interactions with mentors. Observational data show that this inner process of reflection was present in the majority of the empirical cases we investigated.

These questionings regarding the individual aimed to help entrepreneurs understand their drivers, find their "voices" and, finally, align their venture ideas with what they really wanted to create. To better explain these micro-processes of clarification, we put in evidence two representative phenomenological cases. In the first case, we encountered i) incentive to self-assessment through questioning individual self and, then ii) comprehension of entrepreneurial mode of action – the entrepreneur's way of functioning. In the second case, we found; iii) recognition of weakness and lack of legitimacy and iv) clarification of personal interests and comprehension of capabilities. After scrutinizing these interactions, we expose other less descriptive exemplars that demonstrated strategic orientations that also triggered reflections on the individual self. Figure 14 represent this process.

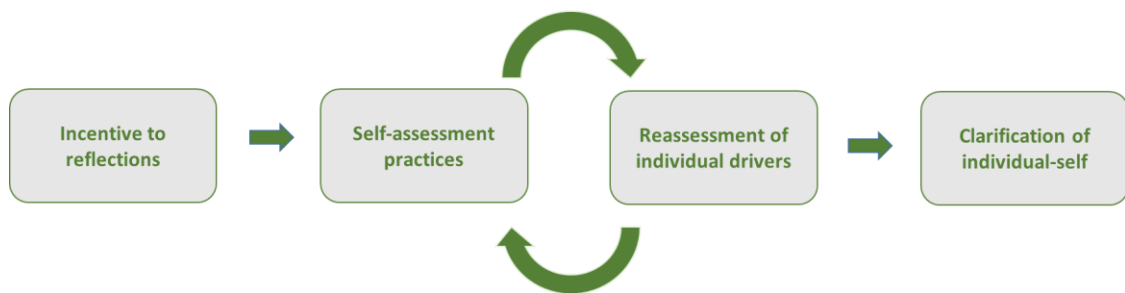


FIGURE 14 - INCENTIVE TO REFLECTION

Our findings demonstrated that entrepreneurs were strategically oriented to reflect on their individual drivers in order to clarify their venture creative process. In specific, P06 shows us the process of understanding her/his own mode of action recognizing the revision of the creative process. This entrepreneur began by reporting that mentors incentivized her/him into self-evaluation practices that helped him/her to comprehend that *“there are X Millions of ways to be able to address the problem. But what is the way that will make you have confidence in yourself?”* (P06). This reflection is oriented towards the clarification of the individual self as the entrepreneur tries to comprehend what drives her/him in consonance with her/his venture idea. P06 explained us that self-evaluations are based on

asking ourselves questions relating to what drives us and what we really want to create in order to make sense of the venture idea. This resonates with the idea that the journey of venture creation is not a linear process and, every entrepreneur has their own ways of doings. In this line, entrepreneurs were reassured about their reasonable line of thought. In turn, this seemed to help the entrepreneurs to comprehend their particular way of doing it. Related to this, P06 also showed us that close support from the mentor on the venture idea and incentive to clarify her/his self-driver may provide consistent acceptance of the revision of the creation process. This means that P06 incorporated entrepreneurial thinking as she/he pursued the evolution of her/his idea work. This issue is associated with the pivoting process of P06. This acquired overview of the venture creation process will be further discussed in part II of the chapter as a result of social interactions within the acceleration program.

TABLE 9 - INCENTIVE TO SELF-REFLECTION

Exemplars	Content
<p><i>"It has brought me a lot of benefit in that by asking yourself about yourself, you find your voice. There are things that are important to you and there are X Millions of ways to be able to address the problem. But what is the way that will make you have confidence in yourself? You will put all your energy into it, that even if there are failures, you will tell yourself "it doesn't matter because it's something that drives me and energises me!" (...)</i></p>	<p>Incentive to self-appraisal through questionings individual self</p>
<p><i>"It made me question myself a little. I said to myself: "You're never going to take concrete action because you change your mind all the time". I spoke with [mentors name]. I did a coaching session with him at that time, and he reassured me by saying: "Your vision, your mission, they are very clear, it's just that you don't have a very linear mind, and that as a result, you function more like a lightning rod [analogy regarding the nonlinearity of the entrepreneur]. He told me "it doesn't matter, nothing prevents you today from doing tempé [actual venture idea], and tomorrow from doing pedagogy and culinary workshops to invite people to better discover vegetarian cooking etc... to deal with all the subjects that are very important to you, it's coherent!" and so it really reassured me." (P06)</i></p>	<p>Comprehension of entrepreneurial mode of action – Entrepreneur way of functioning</p>

For other entrepreneurs, these questionings were related to features and elements they incorporated into their venture idea work. Mentors questioned the inclusion of these elements in order to clarify entrepreneurs' line of thought. For example, our data demonstrated that some entrepreneurs in the early stages had no clear vision of their venture and its value proposition. In specific, P30 told how her/his perception of lack of legitimacy made him/her attached to one venture feature. This entrepreneur explained to us that during one particular mentoring session s/he was questioned about one specific feature of her venture, namely catering. P30 worked on a venture supporting foreign people to be introduced in the catering market. Therefore, when questioned about why using the feature of catering in her/his venture, P30 reacted emotionally recognizing that she/he

did not feel legitimate to create a venture. In this exemplar, P30 perceived that the catering feature was a “crutch” to the development of the venture as it was an expertise of the entrepreneur. This crutch served to increase confidence and legitimation of the venture. After that, P30 described a self-evaluation process recognizing her/his capabilities and detaching from the catering feature of the venture. We suggest that reflections on the individual self may trigger substantial pivots in the future venture. This will be discussed in the next part of the chapter.

TABLE 10 - REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

Exemplars	Content
<p><i>"So, when I pitch my project to others, I was told that it was good, and every time I spoke with [selected mentor], she listened to me but said nothing. She told me that it was good, that I had evolved in my thinking, but she didn't say much. And in Marseille, I didn't feel well, and I didn't know why. We were in the process of seeing the mentors and everything, but I didn't know who to go to... she [selected mentor] asked me again to explain my project, and I told her: "it's to support foreign people in exercising their original profession in France". She says OK, but why the restoration? I tell her, but why are you asking this question? So, I started to cry, but I didn't want to because the project was large in fact, I didn't feel legitimate. And she says to me "but since you came in, you say the same thing [lack of legitimation], but then when you ask yourself, you say restoration, so either you come up with another concept and you stay on the restoration, or you stay on your decision and you accept your thing, and you move forward". (...)</i></p>	<p>Recognition of weakness and lack of legitimacy</p>
<p><i>So, that's when I said to myself that I had to accept what I was saying, and that I had to change, because even if I take a broader approach, we can start with 2-3 jobs that will be recurrent, and then I'll expand it, knowing that when I have the association, it's 2 years and 6 months old, the first year we can't apply because we're young, and little by little, we've applied for subsidies afterwards. I tell myself that somewhere, that's what we wear, and how we move forward. From this experience, I can move forward and fight, that's what I do with the association, and continue to develop my idea in fact. So, it's really a lot of the immersion phase." (P30)</i></p>	<p>Clarification of self-interests and comprehension of capabilities</p>

Overall, these self-evaluation practices brought clarity to entrepreneurs about their entrepreneurial journey and reassurance to maintain their choices in the venture creation process, as we illustrated above. We observed in the majority of entrepreneurs the presence of self-reflective practices, however, some exemplars do not present the same level of clarity that the previous exemplars had. We analyse some other cases below in order to demonstrate the relevance of these practices.

Following the abovementioned, P18 recognised how strategic orientations in mentoring sessions was an instructive guide during his/her entrepreneurial reflections to look at his/her life/career goals. This entrepreneur reported that mentoring sessions were relevant reflections associated to the personal side of the entrepreneur that led to changes in the venture creation process.

Again, we will learn more about it in the next part of the chapter exploring how P18 pivoted considering the feedback users of his/her prototype as the mentor encouraged him to put in practice the prototype. Moreover, this may suggest interactions between mentors’ encouragements, self-evaluation and the pivoting process. P18 exemplars is displayed below.

*“it was always personal questions, not about the project, but about myself, about what I want, in fact, where I want to go in the project or in my professional life. And it was very instructive, but it was more about me than about my project, at that time, even if there is a connection....”*  
(P18)

Our empirical findings demonstrated that strategic orientation on the individual led entrepreneurs’ self-assessments. As a result, we indicated that these self-reflections, in turn, may influence the entrepreneurs’ decision-making processes. Following this, we noted entrepreneurs paying attention towards an alignment of venture idea and entrepreneurial drivers or the clarification of individual self-concepts allowing increased recognition of their own capabilities. Figure 15 illustrated how mentors’ strategic orientations encouraged assessments on individual-self elements.

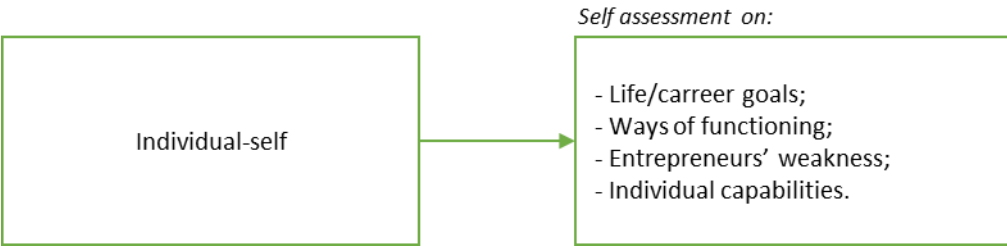


FIGURE 15 - INDIVIDUAL-SELF

In the next section, we explore other interactions with the community.

4.2.3. Collective interactions

In the sections above, we explored peer-to-peer interactions and then entrepreneur-mentor interactions. All of these interactions are immersed in the entrepreneurial community. Now, in this section, we turn our perspective towards a group view in order to explain the collective interactions clarifying how entrepreneurs interact with and within the community, and what they discuss.

When looking at the community interactions, we found characteristics of the previously mentioned interactions, such as entrepreneurs interacting driven by shared values and exchanging knowledge among them. However, the format of is different. In this, we found entrepreneurs

interacting with the community in terms of resource-sharing and sensemaking. These interactions occurred between entrepreneurs, the cohort, and other members of the community.

#### 4.2.3.1 Collective resource-sharing

Throughout the accelerator program we have noticed that many entrepreneurs have created their own groups of discussions. These discussions in group are outlined as an important time for entrepreneurs to informally share experiences and resources. Therefore, we found collective resource-sharing in terms of technical knowledge, experiences, and feedback to others venture idea work.

It is worth noting that the acceleration program has implemented activities in order to enact the creation of smaller groups in the core of the cohort, as we mentioned in the 4.1.1. This is the case of “tribus” (*tribes*) - workgroups defined by the entrepreneurs to discuss a common specific issue. Therefore, this was present in entrepreneurs’ discourse when referring to group discussions.

Participants in the accelerator program came from different backgrounds, and held ventures at different stages of advancement. This enriched the exchange between entrepreneurs and gave them space to share their experiences and skills with those who had doubts or difficulties. This sharing of resources during group discussions happened naturally. In this way, we found that when they presented their projects or questions on a specific regulation, another entrepreneur who had knowledge or a suggestion was willing to share it. For example, P23 described that his group met regularly. P23 explains that he learnt about the new European data regulation law from P21. In a similar line, P04 explained that many entrepreneurs were willing to put their knowledge and skills at their disposal to help one another set up their businesses. In addition to this, P02 informed us that, during the preparation of a pitch, other peers asked for clarification on the technical terms of his project. This was enough for P02 to reassess the language and terms used in his/her presentations and adapt it.

*“We get to know each other better and see each other regularly. Once a week by Skype or in person. [...] With P21 we had a lot of interaction on... P21 is very technical on the technical part we exchange a lot. And also the GRPD. (new European law for data).” (P23)*

*“Well, for example, I belong to two tribes where in each tribe there are contributors who continue to follow my project and help me, [...] the entrepreneurs really want to put their skills and knowledge at the service of social entrepreneurship projects, so they have more time to devote to us and they generally have a lot of experience in this field.” (P04)*

*“Each time it's even without wanting to, it's by discussing with them, they put themselves in the position of a user and it allows them to pretext, to say: ah yes, in fact he didn't understand that term ” for example when we were preparing our pitch, we realised that there was a term that was perhaps a little too technical for some people so we said: "ah yes, I have to explain and clarify". (P02)*



In addition to the resource-sharing, we have also found entrepreneurs seeking to make sense of their ventures during these discussions in group, as we will see in the next section.

#### 4.2.3.2 Collective sensemaking

In this section we explore how the group, and the individuals around it, helped entrepreneurs make sense of their ventures through a continuous flow of shared experience, questioning and advice. Our empirical findings demonstrate this collective sensemaking helped entrepreneurs to comprehend their product, way of communicating, and their venture idea work.

Following that, our empirical data demonstrated that without realizing it, entrepreneurs shared their entrepreneurial and learning process with the group, which, in turn, through informal dialogue and suggestions by others helped entrepreneurs to make sense of their venture idea work. This is demonstrated in data as a form of informal discussions between sessions, workshops or networking events. In specific, P18 described to us that, after presenting his/her project, she/he had been questioned by other peers about his/her product. These questionings were related to how to communicate the project and propositions about the design of the product. Moreover, entrepreneurs actively participated in the product development of other peers. In this, P23 described to us that during group discussions she/he was able to give precise suggestions on P03's product. Specifically, P23 suggested the creation of a box package for P03. In turn, P03 altered the structure of the marketing of the venture, after these suggestions. Similarly, P28 explained to us that his/her venture idea came up as a result from a discussion with the cohort and other colleagues. These last two cases demonstrate clearly how collective sensemaking happens as result of collective interactions in the community. This is illustrated in the following exemplars.

*"Concerning the project, they [cohort] rather made me think about my product by questioning it, by advising me, also, by [providing] some clues. They advised me in communication, for example, to communicate about my project, certain designs." (P18)*

*"I also think that we have contributed quite a lot, made Co-Dev, with other participants, we brought ideas for example to [ventures' name] with the box on the run and when we made the first codev with her starting idea was to make a treasure hunt for children and we suggested her to make a box and today a box for children. Which she did! So you see, I think we participated in the development of a product. That's it. That's our contribution." (P23)*

*"I had really identified a problem. You see, it was by force of discussion with all my colleagues, all the professionals, etc., that the idea came up. So, in fact, I didn't know what professionals and others, or patients, thought of the solution." (P28)*

*"By discussing, by talking about our projects that we realised that we could bring things, but also face to face, it is through dialogue, through discussion, through exchanges on the project, that things are done naturally, without any constraint and in complete freedom, and it was in a spontaneous way, it was a bilateral, multilateral offer of aid." (P11)*

Overall, we found that this collective sensemaking feeds the entrepreneurial learning process by triggering personal reflections on their products and ways of communicating, as well as opening up the space for doing or trying out new things. In this respect, these group discussions increased the movement of back and forth between reflective observation and incorporation/exclusion of elements to entrepreneurs' ventures.

Built on the abovementioned, we identified that collective sensemaking occurred through spontaneous discussions, and often happened in an informal way. In this section we go beyond what we discussed in peer to peer interaction, where entrepreneurs give and receive resources. Here we find that the exchanges do not only take place through the act of giving and receiving but also in an informal and spontaneous way during collective interactions.

In the next sections we draw some preliminary conclusions of what and how interactions occur.

#### 4.2.4 Conclusion of content and form of entrepreneurs' interactions

When analysing social interactions within the programme, we also looked at understanding what format they took, and how these interactions occurred. From the data, we found peer-to-peer "asks", or two-way interactions where entrepreneurs ask and give a variety of resources according to their needs. As we saw above, entrepreneurs asked for resources through advice on tools and materials, marketing communications and feedback. In turn, entrepreneurs gave resources through the provision of recommendations on the venture structure, advice on technical skills and communication. Moreover, we verified a spontaneous aspect when talking about giving and receiving advice. This is explained by the fact that advice to other peers takes place during informal conversations about their venture idea work.

When looking at mentors' centred interactions, we conclude that entrepreneurs interacted with mentors in three configurations: i) venture structure: mentors' counselling through sharing of their experience and tips for structuring entrepreneurs' ventures, ii) venture idea-work: mentors' questionings entrepreneurs' venture idea work and encouraging entrepreneurs to pursue their creative process, and iii) individual self: mentors encouraged self-evaluation practices emphasizing entrepreneurs' individual self. In turn, looking at interactions among all participants, we noted that collective interactions emerged as an important moment to entrepreneurs discuss ideas and reflections about their venture idea. In this, we found collective resource-sharing where entrepreneurs shared resources within the group and collective sensemaking in which entrepreneurs helped other to

make sense of their ventures throughout suggestions and informal discussions on the venture idea work. This also reinforced the idea of sense of community discussed in the section about the drivers. Nonetheless, this community worked as a source information to evolve entrepreneurs' venture ideas.

Now that we understand what and how entrepreneurs interact, it is important for our research to shed light on the outcomes of these social interactions, outlining which interactions may have led to entrepreneurial pivots.

## Part II - Outcomes of entrepreneurs' interactions

In this part II of the empirical chapter, we focus on the second research question: "*How do social interactions shape entrepreneurial pivots?*". To better explore the potential of this question, we focus on the outcomes of the social interactions mentioned in part I of this chapter. To do this, we looked at what entrepreneurs brought from social interactions and their evolution of idea work, seeking to understand how social interactions feed or nurture pivots.

It worth mentioning that in this second part we did not divide the sections into peer-to-peer, entrepreneurs-mentors and entrepreneurs-community. We analysed the group of entrepreneurs who had all these one-to-one and one-to-many interactions, that shaped the evolution of their ventures. Yet, we point out the types of social interactions more associated with entrepreneurial pivots.

Thus, in this section, we aim to detail the outcomes of the interactions explained previously. Throughout the coding phase, we categorised three types of outcomes of social interaction. First, we explore those which support the co-creative acceleration of entrepreneurs' venture creation. Then we analyse outcomes that added constraint in terms of their interactions. Finally, we refer to those outcomes that triggered entrepreneurial pivots. These categories help us to visualise how social interactions shape the venture creative process at different levels. Therefore, we begin by boosting the creative process.

### 4.3. Co-creative acceleration

We found that many of the outcomes acted as catalysts for the cocreation of entrepreneurs' venture development. It is worth remembering that this is one of the objectives of the acceleration programme. Therefore, in this section we seek to qualify these results with the aim of clarifying how interactions help boost the co-creative acceleration of entrepreneurs.

Co-creative acceleration of ventures refers to different elements that helped entrepreneurs to create their ventures more effectively as a result of social interactions. We identified that as a result of the exchanges between participants and those involved in the programme, entrepreneurs improved important capacities at the beginning of the creation of their ventures.

Building on the abovementioned, we divided the outcomes as individual and collective. Individual outcomes relate to outcomes of social interactions affecting the individual entrepreneurs, and collective outcomes refer to the outcomes influencing the group of entrepreneurs. Thus, we start in the following subsections to explore the individual dimension categories.

#### *i) Individual-dimension*

When looking at the outcomes of social interactions that influenced the entrepreneur, we identified effective venture communication, entrepreneurial mindset, and self-efficacy. The individual dimension refers to the impact on the individual state of the entrepreneur. In this, we have organised the following subsections in relation to the degree of relevance in our data analysis.

It is worth noting that these elements are related to the stage of development of the venture. Most of the entrepreneurs who participated in the acceleration programme were at the ideation stage or moving into the testing phase of their prototypes. Considering this, we demonstrate next how effective communication helped entrepreneurs to continue their venture creative process.

##### **4.3.1. Effective venture communication.**

Pitch and communication of the venture came out as two relevant elements important in the early stages of venture development. Our data demonstrated that as a result of the social interactions entrepreneurs increased their abilities to communicate and express their idea work. Therefore, entrepreneurs improved communication about their venture idea work, after facing different presentations to stakeholders, consultants and peers.

The accelerator programme organised several sessions for the entrepreneurs to pitch their venture idea and speed meetings for them to present their projects. In this, we noticed that presenting their idea work to several people allowed entrepreneurs to approach their venture idea from different angles - as it is necessary to adapt the speech to the interlocutor. Therefore, we observed that the feedback and exchanges from these presentations allowed the entrepreneurs to clarify parts of their speech and improve their message.

Thus, our empirical findings demonstrated that feedback and suggestion from others focused entrepreneurs' attentions on their discourse when presenting a venture idea work. In this, we noted that these reflections resulting from social interactions happened through informal discussions and following their presentations. This, in turn, suggests that out of unstructured exchanges others brought to entrepreneurs' attention issues in their message and rhetoric that, afterwards, helped them to adjust their communication. For example, P24 mentioned the different meetings with sponsors and partners that helped him/her with eloquence and attention to detail. Similarly, P02 referred to the meetings with several partners and the need to adapt his/her discourse to the audience. This showed that by presenting to different stakeholders, entrepreneurs had to make an effort to present their venture idea work from different angles. In parallel, P06 referred to feedback after the closing seminar that helped her/him to develop an appealing presentation. This entrepreneur presented good communication skills, nonetheless, the challenge of delivering a powerful pitch was always present. P06 developed these skills thanks to the interactions of the program. Another exemplar is P18. This entrepreneur has become more comfortable in public speaking after interacting and presenting his/her venture to others during the acceleration program. Thus, we emphasise that this exercise of creating different presentations of the ventures' idea for different audiences can bring more fluidity and clarity in the way entrepreneurs present their enterprise ideas. This can be seen in the extracts below.

*"I learnt to present my project, which means that the fact that in the six-month programme there are a lot of meetings with mentors or sponsors, so obviously when you sit down for 20 minutes with the director of a company, you grow because you already pay attention to your words, the eloquence, the way of speaking. I had a lot of feedback on the project, interesting things [to incorporate]." (P24)*

*"After that, what I learnt most was the communication part, how to pitch well and always talk about your project, the meetings with the different partners, each time you are asked to adapt to the person in front of you and to better explain your project. In short, this is the part that required the most work in fact." (P02)*

*"In terms of pitching, I don't have a problem speaking in public if I'm well prepared. However, I really found that, especially for the closing seminar, I had received really good advice that helped me to have a more impactful speech. I told myself that I would never be able to keep up in 4 minutes, and in the end, with so many slides without cutting or anything, by being more impactful, I kept up in 4 minutes. I really acquired this skill ..." (P06)*

*"I'm a pretty reserved person, in general, and with the mentoring, with the exchanges I've had with different people from [acceleration program] and even the entrepreneurs or contributors, I've learnt to be more at ease when I speak... for example, when we had the pitch session. And so, when I take the floor, to express my needs to other people, it's something I don't necessarily have the reflex to do, and today, I'm still working on it, it's not yet ready, but I'm working on it and I've improved a lot in terms of expressing my needs and being more at ease in public" (P18)*

Moreover, we noticed that pitching exercises pushed the entrepreneurs to communicate their projects and improve their speech. We noticed that this became a recurrent dynamic and, besides

enhancing their messaging, entrepreneurs initiated to discuss these issues as a group. This is noticeable in section 4.3.2, where we explore collective interactions. To remind us, P02 describes that in moments when she/he prepared her/his pitch, she/he received important feedback to reduce the technical terms of his/her speech and pass a relatable message to the interlocutors, as we can see below:

*"Each time it's even without wanting to, it's by discussing with them, they put themselves in the position of a user and it allows them to pretext, to say: ah yes, in fact he didn't understand that term " for example when we were preparing our pitch, we realised that there was a term that was perhaps a little too technical for some people so we said: "ah yes, I have to explain and clarify". (P02)*

Interacting with a variety of individuals appears to help entrepreneurs to reassess their discourse and create a clear rhetoric to the public they are facing. We observed that encouraging pitch and presentations in the entrepreneurial community also motivated entrepreneurs to informally exchange feedback about how they communicate their venture idea work. This provides a clear link in social interaction and the improved communication skills.

In this section we detailed how entrepreneurs enhanced their messaging and improved their communication skills as a result of interactions with peers, mentors and the community. In the next subsection, we explore the increased vision of the entrepreneurial mindset.

#### 4.3.2. Entrepreneurial mindset

Our empirical findings demonstrated that entrepreneurs brought an overview of the entrepreneurial process out of the programme. In this, we observed that entrepreneurs reported a trial and error logic that supported them in becoming an entrepreneur. Therefore, our data shows that entrepreneurs increased their entrepreneurial mindset to keep developing their venture idea work.

Our data referred to the vision, ways of thinking and philosophy behind the venture creation process. We noted that entrepreneurs immersed themselves in the ecosystem and developed a certain type of entrepreneurial way of thinking. In this line, we observed that by increasing their vision of how to create a venture, entrepreneurs accepted the non-linear logic of venture creation. This idea of non-linearity is clearly presented when entrepreneurs described the trial and error logic when trying to refine their ventures' solution. Therefore, our empirical findings suggest that entrepreneurs became more aware of this trial and error logic after understanding the venture's life cycle.

Entrepreneurs nourished themselves from the interactions with others experts in entrepreneurship. We found that engaging in interactions with others helped entrepreneurs to accept small failures and consider them a normal part of the entrepreneurial process which, in turn, boosted entrepreneurs' venture creative process. In specific, P11 explained the life cycle of venture creation. P11 referred to the trial and error perspective during the initial phase of business creation, where it is common for the idea work to evolve and change direction. Similarly, P06 agrees with P11 in explaining that he/she has created a fluid vision of the creative process by normalising the errors and difficulties encountered during the creation of his business. In another way, P05 showed us that the interactions with members of the programme led his/her to expand the possibilities of her/his business. In this case, P05 talks about the vast possibilities of financial inputs of an enterprise. In addition, P05 demonstrated some understanding of this trial and error perspective by pointing out that sometimes it takes time to create a venture. In another vein, P04 describes having gained a way of thinking about the development of his business. P04 suggests that this may be a certain kind of philosophy, and not necessarily a set of skills, where the entrepreneur takes different tips on how to act during the creation of his venture. These perspectives on the entrepreneurial mindset are presented in the examples below.

*"And it [mentors' interactions] gave me another vision of things. And the fact of saying: "You screw up, it's not that bad, in any case it's the project's life, and you'll see that you started with an idea but that you're going to change as you go along, but it's nothing, it's normal, and so much the better. It's also a way of "de-dramatize", of taking a step back and saying that you have to set objectives, but if it's not exactly as you want, or if it's different, it's not a big deal." (P11)*

*"I think that when you think with this perspective, things seem more fluid, well I think it helped me to have a more fluid vision. It helped me to have a more fluid vision. When I [my venture] bump into things, [I can] to say to myself that it's not so bad, it doesn't work, so you start again. It helped me a lot in my evolutionary process." (P06)*

*"[Acceleration program name] made me change, made me see that there was not only one door to enter, whereas before I could only see one. There too, other factors came into play, this notion of time, which means that I have to go through a smaller door and that I am less ambitious at the beginning and that I give myself more time, it is also the context that forces me to say to myself "no, you are not going to launch your venture this year". But it's also the evolution within [acceleration program] that made me say to myself "it's not a big deal if it doesn't come right away". (P05)*

*"It's more a way of thinking, a philosophy, but I don't think it was really skills. And that's not mean at all, on the contrary, philosophy is a thousand times more important than skills. Probably also little tips, little things, but I think it's stronger than that what [acceleration program] brought me, and it's less pragmatic than skills" (P04)*

By focusing on this logic of "trial and error", we found a certain kind of comfort in the possibility of accepting mistakes along the path of venture creation. In this line, we noted that entrepreneurs

were in some way demystifying the role of entrepreneurs, while creating a logic of evolutionary search. This is interestingly aligned with effectuation logic, this will be further developed in the discussion chapter.

In a similar vein, we also identified that entrepreneurs absorbed some lessons that we associate with this entrepreneurial way of thinking. In particular, P34 explains to us: *“there are several life lessons that are priceless. The first lesson is to fall in love with your problem, not its solution.”* Many entrepreneurs have evoked this precise lesson during interviews; in turn, we observed the exploratory side of this lesson that encouraged the entrepreneur to keep the focus on the problem in order to refine their solution.

Overall, we found that interactions with the entrepreneurial community helped to re-shape entrepreneurs’ way of thinking. This, in turn, created a mindset, and a reassured/conscious entrepreneur, in moving ahead to the next stage of the venture creation process.

In the next subsection we explore the increased self-efficacy of entrepreneurs in response to the interactions with others.

#### 4.3.3. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to *“people’s beliefs in their ability to influence events that affect their lives. This core belief is the foundation of human motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional well-being.”* (Bandura, 1997, p.6). We found in our data that entrepreneurs were able to organize and execute their ventures’ courses of action.

As a result of interactions with the ecosystem, entrepreneurs reported gaining confidence to develop their activities. Entrepreneurs mentioned becoming more proactive when they encountered obstacles or doubts on the path of venture creation. Moreover, entrepreneurs showed more acceptance of the possibility of failing in their strategies and starting again. In turn, our data indicated that this acceptance functions as a form of motivation for entrepreneurs.

We identified that self-efficacy is associated with the support from mentors, program teams and the community. Four entrepreneurs mentioned this clearly in the exemplars below. In specific, when asked what he/she took from the interactions, P36 put emphasis on self-confidence when you are a solo entrepreneur. P36 referred to the organisation of the tasks and activities in order to put the venture in place in which, when surrounded by the community, he/she feels that they are better able to deliver it. Besides that, P21 referred to the regular support from mentors that boosted him/her during the early stages of the venture creation. Similarly, P10 referred to the confidence in setting up



her/his venture after the close support from a particular mentor. This entrepreneur described that having business advice helped her/him to be more confident and capable to move forward. In parallel, P02 refers to everyday challenges and the support from the acceleration program. This entrepreneur mentioned that he/she always had the feeling of someone supporting his/her steps in the venture creation.

*"[...] it helped me a lot, to be more agile and proactive. And of course, self-confidence is really important when you're all alone in your project because that's the hardest part. [...] I think you're never ready [to launch the company] but now I want to get down to business. I've been looking at the castle [P36's analogy] for too long, I've already thought about strategies so now I have to go and if I fail, I fail, I move on to something else. I've spent a year organizing, I've found someone and I feel like it's starting to feel right and I have to go. For a long time, I was alone but now I have surrounded myself with people and found someone and understand a bit of similar projects to me, so it's time to go... 2019 will be to create my own association, to draw guys and make money with my activity." (P36)*

*"I am ready. I'm in a phase where it's[venture] going, the feeling is good. I've had some good news this week, so I'm quite happy and quite motivated to go. And above all I've had some interesting confirmations. We need that when we undertake... we need, frankly, every 15 days we need someone to tell us: "yes, I'm going with you"; "yes, we have to do it"; "yes, we'll help you". You need that sort of thing quite regularly, and I've had that this week." (P21)*

*"In fact, I don't know where I would be today if I hadn't taken the acceleration program. It allowed me to say to myself at certain moments, certain stages: "yeah, you need to have a good pitch", so it allowed me to move forward, whereas without the mentors I would have always wanted to look for perfection and I would have said: "wait, I'll wait". Yeah, I don't have any specific challenges in mind." (P02)*

*"I think that they really gave me confidence in myself, I don't think I'm the only one, but when you haven't been to business school, you're a little bit in the syndrome of "there's a certain lack of things, you're going to be a little bit behind" because you don't have the business logic. So I think that the fact of being sufficiently well supported, of giving us tools on which we can practice, allows us to have more self-confidence, at least in the sectors in which we don't really feel up to it." (P10)*

In this section we found that not only mentors' interactions but also interactions with the community and the ecosystem impacted the way entrepreneurs perceive their ventures. We noted this boost in entrepreneurial self-efficacy during the final seminar in December 2019, where the majority of entrepreneurs were more aware of their activities and more confident in accomplishing them.

Now, we turn to the outcomes in regard to the collective dimension.

## *ii) Collective-dimension*

Co-creative acceleration as part of the collective refers to social support, networking and peer partnerships. This collective dimension relates to what has emerged from interactions at a collective level, involving more than one individual. Again, it is worth noting that these collective outcomes of

social interactions are related to the very early stages of venture creation where entrepreneurs were being inserted into an entrepreneurial community. Therefore, we start by exploring the social support out of the ecosystem.

#### 4.3.4. Social support

Another element that strongly emerged from the data is the importance of social support. Social support can be seen as cutting across many of the aspects discussed in part I on drivers, content and form of social interactions. However, we decided to separate it from the previous section not only because of the importance it seemed to have for the participants, but also because much of what was discussed above is embedded in this feeling of social support as a result of interaction with others.

When asked about what actually happened within the interactions among peers, entrepreneurs reported social interactions embedded in this logic of social support during the process of social venture creation. We consider social support as “*processes through which interpersonal relationships protect and help people in their day-to-day lives, as well as in particular circumstances (...)*” (Trepte et al., 2016, p. 306). In our empirical findings, social support has recurrently emerged through follow-up conversations, which are a result of regular peer-to-peer exchanges aiming to support and discuss the evolution of ventures’ tasks, and reassurance based the feeling of being heard/listened to when interacting with others based on mechanisms of effective listening.

As a result of everyday peer-to-peer interactions, seven participants emphasized dynamics related to follow-up conversations. This refers to social interactions where entrepreneurs interact regularly with peers exposing their everyday struggles and the net of support created around peer interactions. These follow-up conversations are ongoing social interactions characterized by two aspects: the caring role and task-orientation. As we mentioned, the kindness and caring aspect relate to the attentive and *care-full* approach toward peers in order to support everyday activities. The other important aspect of these follow-up conversations present is that it is mainly task-oriented, as entrepreneurs usually expressed their difficulties in the venture creation process. Therefore, in the following paragraphs we put in evidence entrepreneurs’ coping mechanisms when faced with insecurities and doubts at the commencement of their venture creation process.

In these interactions, we observed an aspect of kindness and caring (*bienveillance* in French) where entrepreneurs were attentive to their peers in order to support them in specific daily struggles and issues. P15 explains that these interactions rely on the informal network of people that you can talk to about your problems, and they may try to help you. For instance, in one of the exemplars this

entrepreneur mentioned that his/her peers were vigilant (*bienveillant*) by sharing potential contacts with him/her, and that he/she was constantly encouraged about his/her venture.

We noted entrepreneurs referring to regular catch up with peers about task-oriented activities as a form of encouraging the development of these activities. This is illustrated by, inter alia, P06, who was in constant contact with another entrepreneur from the cohort. As a result of co-coaching dynamics - presented in section 4.1.1 - P06 explained how they maintained contact as “coaches” for one another. Observational data also showed that some entrepreneurs initiated this dynamic in order to create a regular support network. In the exemplar below, P06 reported that both entrepreneurs did not hesitate to contact each other for counselling and advice. P27, in a complementary perspective, explains that the regularity of phone calls with another entrepreneur motivated her/him to push the tasks forward. This entrepreneur also mentioned that the discussions were insightful and stimulating as they provided a range of ideas and potential contacts. In a similar vein, P15 described the openness of the dialogues in the network, stating that the informality of the network allowed her/him to talk about his/her problems and to identify who could offer help. They affirmed that interactions between entrepreneurs were based on a caring role as whenever one entrepreneur had a network contact or a call for project proposals related to the domain of a peer, they would forward the information straight away. The next few exemplars represent examples of follow up conversations.

*"I was with P26 and we did it, we sent each other messages all the time: "I have a doubt, tell me here, do you think that... ». Anyway, we don't hesitate to give each other advice and that's cool." (P06)*

*"And it's not just a professional network, it's an informal network where you can talk to them, and just get to know them, you can talk about your problems. (...) Entrepreneurs are on the lookout, which means that as soon as they see a call for a project that is related to a theme..." (P15)*

*"I am regularly on the phone for an hour with an entrepreneur, and we exchange on our projects and challenge each other. So, I find it's stimulating, we accompany each other, we give each other ideas, we give each other contacts... it's very pleasant." (P27)*

As we mentioned, another aspect that we found in regards to social support was reassurance created in entrepreneurs' venture creation process. In our empirical data, we found eight entrepreneurs described the feeling of being heard and listening to by other participants was a considerable effect of interacting with peers. This also relates to the outcomes of the use of active listening. This is an aspect frequently explored during the seminars of the acceleration program, as observational data showed us. Active listening also relates to the caring aspect mentioned before as entrepreneurs carefully listened to peers' concerns. However, when entrepreneurs referred to active listening, we found the content of social interactions more oriented towards the “self”. This type of

social support provided a careful listening as entrepreneurs shared their daily struggles. This suggests that practices of active listening created this form of reassurance and may help entrepreneurs to decompress fears and doubts sparked after encountering difficulties in the venture creation process.

It is important to mention that active listening was a tool used by the mentors, as well, and it was explored in the pedagogical programme of the acceleration programme. This means that the entrepreneurs were in a context where these practices would be constantly presented and practiced. Thus, in this session we focus on the outcome of the interactions where the entrepreneurs put these learnings into practice.

Our data demonstrated that some entrepreneurs were a “comfort” for others. In specific, P10 reported that sometimes she felt in the role of a “mother” as entrepreneurs came to her looking for an attentive ear to speak about their difficulties. This demonstrates that entrepreneurs in difficulties were seeking a certain form of comfort or reassurance. P10 explained the effort in paying attention to be open and careful towards the entrepreneurs’ stories, as this was a surprising dynamic for her. This also shows the potential of active listening in creating reassurance for entrepreneurial journeys.

*“I think you'll find this funny because it's not too much in entrepreneurial jargon, but I've found myself in a lot of situations (it's the same thing, it's also linked to my age and the fact that I'm a woman), so I had the impression that I was in the position of a mother. The word "mother" is perhaps an exaggeration. It means an ear to listen when people were in difficulty. I had several times during the immersion phase, people in difficulty who needed to talk and it was me who was spoken to. At first it surprised me, I wasn't used to it, but [then] I said to myself with as much kindness as possible, but finally I found myself in a situation I did not expect. Afterwards it struck me that there were many situations where I was at one time in a position of simply listening, because I didn't necessarily have the answer. I was also in the process of creating a company, so I also had a lot of questions, so I listened instead.” (P10)*

In parallel, other entrepreneurs acknowledged the relevance of this communication skill in creating these self-assessments. In this regard, P37 pointed out: *“I really acquired human skills and in particular non-violent communication was a contribution from [acceleration program name]. I believe that listening to others means listening to yourself.”* (P37). This entrepreneur reported being in the position of the listener in different parts of the interview. On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind the hardships of this social support. In particular to P37, he/she described the difficulties in putting active listening into practice. P37 explained that some entrepreneurs stressed heavy reflections on their individual self that were beyond P37’s capacity to deal with. In this data point, P37 compares these interactions to a psychologist’s office, referring to entrepreneurial self-appraisal of some entrepreneurs.

Therefore, this issue illustrates two points of attention. First, this reminds us again that the entrepreneurial process does not rely only on venture specific issues. Second, these “heavy

reflections” are complex and are intertwined between the ventures’ goals and personal goals. In this, we perceive that reflection over the individual self occurs in parallel to entrepreneurs seeking to make sense of their venture. P37’s reaction, presented below, suggests that excessive sharing may also spark stressful interactions. This may also be related to the overwhelming feeling when entrepreneurs face uncertainties during their own venture creation process. Observational data recorded entrepreneurs’ feelings of frustration and overload of tasks during seminars.

*“They [other entrepreneurs] were redirecting themselves, finding meaning in their lives. And sometimes we thought, “But, OK, is this a psychologist’s office or is it an incubator?”, you know? What I would have liked from the contributors is that they come to me without any personal problems, that means: “OK, he knows where he’s going, and OK, man, I’ve got these, these are my skills, I’ll give them to you. And instead, we had more existential questions of “I don’t know where I’m going, I don’t know who I am, I don’t know what my values are...”. And it’s, it’s not up to us entrepreneurs to solve the problem.” (P37)*

Overall, most of the entrepreneurs have shown that social support based on the self, and careful listening, offered reassurance. The two exemplars below present clear extracts of entrepreneurs’ everyday experiences when they needed to “get off their chest” some of the preoccupations about their own ventures. This idea of “getting off the chest” is also associated with the feeling of being overwhelmed regularly found in entrepreneurs in very early stages, as we briefly mentioned before. This is in consonance of what we suggested above about entrepreneurs needing comfort and reassurance. By any means, our data also indicates that interacting and expressing yourself freely about your project can reduce the pressure of this initial phase in the setting up of a venture.

*“I think I have a great capacity to listen. [entrepreneur name] also solicits me when she has a real question and is in doubt. I think that’s my strength. Now to tell people, ‘No, but don’t worry, it’s going to be okay’. Yes, reassurance, I feel like I had more a role of listening/recomforting.” (P04)*

*“For my project as a “project owner”, I needed support. Especially from [P15], who was close to me during the immersion phase, there is no doubt about it. The fact that you can talk to them[peers], that you can get off your chest, that you can tell them “I am fully here, that’s all I do” (P06)*

Finally, our data shows that on both sides - for those who speak and those who listen - there is a win-win situation. For those who speak, there is the feeling of being able to verbalize their everyday frustrations, difficulties and achievements. For those who listen, there is the possibility of learning from others’ experience, the relatable feeling of having difficulties in venture creation in common, and, even, sharing their own experiences in support. We have also observed that while entrepreneurs were

figuring out how to prototype and refine their venture ideas into something viable, they were assessing their goals and inner values to incorporate into their venture.

It is important to note that this was not particular to the peer-to-peer interactions. Entrepreneurs have largely reported that mentors were interacting based in active listening. In specific, P11 explained: *“They [mentors] were always attentive to our needs, listening, and what I appreciated was that everyone had their role in paying attention to us [cohort].”* This corroborates with what we said earlier at mentors’ strategic orientation in regard to the individual self.

Building on the aforementioned, these social supportive interactions indicated regular exchanges between peers in regard to the venture development and/or personal performance while entrepreneurs seek reassurance in their creative process. In this regard, the data seems to suggest that these constant practices of social support by peers can be a helpful behaviour in the creation of an environment of trust and the feeling of belonging to a community. This, in turn, offers a certain degree of reassurance for the nascent social entrepreneurs in our sample.

On a final note, our empirical data confirmed that most of the entrepreneurs have applied the active listening techniques to improve their communication. In consequence of the encouragement of the development of this competence, many entrepreneurs explained that what they bring with them is a careful listening skill.

In the next section we move to networking in response to interactions with the actors of the community.

#### 4.3.5. Networking

We found networking as a result of social interactions with the community and its members. While networking is an expected outcome, we concentrated on the specificities of the dynamic of introducing entrepreneurs to a wider range of stakeholders. In this, our empirical findings demonstrated a dynamic where entrepreneurs felt inserted into a network of contacts rather than just presented to stakeholders. We noted that this generated a feeling of mutual help which we suggested may provide a propitious environment to take risks when reorienting the course of direction of the venture and pivot. The exemplars are compiled at the end of this section.

Many entrepreneurs pointed out that being inserted into the network is an asset of the acceleration programme. Entrepreneurs described being introduced to many other members of the ecosystem by mentors and program teams. In specific, P06 mentioned that a specific mentor put her/him in contact with another incubation program in which he/she has been recently accepted to

participate. In this, our empirical data shows that the networking events and activities seemed to have a snowball characteristic as one thread invites another to the exchange of information and contacts.

Following the aforementioned, entrepreneurs informed us that usually people they met in networking events frequently put them in contact with others. P36 pointed out being introduced to similar ventures which allowed them to find potential customers, as well as opportunities to create events and potential partnerships for their venture. This snowball effect could be also seen when other entrepreneurs pitched peers' venture idea to other potential partners. This stresses the relevance of these exchange opportunities as entrepreneurs could work collaboratively with another entrepreneurs, sharing help. This was also indicated by P36, and is congruent with what we argued in the previous section, that collective interactions throughout the venture creation process are present, as entrepreneurs exchange with peers' ventures.

Entrepreneurs were also introduced to a range of experts and potential clients. In this, the participants of the programme recognized being resourced by these experts in the creation of their venture. Moreover, some entrepreneurs described that members of the program put them in contact with well-known foundations and similar ventures. In specific, P15 mentioned that she/he was introduced to a foundation working in his/her specific field. This entrepreneur affirmed that this connection in the network would never be possible if she/he was not part of this acceleration programme. This demonstrates that network activities can happen by chance.

*"Otherwise the network is really the strong point of [program name] because I have met a lot of people in the ecosystem. Especially [mentor name] from the [foundation name] foundation. She helped me enormously, she gave me contacts which are today mega useful because today I found a place to store my raw material thanks to her because she made me meet a person who then put me in contact with other people, and that's how it all came about. If I'm in [another incubation program] today it's thanks to [program name], so that's really the strength of the thing, you have access to a directory, an incredible network." (P06)*

*"On the other hand, with the partnership that they have with [partners name], yes, it has been good for me, because when [partners name] started working with me, they shared their network with me, and their network of experts, and that, on the other hand, it has helped me to meet other people in the field of visual disability, to help me move forward with my project. [...] one by one they put us with a sponsor, an expert in our respective fields, who helped us and shared their professional network with us according to our needs. I think that's not bad." (P18)*

*"The incredible thing that happened on the last closing day of the immersion phase was that the [program name] team put me in touch with the [foundation name] when it was not planned. So, that was really good, that's really the networking that I want to say that they provoked, otherwise maybe I shouldn't meet them." (P15)*

*"For example, I've had quite a few people come up to me at events and meet other people working on crafts, they contact me and say, "ah P36, I met someone working on a crafts project in a slightly different format but with the same idea, I'll put you in touch with him to exchange ideas" and, in the end, I met quite a few people like that who have a similar project. Because some of them have talked about my project and they have come to me. And as a result, I have been able to find clients, potential clients or people with similar projects that I am sure we have*

*something to share with them. Notably, because in the end we are able to talk about each other's projects and say: "Look, I know someone who has a similar project, meet him!". And this idea of redirecting people to work on [my venture] but also to give opportunities to others [work on their venture], it's really something I've experienced..." (P36)*

In this section, we detailed the networking specificities that inserted entrepreneurs in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. It is important to note the snowballing effect of networking as entrepreneurs found easy access to other entrepreneurs and potential allies. Following this, we found above that entrepreneurs already highlight the encounter with potential partners, the participation in other support programme, and the word-of-mouth effect when entrepreneurs launch their enterprise for others. This may be an avenue of future research to investigate the social interactions with these distal co-creators.

Overall, we found that the being introduced to the network may incite the entrepreneur to actively seek for information and develop potential commitments and partnerships. Therefore, in the next subsection we explore some partnerships in the core of the entrepreneurial community.

#### 4.3.6. Peers partnerships

We identified that entrepreneurs partnered between them for the development a particular task, as a result from social interactions, in specific at peer-to-peer interactions. Therefore, we explore entrepreneurs that put their efforts together to fulfil one concrete venture task or a collaboration between peers. Beyond that, we have also found two entrepreneurs that partnered into the creation of one venture. We found seven partnerships where entrepreneurs partnered with another member of the network. The majority of these collaborations occurred between cohort peers, although we have also highlighted two collaborations between an entrepreneur from the cohort and an alumni.

Entrepreneurs with similar ventures decided to create joint actions in order to reach a wider range of potential clients. In this early stage of venture development, we found that entrepreneurs were open to this dynamic as a boost to develop future partnerships. This is illustrated by the P16 exemplar in Table 11 that described this action with P19. Moreover, entrepreneurs have also used the skills of their peers to develop competencies in their team. As a result of peer-to-peer ask described in part I, P04 developed a training session in communication and marketing strategy to P23's team. Therefore, we put evidence on the creation of these joint actions as a consequence of initial exchange of resources.



We have also found that more formal collaborations took place after peer-to-peer exchanges. Some entrepreneurs developed collaborative commitments that were mainly ignited by general exchanges and affinities among the members of the network that we discussed above. We also noted that most of these entrepreneurs, driven by their affinities, decided to strengthen their entrepreneurial bonds, putting the effort together to develop joint activities of their ventures. To illustrate this venture collaboration, P23 described to us that a project submitted in collaboration with P25 has just got funding. Since both ventures work on a similar topic, they sent in a project proposal. This allowed both to receive European funding and experiment their prototypes. This can be seen in P23 interview, when she/he mentioned:

*“We are doing a project, the European project that we won. We integrated the dry toilets of P25 into it [our project proposal]. At the beginning it was not planned at all. But we said, here. It would be good to try them out, it would be an opportunity for you to work on it together. There you go!” (P23)*

Still on venture collaboration, we found that entrepreneurs also took advantage from the alumnus experiences and network to develop collaborations. We noted that the driver of these collaborations is associated with the target and the social problem addressed. In specific, P27 stressed a collaboration with an alumnus of the program in one of the podcasts of their venture. Beyond that, entrepreneurs have also mentioned receiving relevant inputs to their venture idea work after discussing with the “collaborator”. This suggests that entrepreneurs may tangentially share information and resources when partnered with peers. This can be also perceived in P04 development of a seminar with an alumnus’ association to test and collect feedback to his/her venture idea.

Partnerships can also change the course of entrepreneurs’ ventures. Since entrepreneurs are in this ideation phase, our data demonstrated that entrepreneurs juggled between different venture idea works and, in one case, P03 and P29 decided to merge into one venture since their drivers were similar. P03 initially had venture idea work around sustainable fashion and P29 focused on a series of educational events for kids. Considering online data, we found that P03 and P29 became close friends during the immersion<sup>10</sup> phase of the program and, after P29’s venture found difficulties in moving forward, both entrepreneurs decided to test the partnership. We discover that this merged venture has been running since March 2020 based on improvements to P03’s idea work. This clearly shows that a co-creator, as a supporter of the idea-work, may become a venture partner, as an architect of the creative process.

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<sup>10</sup> Phase of the program where all entrepreneurs from the cohort spent 10 days together participating in different seminars, workshops and introspective dynamics.

Table 11 compiles the aforementioned exemplars while presenting a short analysis of the collaboration between peers.

TABLE 11 - PEER PARTNERSHIPS EXEMPLARS

Partnering level	Exemplars	Analysis
Support on venture task	<i>"What we'd like to do is to have a joint e-mail with P19, which is also involved in rental management. And then, we teamed up with companies, and thus, moving around, to create a common e-mail to make the most of our potential clients, etc. " [...] I think it will help us a lot. P19 for the aspect of being in partnership, and developing together" (P16)</i>	Partnering up with a peer to boost their internal network
	<i>"We have P32, who was an entrepreneur of the acceleration program, who we discuss very often, she has a lot of skills in Com and social networks, she gives us a particular look each time we ask her a question. At the end of the month she will help us to make our communication strategy. We will work together for a month on the communication strategy of the company. P32 and P04, the two of them will help us to make our company's communication strategy and why not in the future at least or in time, working in good time. It would be nice because she is interested in the project too." (P23)</i>	Promoting a workshop training for a peer venture.
Venture collaboration	<i>"We have P25, as I told you, which we are doing a project, the European project that we won. We integrated the dry toilets of P25 into it [our project proposal]. At the beginning it was not planned at all. But we said, here. It would be good to try them out, it would be an opportunity for you to work on it together. There you go." (P23)</i>	Incorporating a peer in the development of a project.
	<i>"And it's true that this opportunity to make a large public event with this association called the [institution name], it forced me a bit to take the plunge, even if it's still very limited, but here it is. It still forced me to put my foot in the stirrup, to say "come on, you try something". So in mid-October I had this famous event with children from the college." (P04)</i>	Promoting a workshop training for a peer venture.
	<i>"So, with the alumni, it went well with '[association name]', we exchanged, we made a collaboration together that went very well. Afterwards, I had a girl on the phone, too, who is in the same sector as me, that is funny because she gave interesting inputs. In the end, we exchanged and it was very pleasant as well." (P27)</i>	Collaboration

Build on the above-mentioned, we found that partnerships mainly evoked inputs from the market. We can perceive that resource exchanges between peers may result in partnering up to develop collaborative participation in an entrepreneur's tasks. These collaborations stimulate the role of co-creators in helping to clarify and/or negotiate ventures' goals. In this, the majority of the partnerships found in our empirical data served to help entrepreneurs test their services or products as a certain type of first prototype. Our field notes also noted that some peers were the first clients of other entrepreneurs from the co-hort.

Following that, our data also suggested that merging the idea work of entrepreneurs may result in a reshape of the venture idea work. Therefore, it's only in cases where substantial partnerships happen that entrepreneurs reorient their venture idea work. This is in dialogue with effectuation theory as entrepreneurs create commitment to increase their means.

In the next section we conclude the outcomes of boosting up the creative process.

#### 4.3.7 Conclusion of co-creative acceleration.

When analysing the outcomes interactions within the program, we found these elements that lead to a co-creative acceleration. These elements helped entrepreneurs to speed up their process of venture creation. Therefore, we first identified that effective communication helped entrepreneurs to improve their communication skills and pitch of their ventures. As we saw above, by interacting with peers on different stages of development and mentors, entrepreneurs gained an entrepreneurial mindset. In this, we refer to the relevant logic of trial and error in venture creation. In turn, we have also observed a self-efficacy within entrepreneurs that felt more confident in their abilities to set up a venture.

Looking as a collective, we identified that social support helped entrepreneurs during the everyday struggles of the venture creative process. In turn, we have also noted networking as a result of interactions with the ecosystem where entrepreneurs were actively introduced in to stakeholders and exchanged relevant contacts between them. Nonetheless, some entrepreneurs have also mentioned the creations of partnerships and collaborations with peers in the core of the network that permitted the creation of common training courses and test their venture idea work.

In the next section, we explore outcomes that added constraints to the social interactions.

#### 4.4. Adding constraint

Almost all entrepreneurs faced interactions that brought constraints during the creation of their ventures. We borrow from effectuation theory the notion of constraints which explains that entrepreneurs, after interacting with the context, add constraints to refine the goals of their venture. These constraints are associated with the incorporation of inputs from others that change or narrow the venture's goals. Nevertheless, our empirical data indicated that entrepreneurs felt pressured or distrust, after interacting with others. This means momentary constraint which reduced the flow of their venture creative process. These elements can be also seen intertwined with aspects discussed in

part I on drivers, content and form of social interactions. However, we explore it separately because of the potential impact on the venture creative process. It seemed that peer pressure and distrust as a result of interaction with others can shed light on negative outcomes of social interactions.

Therefore, we begin by exploring peer pressure which, at times, may generate set back in the venture creative process and, then, we discuss the distrust in mentors' driven interactions after interactions with them.

#### 4.4.1. Peer pressure

As we saw in co-creative acceleration, interactions with others indeed may generate support in the venture creation process. This is clearly demonstrated by P28 as she/he says: *"I would say that it gives me a lot of support, in the sense that we go through the same phases. It's very interesting to see... some people evolve, some slow down, some step back, some pivot"*. Nevertheless, beyond this inspirational effect, we observed that this can generate a reverse effect where entrepreneurs try to move faster, or felt pressure, to develop their ventures. In turn, a number of entrepreneurs have mentioned rushing their creative process as a result of interactions with the cohort.

Our empirical findings demonstrated that entrepreneurs aimed to keep the pace of the venture creative process in tandem with their peers. In this, entrepreneurs who found obstacles, or pushed their market analysis, to keep up with their peers' rhythm reported a certain type of pressure. It is worth to note that it might be related to the rhythm of the acceleration program. As we mentioned in the methodological chapter, the program focussed on structuring ventures up to the prototyping phase.

The differences between the stages of development of the various ventures in the acceleration program was aimed to create this type of leverage for those who were in the early stages. For example, ventures at later stages were expected to inspire ventures at earlier stages. While the underlying idea was to stimulate less experienced entrepreneurs to reach the level of the more experienced entrepreneurs, the former encountered some difficulties. In this regard, our data demonstrated outcomes of peer interactions that added constraints to entrepreneurs venture creative process. For example, P37 mentioned that when you struggle in your venture creative process, seeing others progressing faster than yourself may trigger you a demoralising effect. On the other hand, P05 explained that while she/he was inspired by entrepreneurs in more advanced stages, as a result P05 tried to speed up the development of her/his venture. However, P05 realised, at the end of the acceleration programme, that it was necessary to redo her/his market analysis, as her/his study was superficial after drawing quick conclusions and leaving a qualitative analysis aside.

*"We struggle quite a bit, so we're a bit at the bottom of the class, and it's true that when you're struggling and you see what's succeeding really well, at the same time you feel admiring and at the same time you say: Shit, I'm not making any progress. it gives you a boost and at the same time it could be demoralising." (P37)*

*"You feel pulled up by those who are at a more advanced stage than you and you say to yourself: "well, these people have already done all this, so it's something I can do too". So you manage to [do it too], you can learn from people who are more experienced than you in the field and it's interesting that we're at different levels but when you're at the very beginning of your project there's absolutely everything to do so I think the difficulty is to understand exactly what you need to do at the beginning without, as I said, rushing the stages. You're just starting out, you don't even have a name for your project yet and you'd like to do everything they do at the same time, as I was saying, you need to do the first things well before creating your site and this can give you the downside of this, it can make you want to rush through the stages when it's important to do things step by step." (P05)*

Peer pressure may have a double effect on entrepreneurs. On the one hand, mirroring others is a common effect when interactions happen. Our data showed how entrepreneurs end up mirroring those who are more advanced, even though this may cause a certain deviation in their creative process as they may rush it. In this, we demonstrated the case of P05 that rushed to complete without structure, having to rework some steps in order to start the venture from more robust base. On the other hand, our data suggests that entrepreneurs not only mirror others, but that they also feel peer pressure in terms of feeling their venture is not moving forward fast enough or that they feel they are behind their colleagues on other aspects of the venture creation process.

Therefore, in this section we explored the outcome of social interactions – peer pressure - that resulted in constraints to the flow of the creative process.

#### 4.4.2. Distrust due to impediments in mentors' driven interactions.

As we saw in the section 4.2.2., interactions with mentors were based on three pillars of strategic orientations: venture structure, idea work reflection, and stimulation of individual-self assessments. We also found entrepreneurs that reported distrust to interactions with their mentors due to a variety of reasons. In other words, we noted entrepreneurs that encountered impediments and took a step back when engaging in mentoring activities.

We associate impediments to three elements that entrepreneurs described: absence of technical expertise, lack of regularity, and lack of affinity. These elements emerged from the inputs of the participants that shared difficulties in interacting with the mentors regarding the previously mentioned reasons.

First looking at the lack of technical expertise, we found entrepreneurs who described the absence of technical profiles in the acceleration program. This is particular to the ventures working in high-tech and complex engineering ventures. This lack of expertise of the mentors made, in turn, entrepreneurs undervalue mentors' inputs to their ventures. For instance, P18 had a high-tech venture specialized in mobile capability. In this line, P18 reported hesitation in considering advice on his/her product as the technological complexity of her/his product was perhaps not understood by the coaches.

*"I have the impression that technical profiles were missing, real technical profiles. Because there is a difference between people who have carried out projects that were once technical, but who themselves are not technical people. Even if it's going to remain a minority in [acceleration program name] apparently, the technical aspect, that's where I was, where P14 and P37 were [also], and we didn't have that [coaching and mentoring]. We had personal advice from people at the business level, in terms of orientation on who could finance, how to organize ourselves, but clearly, technically, we didn't have that. We could tell them anything, people were not technically sharp enough to tell us: "In fact, you're talking nonsense"." (P18)*

In regard to the lack of regularity, the acceleration program has established mentoring activities with the participants every two weeks. Our field notes demonstrated that the load of work distributed between the mentors impacted the constant follow up. Some entrepreneurs mentioned that this regularity was not followed and the entrepreneur had to reschedule the meetings, which in turn, led to entrepreneurs seeking supplementary support with other potential mentors. For example, P34 expressed reaching out to others' mentors and participants of the program in order to create relationships and overcome the lack of orientation during her/his entrepreneurial journey.

*"[Program manager name] is our [selected] mentor, she didn't follow us too much. I don't think she was too available. We only saw her twice, I suppose... that's not much! We didn't have a point of reference. As a result, we didn't have any people who followed us along [the acceleration program]. I had a fairly close relationship with [program manager A], but we didn't talk about it too often. In the end, the one who helped me the most was [program manager B], because I also developed a relationship with him and we saw each other every week. And he very kindly accepted to take us back with P35 on our vision, etc. He was perhaps the one who helped us the most to put our finger on certain things. But the [program name] staff itself didn't help us too much in the long run, in fact. There isn't one of them who saw us really grow up. Afterwards, we didn't go searching either..." (P34)*

As we could see, sometimes the regularity of the meetings was not followed and, by (not) doing so, the thread of the follow up was, sometimes, lost. In addition to this, we have also noted some other entrepreneurs developed a distrust of the mentors as a result of a lack of affinity. This corroborates with our findings on the drivers of mentor interactions, as entrepreneurs had prescribed interactions with mentors, and when affinities increase, this bond seemed more robust. For instance,

P26 described, that after several attempts of contact with the mentor, she/he felt that the relationship was affected and the follow-up drastically reduced. For P26 this is due to a lack of interest on the part of the mentor and her/his project, where the entrepreneur eventually gave up seeking advice and inputs from the mentor. This can be represented by the exemplar below.

*"We had done a session by phone, and then we made an appointment. So it was on Monday afternoon, we had an appointment early in the morning. And then, I got up in the morning and everything, and then, no [mentors name] on the phone. And then afterwards, he said to me: "Oh yes, I'm sorry, I had an appointment and everything, so I wasn't available." Ok. After that, we tried to meet up again, so he said to me: "Every time, it's me who calls you. "So I was waiting, it was the evening, and no [mentors name] again. And so he said to me: "Yes, but I thought it was you who should call me..." Well, we had some misunderstandings. "Well, we had misunderstandings like that. And the fact that I told him I was going to take up a new activity... Yes, and I think that this affected our relationship a bit. And then we left for the immersion phase. And then [mentors name] ... well, it was very cold, we didn't talk, he avoided me... well. So I think it was a personal problem, a feeling problem or something, I don't know, which meant that I had no impact during the whole tour." (P26)*

Overall, we noted that entrepreneurs were seeking clarification and structuration in their venture process from their mentors and when impediments occur, entrepreneurs either seek these resources elsewhere or withdraw and wait for the relationship to re-establish itself. In this section, we highlight impediments that create a distrust in the relationship with the mentor. This reticence in exchanging with their assigned mentors may create a setback or a slow down on their venture creative process, as entrepreneurs reduce their interactions with business advisors. We noted that the relationships between coaches and entrepreneurs may require an alignment between the profile of the mentee and the mentor. At the same time, this also evoked the misunderstanding of the role of mentors and the expectations about these exchanges.

#### 4.4.3. Conclusion of the section

In this context, adding constraints refers to peer pressure and distrust of mentors as consequences of social interactions. This in turn, generated an initial setback on the venture creative process. From our data, we explore the nuances of peer pressure as other entrepreneurs felt pressure to rush their venture creative process. In these cases, entrepreneurs have described rushing during the venture creative process, which later created setbacks in the flow of their venture creative process, as entrepreneurs had to rework some parts of their ventures. After that, our empirical findings demonstrated that entrepreneurs distrusting their relationship with mentors impacted the engagement of peers in the acceleration programs.

We now turn to the third category of outcomes of social interaction where we demonstrate empirical evidence about entrepreneurial pivots.

#### 4.5. To pivot or not to pivot?

From what we have shown so far, we can grasp that certain interactions, and outcomes of interactions, have the potential to enable and trigger entrepreneurial pivots. It is important to bear in mind that pivots are not explained by linear causal processes, but are rather characterized by multicausality and complexity, of which social interactions are a part. We also understand that the complexity of pivots limits us to identify one single trigger for changes in idea-work, therefore, in the following sections we explore the outcomes of social interactions which resulted in entrepreneurial pivots.

We build on Grimes' (2018) notion of revision of the creative process - as entrepreneurs re-evaluate their venture idea work – to qualify the pivots identified as: i) *Defending* ii) *Repairing*, iii) *Re-engineering*. Following this, we identified social interactions that triggered pivots and others that enabled pivots. We considered triggers to be something that causes another thing to start and we refer to enabler as something, or someone, that allows or makes action possible. Nevertheless, defending venture idea work manifested in our empirical data as reluctance to pivot. If entrepreneurs did not perform a pivot, we then focus on the analysis of the reasons why. It is worth noting that the reasons are based on the clarification and working justification of the venture idea.

Thus, we begin by exploring entrepreneurs' reluctance to pivot. After that, we explore social interactions and outcomes that triggered and enacted pivots. In this, we examine self-assessment in response to mentors' questioning and how it triggered reengineering pivots, as well as and users' feedback that triggered repairing pivots. Finally, we describe how market knowledge enabled repairing pivots. This is represented by Figure 16.



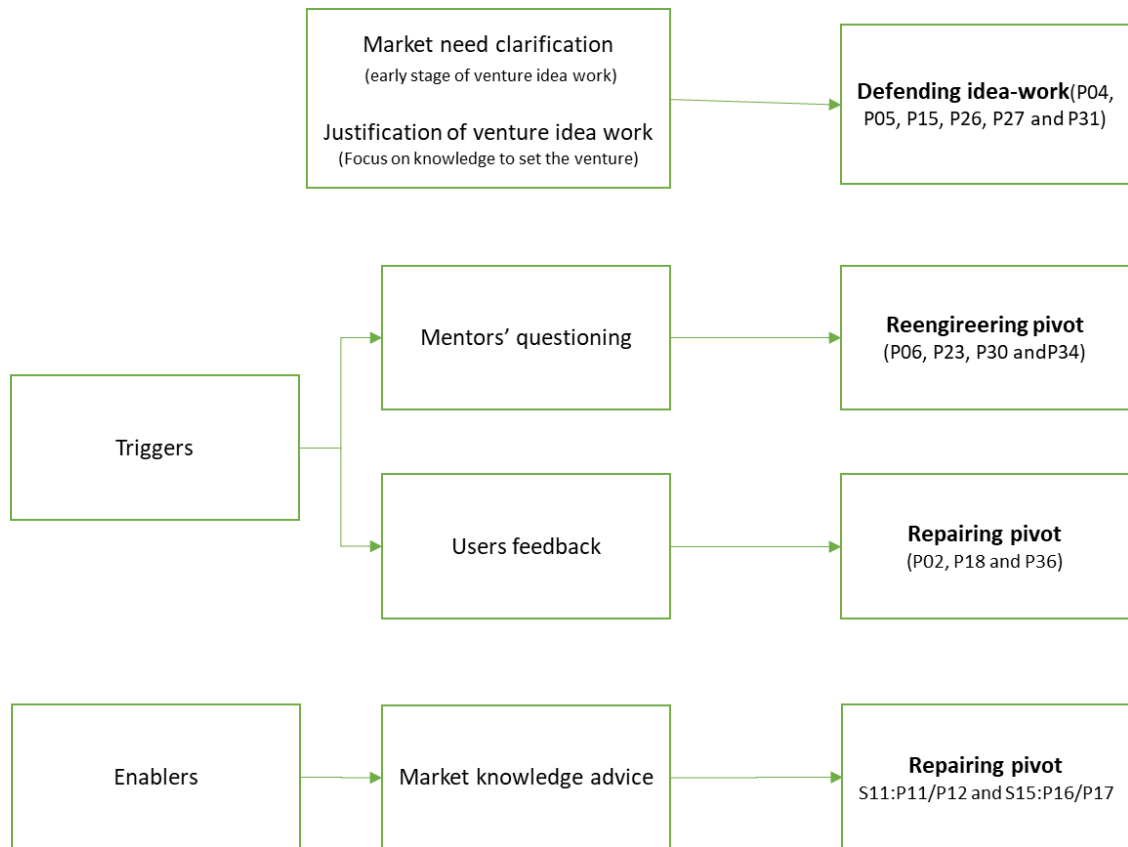


FIGURE 16 - ENTREPRENEURIAL PIVOTS

#### 4.3.1. Defending venture idea-work

We observed multiple instances of entrepreneurs being reluctant to pivot. We call this practice ‘defending venture idea-work’. To recall, Grimes (2018) explained that “*entrepreneurs narrowed the attention and intentions of their revision efforts, treating most changes as personal compromises*” in which entrepreneurs were unwilling to implement mentors’ inputs and defended their venture idea work. In this line, we present our empirical findings that demonstrated this reluctance to pivot.

In this section, we explore the reluctance to changes in their venture idea work demonstrating entrepreneurs that did not pivot. We outline the reasons why entrepreneurs did not pivot, and how this links to social interactions. Following this, we unpack why entrepreneurs did not pivot, based on clarification of the market, since they were in the early stage of venture idea development and justification of the venture idea, as entrepreneurs focused on acquiring knowledge of how to implement the venture.

### Clarification of market need.

Our findings demonstrated entrepreneurs defending their venture idea work in order to clarify their market analysis. In the following paragraphs we dissect this reluctance, outlining the visible reasons for this defending approach.

In specific to two entrepreneurs, P04 and P05 explained that they pivoted just before entering the acceleration program. This means that their venture ideas did not change during the six months of the acceleration program. During the second round of interviews, P04 and P05 mentioned the need to re-do a market analysis. Both entrepreneurs reported moving very quickly in collecting information from the field and ended up “burning steps” of the venture creation process. This is associated with peer pressure. In this line, P04 and P05 decided to redo their market analysis, or field study, to develop a more qualitative analysis to better understand the market in which they intended to operate. Most of these clarifications related to customer need and customer segment, as they set out to narrow down the venture idea work. Therefore, we first associate the reluctance of the pivot when entrepreneurs tried to speed up their creative process, in specific the market analysis of their venture, as they were still clarifying their market. As a reminder of this undesirable effect of trying to speed up the process:

*“You'd like to do everything they do at the same time, as I was saying, you need to do the first things well before creating your site and this can give you the downside of this, it can make you want to rush through the stages when it's important to do things step by step.” (P05)*

*“So, after that mistake I couldn't go as fast as everyone else, and I still can't go as fast as everyone else.” (P04)*

It is important to note that P04 and P05 also mentioned that interacting with others allowed them to validate their venture idea work and create a network of contacts and develop their legitimacy. However, no strategic reorientation was produced.

In addition to these issues of market clarification, we identified other elements that may be associated with resistance to the pivot. In this case, entrepreneurs, besides continuing to clarify the need of the market, demonstrated time restriction to the venture and difficulty in the relationship with the mentor.

For example, P26 explained that besides working full time in a company, this entrepreneur reported a negative relationship with the mentor. As we discussed in section 4.4.2., P26 distrusted their relationship with the assigned mentors which created a distance that, in turn, may have affected the evolution of his/her venture idea work. We suggest that this may be one other element that provoked reluctance to pivot. To remind us, P26 explained:

*"Well, we had some misunderstandings. "Well, we had misunderstandings like that. And the fact that I told him I was going to take up a new activity... Yes, and I think that this affected our relationship a bit. And then we left for the immersion phase. And then [mentors name] ... well, it was very cold, we didn't talk, he avoided me... well. So I think it was a personal problem, a feeling problem or something, I don't know, which meant that I had no impact during the whole tour."* (P26)

In this section we discussed entrepreneurs who do not pivot because of the need to clarify the market and, thus, the early stage of development of their ventures. Moreover, we have also observed the presence of adding constraints to social interactions may generate setback, or slowdown, in the creative process. In specific, rushing during the creative process and distrusting mentors due to lack of affinity may be constraints on social interactions that provoke reluctance to pivot.

### Focus on acquiring knowledge to set up the venture

We found entrepreneurs who reported defending their venture idea work. These entrepreneurs focussed on justification of their venture idea work, as they described gaining knowledge to setting up their ventures when asked about the evolution of their venture idea work. In specific, three entrepreneurs explained to us that they focused on gaining skills to develop their businesses. For example, P15 described to us that she/he created a journey diary, that after examining it, she/he recognised being more confident and "prepared" to prototype his/her venture idea. Otherwise, P27 described to us that her/his venture was already established before starting the acceleration programme and that pivoting was not a primary goal. Finally, P31 said that they gained business knowledge to implement their venture. This entrepreneur mentioned that his/her venture idea work was adapted from a friend, therefore, she/he was not expecting to pivot. The extracts below support the issues discussed in this paragraph.

*"In July, I told myself 'I need to gain credibility as an entrepreneur', and in fact, this morning, [...] someone had come to see me and said "why are you doing this? Why is it you? Why isn't it someone else? ». And [program name] is exactly what I did, and at the same time, I think that just before starting I said to myself "it's OK, we bought the material, we'll be able to prototype and everything" (P15).*

*"In fact, when I started [program name], I already had my project established, I already had my name... pretty much everything was... I was quite advanced on my project. So, it [venture idea work] is the same thing. Nothing has changed." (P27)*

*"it's pretty clear. In fact, I copy-paste a solution [from another venture team]. I have worked in a team that does exactly the same thing, and in fact, I copy-paste the solution with just another target." (P31)*

Another aspect that it is relevant to note that may be associated with the reluctance to pivot are some impediments in the mentor-driven interactions P27 mentioned. Similarly to what P26 mentioned, P27 demonstrated frustration with support from the mentors since he/she was not sufficiently supported. This is represented by the exemplar below.

*"I was quite disappointed with the support, especially the mentor, because I prepared myself beforehand... I was making lists of questions, saying to myself: "Here, we have such and such an interview on such and such a day...", etc., and on the day, I didn't have the answers to my questions. " And I sent emails to get documents and I never got them." (P27)*

Overall, P15, P27 and P31 suggested during interviews that pivot was not their primary objective. We noted that P15 focused on acquiring credibility and gaining knowledge to prototype their venture. In a similar line, P27 created the venture before the program and, then focused on enlarging their network. Finally, P31 focused on learning on how to implement the venture.

In this subsection we have illustrated the reluctance to pivot and how it links to social interactions. We have shown that the focus on gaining business and potential impediments in interactions with mentors' interactions may be associated with the lack of strategic reorientation to the venture. Nevertheless, we showed that entrepreneurs had no interest in carrying out a pivot but rather focused on expanding their business knowledge.

Next, we discuss re-engineering idea work triggered by mentors' questioning.

### Triggers

#### 4.3.2. Re-engineering idea-work triggered by mentors' questionings

Re-engineering idea work refers to entrepreneurs responding by actively incorporating feedback and suggestions into their venture idea. In doing so, entrepreneurs adopt a re-engineering posture as they criticize or replace any or all aspects of their business model (Grimes, 2018). Therefore, our empirical findings reported reassessment of entrepreneurial means after being questioned by mentors. This reassessment triggered pivots, which we refer to here as re-engineering venture idea work. In specific to this, our data demonstrated that questioning by mentors, through the form of criticism and advice, was a triggering element in the entrepreneurs' pivoting process. Yet, in this section we also explore P13's pivot as an outlier that was sceptic to critics and pivoted after his own self reflections.

Looking at mentors' feedback, we found that the mentors' inputs led to re-evaluation of entrepreneurs' internal competencies and personal drivers. Therefore, we noted that these mentors'

advice helped entrepreneurs to pay attention to particular aspects of the venture, which in turn, entrepreneurs gave a sense of venture idea work. P23 whose initial venture idea focused on the creation of a water cleaning device for vulnerable regions, mentioned that other ideas, such as working with industrial water cleaning, remained as a plan B. P23 explained that he/she had previously received criticism about working a venture across the two sectors - water cleaning in vulnerable regions and industrial water - as each sector required different skills. We identified that P23 pivoted his/her target segmentation focusing on industrial water, which provided a whole different system of work. In turn, we found that P23 mentioned that mentors' questionings helped his/her team in clarifying the transversal competences present within the venture, as a trigger element. This is described the extract below.

*"In the beginning, we were very much focused, even self-centred, on access to drinking water, and at the end, thanks to [program name] we had the idea in our heads to also work on industrial water, for us there was no link. We couldn't see the link between access to drinking water and industrial water treatment. And moreover, people told us: **"Yes, but this has to be done in another society, you mustn't mix things up."** And in the end, with [program name], you realize if you have transversal competences, which we had, and that there was an obvious complementarity. And so, the idea of access to drinking water is the symptom but the problem is pollution. Thanks to [mentors' name] we understand treating industrial water also means treating part of the problem and facilitating access to drinking water. Thanks to [program name], we have been able to reorganise our way of seeing, working and designing the project. So, we have come a long way and advanced in it. We were allowed to produce a prototype that had nothing to do with what we produced at the beginning. In fact, we had a proto that we had made at the very beginning of the [program name] and that was what we wanted to present. And in the end, as the [program name] progressed, we went on to something completely different. We went to a system that was very technical, that was like nothing else, a block that will do its job, and today we have a product that resembles us and that will adapt to the terrain and the problem and not to the terrain that adapts to our solution. That's it". (P23)*

While mentors encouraged a re-evaluation of team capabilities, other entrepreneurs' mentors' advice triggered "individual-self" assessment, allowing them to develop a venture aligned with their personal drivers. For example, P06 initially tackled the global issue of carbon emission by proposing an app to evaluate the consumption of carbon in food products. However, P06 was constantly challenged by mentors and encouraged to develop self-appraisal practices to refine her/his venture idea. In this, P06 described to us this reflective process in which he/she performed an assessment of her/his personal aspirations. In the end, this entrepreneur reported to us that a "cooking" feature came out as a relevant personal interest. As a result of it, P06 pivoted from an app of carbon emission awareness to the production of a fermented soy-based food and cookbook recipes. In the exemplar below P06 explained in detail how she/he made sense of her venture idea work.

*"As [program mentor name] would say, **"Trust the process! "The problem for me remained the same. It's about reducing the environmental impact of our food. So the problem has remained***

*the same, except that as I progressed, by doing the field immersion, I was already guided by it. [...] then we [entrepreneur and mentor] worked on what was our flow, the things that gave us energy, that we liked to do, and I said to myself, cooking I love it. It's something I like where I don't think about anything else. So it was growing in my head! I said to myself, "Maybe I should do the cooking!" and in relation to the recipe kit, I said to myself that I would like to make a kit with Tempé. It's a great product, it's a great food, it has ultra-interesting nutritional values, it's not very processed, people ask for products that are not very processed, on top of that, it would help the production of legumes in the crop, and it's a real crop that allows the implementation of agroecology, because it allows crop rotation. I said to myself, "It would make it possible to make a healthy product, good for the planet, with traceability from farm to fork. It's the product and the solution that are aligned". (P06)*

Built on the abovementioned, our empirical data demonstrated that mentors' questioning triggered reassessment of internal competences and personal drivers. While the elements of these inputs are different, we found that this practice helped entrepreneurs to refine their venture idea work. In turn, we suggest that these mentors' questionings played a role in sense making of how to reorganise their way of working and to restructure the venture. For instance, in specific to P23, the entrepreneur found it possible to conceptualize a hybrid product that could be used by industries and vulnerable regions.

Overall, we found that this idea of "being challenged" or "questioning" about the venture idea is associated with entrepreneurial pivots. Our data demonstrates that this promotes entrepreneurs' reflection in order to create alignment between the problem and solution proposed. For example, mentors' inputs brought to the light issues not clearly seen by the entrepreneurs, however, a reflection with mentors supported new directions on the venture creative idea. In this, we suggest that this mentors' questionings helped entrepreneurs to make sense of their ventures.

While advice from mentors can generate self-assessment, we also observed that criticism from mentors also triggered this kind of reassessment in venture idea work. Criticism was common after pitch sessions, speed dating, or informal exchanges with mentors. These types of outputs from interactions with mentors normally brought new elements to entrepreneurs to improve their ventures. Following this, we identified that for two entrepreneurs, accurate critiques of the value proposition of their product and the market they were targeting triggered self-evaluation in their ventures, which in turn generated a pivot and abandonment of their idea work.

In specific, when looking to S37's (P34/P35) venture idea evolution, their original idea was to create an ethical market to engage people in more sustainable consumption. P35 reported being confronted by a mentor about the market addressed. This in turn triggered a total reappraisal of the social problem. While re-analysing their market research, P35 and his/her cofounder P34 found difficulties in adapting his/her solution as their segment was apparently weak, or non-existent. Both

entrepreneurs decided to abandon the venture creation process. As we demonstrate below, this is stressed by one specific mentor' feedback, as the mentor said:

*"We had only one idea in mind, to sell ethical products, etc., and we failed... well, when we arrived, we were in love with our solution and not with our problem. Afterwards, we were smacked in the face, especially by a mentor, who told us: "Look, it's simple, your project, I don't understand anything. I don't understand who the target is, I understand what your point of departure is, etc." [...] And we [P35 and cofounder] realized that in fact we didn't have a problem, or else we imagined that people needed to consume better, except that this may be true for 1% of the French, and even I don't agree with this assertion, there's a debate with my cofounder on this. We end up dissolving our collaboration." (P35).*

In a similar vein, criticism can also trigger the removal of an initially crucial feature for the entrepreneur in developing their business. Despite several initial positive feedback signals, some entrepreneurs encountered challenges from mentors that made them reassess the relevance of key aspects of their ventures. For example, P30 reported removing one crucial feature of her/his venture after a mentor questioned parts of it. P30 initially proposed a venture on the social reinsertion of recently arrived immigrants through the development, and improvement, of cooking competences. After initial positive feedback, P30 described that mentors began to question the reason for developing a venture associated with catering.

Following the abovementioned, P30 mentioned that cooking and catering was a personal skill that she/he felt important to include. However, during these questionings, P30 realised that the cooking aspect was only a security anchor as s/he did not feel legitimate to develop her/his venture. P30 had a background working as a cook, which is why it made sense for her/him to include this aspect the venture. On this issue, we suggest that the inclusion and the removal of a venture feature may, sometimes, be associated only with individual aspirations. As we demonstrate below the evolution of P30 venture's idea work, this entrepreneur removed the cooking training and focused on the actual need of her/his target, developing a tailored support for immigrants.

*"So, when I pitch my project to others, I was told that it was good, and every time I spoke with [selected mentor], she listened to me but said nothing. She told me that it was good, that I had evolved in my thinking, but she didn't say much. And in [city name], I didn't feel well, and I didn't know why. We were in the process of seeing the mentors and everything, but I didn't know who to go to... she [selected mentor] asked me again to explain my project, and I told her: "it's to support foreign people in exercising their original profession in France". She says OK, but why the restoration? I tell her, but why are you asking this question? So I started to cry, but I didn't want to because the project was large in fact, I didn't feel legitimate. And she says to me "but since you came in, you say the same thing [lack of legitimation], but then when you ask yourself, you say restoration, so either you come up with another concept and you stay on the restoration, or you stay on your decision and you accept your thing, and you move forward". So that's when I said to myself that I had to accept [actual venture idea] what I was saying, and that I had to change, because even if I take a broader approach, we can start with 2-3 jobs that will be*

*recurrent [job reinsert], and then I'll expand it, knowing that when I have the association, it's 2 years and 6 months old, the first year we can't apply because we're young, and little by little, we've applied for subsidies afterwards. I tell myself that somewhere, that's what we wear, and how we move forward. From this experience, I can move forward and fight, that's what I do with the association, and continue to develop my idea in fact. So it's really a lot of the immersion phase." (P30)*

It is important to shed light on initial positive feedback to entrepreneurs' idea work. In both cases, these entrepreneurs only reported these criticisms in a later stage of the acceleration programme. In this, we observed that entrepreneurs described the criticism with a certain surprise or indignation. For them, they were on the right track of the venture creative process. Therefore, we suggest that perhaps, positive feedback can generate a certain kind of blindness about the solution proposed by entrepreneurs. This can be seen in the extract above when P35 mentioned the attachment to their solution instead to the social problem and when P30 described the lack of remarks from the mentors, when she/he pitched in the beginning of the program.

In this section we put emphasis on mentors' questionings and interrogations that triggered a re-engineering idea-work. Our data demonstrated that questioning through the form of criticism (P30, P34) and advice (P23, P06) triggered self-assessments which, in turn, led entrepreneurs to criticise and/or replace aspects of their business model. Our empirical findings demonstrated that entrepreneurs clarified relevant aspects of their ventures enacted by questioning that encouraged self-assessment of entrepreneurial and individual means. To better illustrate this micro-process, we have elaborated in figure 17 how these interactions help entrepreneurs make sense of their business ideals. Thus, triggered by mentors' questionings, entrepreneurs enhance or strengthen entrepreneurial means, which, in turn, generate a reassessment of these means and, finally, create a re-engineering pivot, as entrepreneurs criticise or replace relevant aspects of their business.

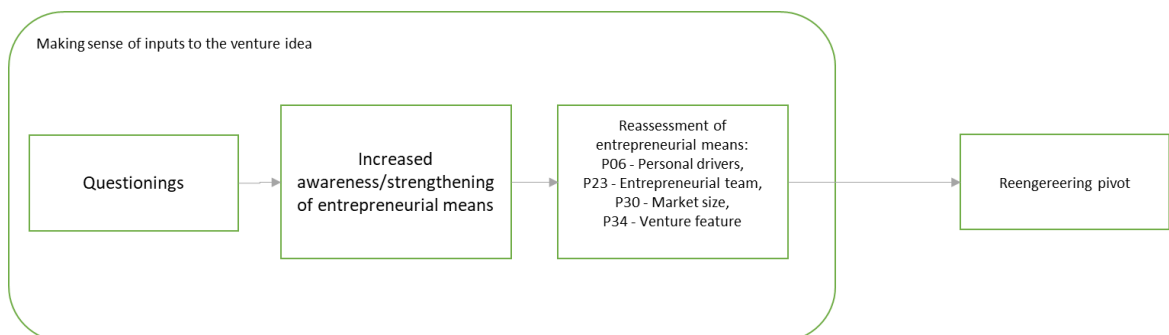


FIGURE 17 - MAKING SENSE OF MENTORS' QUESTIONING



Moving on, our empirical data also demonstrated one outlier in this regard to their pivot as P13 has shown scepticism towards criticism. When we look at how P13 reacted to mentors' inputs, we found him/her asserting how he/she is the only decision maker of the venture, as we can see below.

*"When I present the idea, whether it's production in urban farms or machines for individuals or whether it's production in greenhouses or not, people all say that it's crazy; [but] I'm the one who chooses to change my idea alone, nobody tells me to change it. Because in reality, an urban farm can work just like a farm in the countryside."* (P13)

Following that, P13 reported his/her pivot guided by her/his personal aspirations. In other words, P13 explained that by wondering where he/she sees himself/herself in the next five years, and as a result of this self-reflection, the entrepreneur reoriented her/his venture towards the creation of an urban farm in a medium-sized city. In this regard, P13 proved to be an outlier as she/he pivots mainly oriented by his/her self-reflections and disregards to some criticism from mentors, as P13 explained us below:

*"I was doing a Spirulina production instead, and I asked myself a lot of questions about it, and then I changed my mind again. I realised that it wasn't what I wanted to do. Having a whole thing in town was more of a hassle than anything else. [...] I went back to my basics which are: "but wait, what do you want? Where do I see myself in 5 years?" And in reality, well, not in Paris, not in the city, so I said to myself "you're stupid, why are you doing something in the city when I don't even want to stay there?"* (P13)

P13 is an outlier that put evidence to personal drivers in the pivoting process. A number of entrepreneurs have described working on their individual drivers during the acceleration programme. It's noteworthy that this was one of the phases of the acceleration programme. With this, we can see the importance of each entrepreneur evaluating their personal and professional objectives. Our data suggests that personal drivers play a strong role in reorienting the venture. However, our data also shows that mentors are often the ones that triggered these assessments and supported entrepreneurial reflections.

Self-assessment was perceived in the majority of entrepreneur's interactions however, we identified four entrepreneurs associating it with their pivot. In this section, we explored that criticism (P30, P34) and advice (P23, P06) may trigger reassessment of means, which in turn may generate a pivot. These entrepreneurs performed a re-engineering pivot in their venture creative process. On another line, we found P13 performing a repairing approach<sup>11</sup> to pivot mainly considering his/her individual wishes to settle in a medium-sized city. P13 is treated here because his/her pivot is based on mentors' questionings. Moreover, we incite the relevance of moments of self-evaluation to guide

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<sup>11</sup> Entrepreneurs expanding their possibilities by permitting shifts and changes in their ventures' idea without impacting the core value proposition. (Grimes, 2018).

the venture creation process. At times, the triggers for pivots can be present in ourselves and not in the information collected from the market. Yet, self-assessment practices appear to help clarify individual and professional driver.



FIGURE 18 - MENTORS' QUESTIONING

Moving forward, we discuss repairing pivots associated to users' feedback.

#### 4.3.3. Repairing idea-work triggered by users' feedback

*Repairing* idea work refers to entrepreneurs expanding their possibilities by permitting shifts and changes in their ventures' idea without impacting the core value proposition. Then entrepreneurs' question or narrow any or all aspects of the business model or replace peripheral aspects of the business model. (Grimes, 2018). In this section we explore entrepreneurs who pivoted based on information gained from interactions with potential users. In this, we found the pivoting process of P18, P36 and P02 occurring during the field immersion phase of the program in which the entrepreneurs interacted with market actors such as associations, companies and potential clients in order to validate their business assumptions/venture theory (Drucker, 1995). Therefore, in the following paragraphs, we explore how the outcomes of these interactions fed their pivots.

For instance, P18 associated his/her pivot to the feedback from a test in his/her prototype. This entrepreneur explained during the immersion phase, that he/she could develop a first prototype with members of the cohort. After that, P18 collected proper feedback from the test users to add to his/her venture idea work, as represented below:

*"it's true that at the end of July, when the immersion phase started, I was in a hurry to make a first prototype to test it and to get feedback. And then, the feedback I got, brought up other needs, and other improvements and modifications to make on the initial prototype, which I was able to do, and on which, also, a second idea appeared, still in the same field, but a second different product, which made a second prototype appear. And today, as the needs of people become is more and more clear, I can have my first product... " [...]" (P18)*

Our empirical data showed entrepreneurs who incorporated feedback from associations and actors working in the field of their ventures. The accelerator programme encouraged entrepreneurs

to find key players in their business to validate their hypothesis. As a result, entrepreneurs gained insights from the field to improve their product and service propositions. For example, P02 had a venture that offered personalized assistance to help households reduce their energy bills. This would be an application based on the analysis of real energy consumption that would share these analytics with associations for families in need. However, after pitching their venture idea to potential collaborators, P02's venture idea was questioned, as his/her solution was not adapted to their target market. Yet, when looking to P36's original venture idea that was to create an online marketplace for artisans, P36 described that, after pitching his/her venture idea work to stakeholders, in specific to a potential partner, he/she had to reassess the original idea, and concluded that his/her solution did not meet the artisans' stakeholder needs. This is demonstrated by the extracts below.

*"I said to myself: "they will need tools to help them better follow these people". So, I went to meet them and it didn't work out too well. They were waiting for something concrete that I hadn't yet created, so it was difficult to create the discussion. So, I changed a little, and I said to myself: "Well, I'm going to create a first tool that can be directly usable by the occupants of a housing unit", that was the first step, that already changed my target and who I was talking to. Then, I said to myself, I'm going to try to start on an internet platform, but I quickly said to myself: "people are not the most comfortable with digital technology" and so I oriented my solution: I communicate with them by SMS." (P02)*

*"At the beginning I wanted to make a marketplace in the handicraft sector, but then I realised that this was not what the artisans were interested in, it was not the solution but the problem. And so, I started to develop these ideas of helping the artisans on a daily basis and therefore immersions [i.e. Seminars] but also actions that the association could do. [...] So the idea is to create an association that helps artisans and from that create a network of artisans to help me think about what else we can do for artisans and that could also bring money. It's a simple, effective way to start, and then see where the opportunities are." (P36)*

Considering the abovementioned, we detailed P18 showing the inclusion of feedback from users to their prototype, alternatively, P02 and P36 adding information from market actors to their value proposition. Market information is one of the triggers of the pivot (Shepherd & Gruber, 2020). Nonetheless, when we analysed other aspects and reasons why these pivot occurred, we noted that entrepreneurs also nourished this strategic change taking into account mentors' advice and encouragement.

In regard to mentors' inputs, we perceived that P02 and P36 were constantly challenged to reassess their venture idea work in consonance with the market encountered. In specific, P02 emphasized the underlying notion of being challenged that provided guidance in the reflective process of adapting his/her venture idea work. Similarly, P36 was encouraged to reflect on the refinement of his/her venture idea work, as we can see below. We noted that these mentors' inputs helped entrepreneurs to make sense of their ventures.

*"The principle of always challenging myself, is, do you think your solution is really in line with the people you are targeting? Do you think that your solution responds to an identified need? And that's it. This helped me ask myself the right questions every time (...) because now we're sure of the solution we've found, and the principle of asking these questions every time saves time."(P02)*

*"I had a lot of advice, especially during the mentoring sessions, which helped me to move forward in my reflections. I had the Mentor too, which helps a lot, when you have questions that come to your mind, and especially the physical time and the presence time, these are moments when you rest a little bit. (P36)*

Our data also showed that these entrepreneurs reported being motivated by mentors to develop their prototype. While we acknowledge that this is a common practice in these early stages of the venture creation, we evoke that, perhaps, the prototype was never experimented if the selected mentor hadn't pushed the entrepreneur to test. This is represented by the P18 exemplar in the extract below:

*"[selected mentor] had given me good orientation, already ... **He was the one who said to me: "But if you can, make the prototype, and this way, you come with it to the immersion phase. "She motivated me well.** And then, the other people of the program team, the interaction with other [cohort] supported it..." (P18)*

Therefore, although the aforementioned entrepreneurs associate their pivot to the users' feedback, we also put evidence in the practice of sense-making when interacting with mentors and externals of the venture. In this, we suggest that entrepreneurs faced questioning and encouragements that shape their pivoting processes. Our empirical data showed that entrepreneurs incorporated users' feedback to develop a second prototype, and, alternatively, other entrepreneurs added information from potential users to their value proposition, adapting their venture solution.

In this section we detailed P02, P18 and P36 incorporating feedback from their potential customers or ecosystem partners in order to adjust their solution, as figure 19 represents. In parallel to entrepreneurs interacting with their market to refine their ideas, we have also emphasised that mentors may have a twofold role in nourishing the pivot as clarifiers of the venture path and as "motivator" to boost entrepreneurs towards the prototype of the venture.

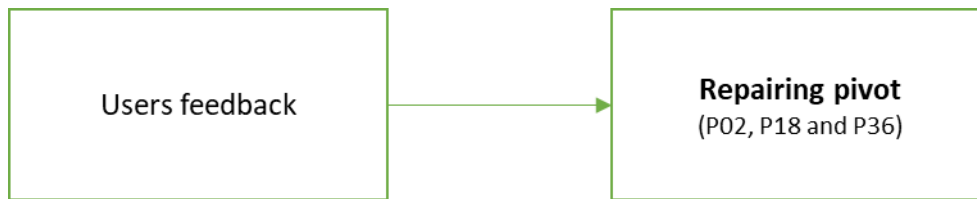


FIGURE 19 - USERS' FEEDBACK

In the next section, we explore market knowledge as an element enabling repairing pivots.

## Enablers

### 4.3.4. Repairing idea-work in response to new market knowledge.

Our empirical findings also reported that market knowledge<sup>12</sup> enables repairing idea work. Differently from the sections discussed before, our analysis of the pivots indicated nuances in what concerns the triggers and enablers. Our data demonstrated some entrepreneurs pivoting without a particular trigger, as they incorporated market information into their ventures and repaired their business model. Therefore, in this section we explore market knowledge as enablers of reparation of the ventures' idea work.

Our data indicated that mentors' advice on market access related to the product offering and that venture operationalization repaired their proposed solution. We recognize that mentoring is a common feature of the accelerator programme. However, what makes this section different from the others is that entrepreneurs actually incorporated these inputs directly into their business model, which, in turn, changed their proposed solution to a version more adapted to the problem they encountered. In the following paragraphs we draw some particularities of the incorporation of mentors' inputs.

Market access knowledge in regard to product offer refers to how entrepreneurs place their product or service in the market. Entrepreneurs in the very early stages had different channels to put their venture in the market with few possibilities to access throughout their products. In this line, we identified that strategic orientation in regard the venture structure helped entrepreneurs to start to test their product or services. In this line, S11 referred to clarification on their priorities and mentors' advice while S17 denoted mentor's guidance on their decision-making process and the alignment process with his/her co-founder as mentors' input.

<sup>12</sup> We followed the Denis & Depelteau (1985) definition of market knowledge where they refer to "knowledge that relates to: present and future demand and supply; competition and channels of distribution; payment conditions and transferability of currency among foreign markets." (p.75)

It is important to note that in part I of this chapter we explained that strategic orientations to the venture structure brought more focus to entrepreneurs, therefore, here, we examine the effects of these interactions for these early stages' entrepreneurs. For example, we noted that P11 learnt how to prioritise after assessing the path of their venture idea work. Therefore, we found that strategic orientations from mentors helped S11 (P11/P12) to make a conscious decision. As a result of it, P11 carried out a pivot narrowing down their product offering. Concretely, S11 shifted from the production of certain types of transformed flour to the production of cereals and biscuits. We have also identified that S11 shifted the target segmentation and the route to the market. We can capture P11 reappraisal of the venture idea when she/he described:

*"We (P11/P12) were going a bit all over the place, we lacked focus. Now we are more focused, especially in terms of products. We had a lot of ideas and we wanted to do everything at the same time. Now, we have reduced the things we wanted to do, and we have left the other things aside, and when the core business is well developed, we will think about developing other things. In the beginning we wanted to make flour... well, X number of products, now it's cereals, and biscuits, but mainly cereals. Now our evolution is that we are wondering if our products will please, and if we are able to do it. There is also the impostor syndrome, we are not agricultural engineers at all, none of us, but we realized that we knew how to cook good things, that we had very positive feedback." (P11).*

In analysing the reasons why this effort to refocus entrepreneurs has shaped the pivot described above, we note that the two companies were composed of two founders. As we discussed in section 4.3.2.3, entrepreneurs evolve their reflections over the idea work in different timings. In this line, we suggest that an external eye can bring this divergence of vision closer. For example, this can be seen when P11 reflected over the what they brought out from mentors' interactions:

*"...now we are more focused, especially in terms of products. We had a lot of ideas and we wanted to do everything at the same time. Now, we have reduced the things we wanted to do, and we have left the other things aside." (P11)*

Another element that emerged from S15's case was also demonstrated earlier in this chapter, however it is important to remember that misalignment can generate noise in communication that hinders the mutual advancement of entrepreneurs. This can be seen when P16 explained: *"It was a bit annoying to say to myself: "We are not on the same page, and it takes me too long to realise it".* Therefore, we found P11 refining their product offering and P16 replacing one product offering in order to gain the market.

Our empirical data also shows the importance of market knowledge in regard to operationalization of the ventures. This refers to how entrepreneurs implement their ventures, in regard to technology, legal structure and complex dimensions. Our data demonstrated that strategic

orientation helped them to clarify how to implement their venture and repair their venture idea work. For one entrepreneur, this was a linear process on understanding the costs of an app. P24 pitched a job search app venture aiming at engaging youngsters to his/her venture proposition. However, as we mentioned, after studying the costs of an app, P24 gave up on this app-based idea, reorienting to a physical structure promoting a place to share and learn about new jobs and opportunities. P24 replaced the channel of promotion of the venture, pivoting from an online application to a warehouse site in order to establish a direct channel of contact with its job-seeking customers. This can be seen in extract below.

*"At the beginning of the [project name] I was convinced, and the project when I entered the immersion phase was just a digital [job seeking] application that any young person from 18-25 years old, girl or boy, could use. And that is it, it was what it was before. **After the program, I changed back to a physical structure [idea], of a warehouse, a real physical meeting station, face to face like I do with you, basically human to human. Well, it [venture idea] changed, because I listened to what was said during the mentoring sessions. I was told that an application is very expensive and that you really have to think about the design of it because once it's done, there's no turning back and it's hard to correct it.**" (P24)*

External mentors have different expertise and knowledge about the market. Our data demonstrated the enrichment of these inputs in operationalising their ventures. For example, we found that understanding on the viability of B to C and the incorporation of several dimensions of value proposition to their business model helped entrepreneurs to repair their venture idea work. In specific, P21 clarified the impact he/she wanted and then gathered information about how to legally operationalise the venture. P21 changed his venture idea from being business to customer, to being a business to business solution. This was no different for P10, when this entrepreneur described to us the evolution of his venture idea work and incorporation of inputs from mentors and external partners. In this, P10 zoomed out the business model, aggregating other fields to her/how co-working space. We found that this expansion of the dimensions of the venture repaired his/her idea work. This can be seen in the exemplars below:

*"[...] had the opportunity to put light on it, to think about the impact, without thinking about the how at first, and then afterwards I came to the how. That is to say: ok, now that I have clarified what I want to do, I am sure that I want to do it and here it is, how I do it? And here [at this stage] I was looking for legal and financial skills also to find the solution. So, this is done, in fact, for example, at the beginning of the project, I had no certainty about how it could be done, legally, juridically, and today I'm at the point where I'm sure to affirm, I know how it's going to be done, and so on. [...] Beyond that, I have oriented my project towards a value proposition for companies, whereas at the beginning of the project I was more focused on a value proposition for individuals." (P21)*

*"We had started on a smaller scale project less focused on urban agriculture, this mix is at the heart of the project from the beginning, but here we really evolved to something much bigger,*

*with external suggestions [mentors and partners], with important partnerships, I think we really changed dimensions.” (P10)*

Overall, we observed entrepreneurs adapting their business model according to particular mentors’ inputs based on their market knowledge. We found market knowledge to be an enabler of the entrepreneurial pivot. Then, market knowledge for entrepreneurs is not the cause of a particular pivot, but rather a pre-requisite that allows entrepreneurs to develop their own strategies to make changes. Our data suggests that market knowledge is an empowering element that enables pivots.

Another issue that leads us to understand market knowledge as an enabler, rather than a trigger, is the entrepreneurs' lack of market knowledge. It’s worth noting that we recognize that entrepreneurs faced these types of suggestions and advice during the majority of exchanges with assigned and external mentors. However, in this section we found that as a result of interactions with mentors, entrepreneurs incorporated precise knowledge from the market, and then, strategically reoriented their ventures. For example, as we saw above, P21 performed a technological pivot based on the production cost of an app. This illustrates how market knowledge works as an enabler of entrepreneurial pivot. Furthermore, in specific to P10, S16 and P21, mentors’ inputs were a fundamental source of business and market knowledge. While this can be seen in the section 4.3.3 when P10 explained that she/he felt more self-efficient being surrounded by mentors since she/he lacks a business background, the exemplar below outlines the relevance of market knowledge for less experienced entrepreneurs:

*“When you haven't been to business school, you're a little bit in the syndrome of "there's a certain lack of things, you're going to be a little bit behind" because you don't have the business logic. So I think that the fact of being sufficiently well supported, of giving us tools on which we can practice” (P10)*

On the other hand, P24 had experienced another start-up programme before. In this line, we associate the mentors’ input to the openness to think about the social impact, as she/he wanted to develop it, combined with the inputs from a mentor who was a lawyer that gave him inputs about the legal innovation of her/his business, as we can see below.

*“I confirmed the legal model of the project, because I have a project that brings a legal innovation. [...] I had just come out of another support program where they told me: "who cares about the impact, what you need is to be profitable." Today, with [program name], therefore, I had the opportunity to put the spotlight on it, to think about the impact, without thinking about the how at first, and then afterwards I came to the how.” (P24)*



Furthermore, our empirical data indicated that market knowledge from mentors enables entrepreneurs to improve their venture idea work. This market knowledge was gained through strategic orientations to the venture structure. In specific, we put light on repairing idea work where S11 and S17 mentioned market access advice as enablers to repair their venture idea work, while P10, P21 and P24 referred to mentors' advice to operationalise their ventures that saw them adjusting their business model. In a certain way, we noticed that these pivots were "planned" and "pursued" by entrepreneurs who were seeking business knowledge to put their ventures into practice.

In this section, we explore how market knowledge shaped the creative process, as presented in figure 20. The entrepreneurs reported the incorporation of mentors' advice that guided, or confirmed, their next steps. It is noteworthy that in this section we do not discuss triggers, since they are not visible in entrepreneurs' social interactions. In this, our empirical data put emphasis on market knowledge as enablers of pivots, instead of triggers. Beyond that, we noted that some mentors' advice also demonstrated nuances of guidance, or need of focus, in entrepreneurs' mentoring. Oddly, this appeared with ventures composed of multiple members. This will be further unpacked in our discussion chapter.



FIGURE 20 - MARKET KNOWLEDGE

In the next section we conclude this section on whether to pivot or not to pivot.

4.3.5. Conclusion of whether to pivot and or not to pivot.

When analysing the outcomes of social interactions that generated pivots, we found that self-assessment triggered by mentors' questioning generated reengineering pivots, users' feedback incorporated to the venture idea work led to repairing pivots, and market knowledge worked as enablers of repairing pivots. In turn, we have also explored reluctance to entrepreneurial pivots associated with clarification of market needs – or the stage of the venture - and the focus on knowledge about setting up a venture.

Built on that, we have noted that mentors' suggestions and users' feedback were triggering reassessment of means, which, in turn, generated a pivot in the venture idea work. This corroborates with authors that argued that effectuation does not start from the reassessment of means (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Kerr & Coviello, 2019). This will be discussed in the following chapter.

We now conclude the empirical chapter.

## 4.6. Conclusion

In chapter IV we set out to empirically answer our research questions. In the first part, we focused on answering the first research question: *"What are the social interactions early stages entrepreneurs engage in?"* To do this, we zoomed in on the interactions between entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs and their mentors, and entrepreneurs and the community they were embedded in. Therefore, we elaborated the drivers of interactions where we discuss the entrepreneurs' drivers when they initiate interactions with others. After that, we examined the content and form of interactions where we refer to the questions about "what" and "how" entrepreneurs interact about.

Then, in the second part, we concentrated on answering empirically the second research question: *"How do social interactions shape entrepreneurial pivots?"*. In this second part of the empirical chapter, we scrutinized the outcomes of social interactions, *exploring* how social interactions feed entrepreneurs' venture idea work into pivots. We first identified outcomes of a co-creative acceleration. This was examined in an individual and collective dimension. In regard to the individual dimension, we found effective venture communication, entrepreneurial mindset, and self-efficacy. As outcomes to the collective, we identified social support, networking and peer partnerships. We have also encountered outcomes adding constraint to the social interactions. In this, we identified peer pressure and distrust due to impediments of mentors-driven interactions. When looking at whether to pivot or not to pivot, we found pivots in response to mentors' questioning, users' feedback, and market knowledge. Finally, we noted entrepreneurs' reluctance to pivot, and possible reasons associated with the outcomes of social interactions.

## Chapter V – Discussion and conclusion

The previous chapters presented our empirical results of the interactions that early stage entrepreneurs engage in, and the outcomes of these interactions in regard to the venture idea work. In this chapter, we discuss these empirical results, integrating them with the literature review presented in Chapter II. We follow the same structure as chapter IV, considering part I and part II. This means that we first discuss the drivers, content and form of entrepreneurs' social interactions and then we discuss the outcomes. We discuss some elements together, as their discussion with the literature converges. After the discussion, we draw our conclusions as to theory and praxis. As our study also had some limitations, we present them at the end of the chapter, followed by suggestions for further research.

### Part I - Drivers, content and form of entrepreneurs' social interactions

The starting point of this research was to better understand social interactions and their implications on venture idea work. In chapter II, we verified that social interaction is a key aspect of the venture creation process that is still underexplored in literature. In regard to effectuation theory, the majority of the studies either framed social interactions as a deliberated practice where entrepreneurs ask resources of others (Dew et al., 2018), or as an influence at the self-identity, cognition and subjective features of the venture creation process (Kerr & Coviello, 2019; Nielsen & Lassen, 2012; S. Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019).

Building on the abovementioned, we aim at answering the following question: *“What are the social interactions early stages entrepreneurs engage in?”*. In turn, in the second part of this chapter, we concentrate on the discussion of the outcomes of social interactions in order to understand the implication on idea work in the form of pivots.

When analysing our empirical data in chapter IV we noted some elements are coherent with the literature. Yet, we found some dissimilarities. In the next sections, we put the literature (chapter II) in dialogue with our findings (chapter IV), examining their convergences and divergences.

## 5.1. Drivers of social interactions

While social interactions are a key element of effectuation, most of the authors do not mention the drivers of these social interactions and the literature remains quite general at this level, when it argues that entrepreneurs “reach out” to others “*to obtain commitments, it is postulated they begin with proximal actors driven by mechanisms of (e.g.) homophily and embeddedness*” (Kerr & Coviello, 2019, p. 8). Similarly, Sarasvathy (2008), in most of her studies, explored that entrepreneurs initiate interactions with the closest stakeholders who come on board with their venture ideas. This suggests that entrepreneurs interact with others, driven by a systematic search for information about their context (Dew et al., 2018; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Kerr & Coviello, 2019). The literature on pivots seems to agree with this as entrepreneurs’ drivers are associated with knowledge and competences to validate their venture ideas (Flechas Chaparro & de Vasconcelos Gomes, 2021; Kirtley & O’Mahony, 2020).

However, reality seems a bit more complicated than what extant research suggests. Our empirical data demonstrates that entrepreneurs’ drivers vary according to the type of interactions they engage in. From our data, entrepreneurs interact with their peers because of affinities. We considered affinity when interviewees explained “drivers” associated with ‘approachability’ of peers and ‘sharing themes’ as entrepreneurs shared similar features in their ventures. In turn, we verify that interactions between entrepreneurs and mentors had, mainly, a prescriptive character, as entrepreneurs were assigned to a mentor by the acceleration programme. In reviewing interactions among all participants, we noted a sense of community in which entrepreneurs satisfied their needs of belonging, and consequently, reduced their feeling of loneliness. This is particularly evident in solo entrepreneurs, who turn to their entrepreneurial community to support their venture creation process. Nonetheless, this community worked as a source and place of enthusiasm, motivation and inspiration for the entrepreneurs.

Table 12 compiles what the literature suggests about the drivers of interactions and what we found in our empirical findings. Table 12 demonstrates how the literature is general about drivers of social interactions, while our empirical findings indicated that drivers vary according to the parties involved.

TABLE 12 - DRIVERS OF INTERACTIONS

	Chapter II – Literature review	Chapter IV -Empirical findings
<b>Peer-to-peer interactions</b>	<p><b>Literature is general about drivers of interactions.</b></p> <p>-Driven by self-selecting stakeholders that may come on board (Dew &amp; Sarasvathy, 2007)</p> <p>- Entrepreneurs reflect upon the task of interacting with each other ahead, as they aim to persuade stakeholders (Read et al., 2017).</p> <p>-Entrepreneurs systematically seek information from the context (Dew et al., 2018; Dew &amp; Sarasvathy, 2007)</p> <p>-Entrepreneurs interact to obtain commitments; starting with closest actors by homophily<sup>13</sup> or embeddedness<sup>14</sup> (Kerr and Coviello, 2019)</p>	- Driven by affinities; shared themes and approachability.
<b>Entrepreneurs-mentors interactions</b>		- Given the prescriptive nature, solid interactions only happened after finding affinity with mentor
<b>Community interactions</b>		- Driven by shared values and the idea of being part of a community

To follow our argument, we elaborate the discussion of the drivers in regards to each counterparty. We start by discussing the drivers on peers to peer interactions.

### 5.1.1. Drivers of peer-to-peer interactions

As we mentioned, our data reported that entrepreneurs interacted with their peers, driven by affinities. Our empirical findings demonstrated affinities when entrepreneurs described “drivers” associated with “approachability” and “sharing themes”. In parallel, the literature suggests that entrepreneurs initiate interactions in two ways; i) entrepreneurs interact to obtain commitments, starting with closest actors by homophily or embeddedness (Kerr and Coviello, 2019), and ii) entrepreneurs reflect upon the task of interacting with others ahead, as they aim to persuade stakeholders (Read et al., 2017). The first form is partially in accordance with what we found in our empirical data, as we found similarities between our view on affinities and homophily (Kerr and Coviello, 2019). Both drivers’ mechanisms consider like-minded people.

Yet, we noted a dissonance in that entrepreneurs interact to obtain commitments and/or systematically seek knowledge from the context. Very few entrepreneurs in our findings described having identified a peer with a particular expertise and reaching out to him/her. Our empirical findings demonstrated that this seems to happen more organically rather than being strategically thought out beforehand to reach out to others. In addition, we did not find entrepreneurs seeking out commitments. Yet, we recognised that entrepreneurs exchanged resources with their colleagues, and thus developed partnerships, but this was not the primary driver of their interactions. We associate

<sup>13</sup> *Homophily* is the tendency of individuals to associate and bond with others that are similar to them, as often we connect with similar voices and interact with like-minded individuals (McPherson et al. 2001).

<sup>14</sup> *Embeddedness* is explained considering that the economic phenomena do not happens in a vacuum. In this sense, the phenomena is embedded in a network of social relationships (Dufays & Huybrechts, 2014).

this lack of interest of entrepreneurs interacting with peers driven by resources, and search for commitments, with two issues; the (lack of) maturity of the ventures, and that seeking resources may be a skill. This idea of interacting with others as a skill is presented by Dew et al. (2018) who explain the “*effectual ask*” as meaning that entrepreneurs ask questions of a multiplicity of actors in order to orient their venture. This brings attention to how actively interacting with stakeholders may be a fundamental entrepreneurial skill during the venture creation process. In addition, this resonates with the (lack of) maturity and early stages of the venture creative process, as entrepreneurs may have less experience in the entrepreneurial world. Moreover, in our empirical data, we found that the acceleration programme stimulated interactions and mutual help through (i) *co-coaching*<sup>15</sup>; (ii) *social media workplace*<sup>16</sup>; (iii) “*tribus*” (*tribes*)<sup>17</sup>. This reinforces the idea that entrepreneurs were encouraged to interact and seek resources, as a form of teaching entrepreneurship.

Following the perspective that nascent entrepreneurs seek to initiate interactions with others with whom they have affinities shows that entrepreneurs seek the easiest way to reach others. These drivers seem to be facilitators of interactions, and we noticed that entrepreneurs were still interested in getting information from peers. In this, we observed that affinity drivers facilitate interactions as a form of guidance, and perhaps reassurance, during these early stages of ideation and prototyping phase.

In a similar vein, our data presented entrepreneurs with different backgrounds and stages of development. However, the aforementioned search for resources in peer-to-peer interactions was not observed. As we said, entrepreneurs did not initially perceive peers as a first option for resource mobilisation. We suggest that perhaps entrepreneurs perceived peers in the acceleration program as equals, instead of a source of pre-commitments or alliances. In this, we noted during the last seminar that very few entrepreneurs demonstrated interest in peers as a resourceful asset. Overall, the literature reviewed does not opine about this subject.

Building on the above, we suggest that peer-to-peer interactions are not driven by effectual logic as entrepreneurs interact mainly through the affinities among them. Alternately, we clarify the factors that drive peer interactions so that future research can better understand the antecedents of these interactions, and thus better understand the driving forces of interaction with others, which perhaps, can be learned. Furthermore, this may shed light on whether peers are perceived as a rich source of resources or not.

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<sup>15</sup> pairing up peers to create a follow-up dynamic and setting weekly goals

<sup>16</sup> one central online platform of exchange, also groups on WhatsApp and Facebook between the cohorts

<sup>17</sup> workgroups defined by the entrepreneurs to discuss a common specific issue.

### 5.1.2. Drivers of entrepreneurs-mentors' interactions.

As we mentioned, most of the literature is not precise about the drivers of interacting with mentors despite suggesting that entrepreneurs interact driven by homophily or, embeddedness (Kerr and Coviello, 2019) or they reflect in advance on the task of interacting with others to persuade them (Read et al., 2009). Our empirical findings indicated that interactions with mentors were mainly motivated by a prescriptive nature. Beyond that, very few entrepreneurs described that they solidified interactions with their mentors after they created affinities with them.

Following this, we suggest that entrepreneurs do not see mentors as allies or potential partners in their ventures, but rather as a strong source of knowledge. This can be linked to the prescriptive character of the relationship. When we look at Nielsen & Lassen (2012) who stress the mentors' guiding role in helping the entrepreneur to make sense of their ventures, we noticed that only a few entrepreneurs who solidified their relationships driven by affinity benefited from this directive character of the mentors.

In this line, our empirical data suggests that those entrepreneurs who have developed affinities with their mentors, and have ultimately been able to create stronger relationships, perceive their relationship with their mentors as being more valuable. In this way, they perceive their mentor as an ally in the development of their enterprise as P06 described: *“He[mentor] is really my red thread, when I really doubted, it was rather towards him that I would turn.”* This data point suggests the drivers of the interactions, when linked to affinities, are more associated with commitment and partnerships with their ventures as stressed in the effectuation literature. However, our data demonstrates that interactions are more driven by affinities rather than by the search of stakeholders to come on board (Dew et al., 2018; Read et al., 2009)

In line with the above, we suggest that entrepreneurs can develop this vision of entrepreneurs as allies by identifying the affinity with their project or by sharing common values. These entrepreneurs who developed closer relationships seemed to obtain more reassurance during the acceleration program.

### 5.1.3. Drivers of entrepreneurs-community interactions

Our empirical results indicated that the drivers of community interactions are aligned with the drivers of peer interactions, i.e. affinities. From our data, this was clear through the ease in interacting

with the members of the community. In this, we found broader perspectives on entrepreneurs interacting with the entrepreneurial group in a quest to join a community, to extend their network and to reduce feelings of loneliness. Our empirical findings are in line with the literature as the majority literature describes entrepreneurs interacting with others to obtain commitments (Dew et al., 2018; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007), starting with closest actors by homophily or embeddedness (Kerr and Coviello, 2019). For instance, while homophily refers to the tendency of individuals interacting with likeminded people, our data indicated some entrepreneurs (P14, P18 and P27) interacted clustering in tech groups, to create a social support between them.

It's noteworthy that effectuation theory conceives community as the context that surrounds the entrepreneurs (Sarasvathy, 2001). This relies on the underlying notion of effectuation that claims that entrepreneurs are embedded in their own social communities (Kerr & Coviello, 2019; S. Sarasvathy, 2001, 2008). That is to say, that the idea of embeddedness where entrepreneurs immersed in a network have social relationships is clearly found in the interactions with the community reported in our data. For example, entrepreneurs seek to join a community as they acknowledge that being part of a community where values and principles are shared among members allows them to quickly interact and exchange with one another. Thus, our empirical findings are aligned with this idea that venture creative processes do not happens in a vacuum, but rather in a dynamic environment in which entrepreneurs are embedded. Moreover, when looking at the revised literature, we found that this also resonates with Høvig et al. (2017) as effectual entrepreneurs engage in entrepreneurial communities with genuine interest of entrepreneurship stimulating the venture creative processes. Future research could better explore this link of effectual entrepreneurs and the enactment of future interactions with the community.

While our empirical findings on drivers of entrepreneurial community interactions are in accordance with the majority of the literature, we have observed that the reduction of loneliness of the entrepreneurs' venture is less apparent in the literature revised. However, as evidenced by our data, we contend that this is important as the creation of a new venture can be a long process in which nascent entrepreneurs may have to sustain energy levels over an extended period of time. As argued by Goss (2010), "emotional energy" defined as "*a long-term level of enthusiasm, personal strength, a sense of social connectedness, and/or willingness to initiate interaction*" (p. 210) is an important aspect of the venture creation process. A better integration of this aspect into effectuation theory could help us better understand the connected chains of interactions over time, as outcomes of social interactions (i.e. emotions, feelings and symbols) becoming inputs for the next interaction.

Our empirical findings demonstrate that drivers of interactions with the entrepreneurial community are associated with the uncertainties of starting a new venture. Since the majority of early



stage entrepreneurs begin this journey alone, having a community was an asset to provide reassurance and validation to their venture idea work.

## 5.2. Content and form of entrepreneurs interacting.

At the core of our research is the clarification of the social interactions that entrepreneurs engage in. The literature revised provided a broad perspective on what entrepreneurs seek and pursue during interactions with others. The effectual literature argues that entrepreneurs interact seeking resources, new information, and feedback to generate new means and goals (Arend et al., 2015; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001). These interactions with others is referred as “*Effectual ask*” by Dew et al. (2018) where entrepreneurs interact through asks, seeking for inputs<sup>18</sup>, in order to create pre-commitment and alliances (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007). In addition to this, interactions with others lead the co-construction of knowledge, of their identity, of their social capital, the spark of their ideas (Kerr & Coviello, 2019), and the evaluation of their means (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Kerr & Coviello, 2019). However, as previously mentioned, we observed that the interactions, besides being investigated at the context level, are more associated with intangible aspects of the venture creation process, thus being different from what we aimed at in this thesis, which set out to study interactions at a micro level to appreciate their impact on entrepreneurs’ idea work.

Our empirical findings focused in understanding the questions “what” and “how” of interactions with others. In this, we aimed to clarify the content and the form of social interactions entrepreneurs engage in. Therefore, we identified many consonances with the literature revised, however, we found few dissonances as we took a micro perspective to these social interactions. Table 13 aggregates results of our empirical findings and literature revised in order to shed light of the specificities we found in our data to bring clarity to the reviewed literature.

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<sup>18</sup> Inputs may include intangibles - advice, introductions to network contacts - and tangible assets - resources such as customer orders, supplier materials, labor, and money.

TABLE 13 - CONTENT AND FORM OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

	Chapter IV -Empirical findings	Chapter II – Literature review
<b>Peer-to-peer interactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entrepreneurs asking for resources</li> <li>- Entrepreneurs giving resources</li> </ul>	<p>Entrepreneurs interact seeking resources, new information, and feedback generating new means and goals (Arend et al., 2015; Dew &amp; Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001).</p> <p>Entrepreneurs interact with other in order to create pre-commitment and alliances (Dew &amp; Sarasvathy, 2007)</p> <p><i>“Effectual ask”</i> - Entrepreneurs interact, as an expertise, through asks seeking for inputs (Dew et al. 2018)</p> <p>Entrepreneurs interact with others leading to the co-construction of knowledge, of their identity, of their social capital, the spark of ideas(Kerr &amp; Coviello, 2019) and the evaluation of their means (Fischer &amp; Reuber, 2011; Kerr &amp; Coviello, 2019).</p>
<b>Entrepreneurs-mentors interactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Counselling about the venture structure</li> <li>- Interactions in support of the venture idea work</li> <li>- Interactions helping individual self-reflection</li> </ul>	<p>Dialogues in group that creates collective sensemaking (Grimes, 2018; S. Sarasvathy &amp; Ramesh, 2019)</p>
<b>Community interactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discussion in group</li> </ul>	<p>Entrepreneurs interact to accumulate inputs in order to adjust the venture idea work(Kirtley &amp; O’Mahony, 2020)</p>

We begin by discussing the content and form of peer-to-peer interactions.

### 5.2.1 Peer-to-peer “asks”

Our empirical findings demonstrated peer-to-peer “asks” as two-way interactions between entrepreneurs asking and giving a variety of resources according to their needs. This is in accordance with the literature revised (Arend et al., 2015; Dew et al., 2018; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Kerr & Coviello, 2019; Kirtley & O’Mahony, 2020; S. Sarasvathy, 2001, 2008). However, our empirical results move the literature forward by shedding light on the resources asked and given during the very early stages of social venturing.

Our results have shown that entrepreneurs asked for resources through advice on tools and materials, marketing communications and feedback to their venture. In turn, entrepreneurs give resources thought the provision of recommendations on the venture structure, advice on technical skills and communication. These peer-to-peer “asks” are associated with entrepreneurs interacting in the search for resources, new information, and feedback (Arend et al., 2015; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001; Dew et al. 2018). At the same time, peer-to-peer asks in our data suggests the co-construction of knowledge (Kerr & Coviello, 2019) and the accumulation of inputs in order to adjust

the venture idea work (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2020). This is clearly shown in our data when P26 collected suggestions from her/his target audience during a test of her/his prototype. Therefore, our empirical findings clarified that knowledges are co-created and that resources are exchanged during these social interactions. In this, our data shown that during peer-to-peer interactions, early stage entrepreneurs ask and give advice on venture communication, venture structure, use of tools and materials, while also exchanging feedback about their venture idea work.

In regard to peer-to-peer interactions, the literature has indicated that entrepreneurs report their decision-making process to their peers (Arend et al., 2015). In this, our findings go beyond the idea of self-report by demonstrating that peer-to-peer interactions also consist of resource exchange. Peer-to-peer asks demonstrated that entrepreneurs interacted organically in seeking input from their peers. This, in turn, resonates with Høvig et al.'s (2017) findings, which noted that effectual entrepreneurs in support programmes perceive inter-tenant networking as high-value contacts in the search to boost their venture. Moreover, this reinforces the idea that entrepreneurs who interact more with their peers, perhaps, are more susceptible to the added value of the interacting with them.

Furthermore, our empirical data on peer-to-peer "asks" indicated the spontaneity when entrepreneurs ask and give resources. From our data, this is associated with the fact that advice to other peers takes place during informal conversations about their venture idea work. In this issue, Dew et al. (2018) mentioned that interaction with others creates a natural spontaneous feedback for an entrepreneur. This notion of informalities and spontaneity in social interactions demands a focus on situated social interactions (Chalmers & Shaw, 2017). This mean that it requires further focus on particular social interaction, rather than the broad vision of social interactions we gather in our data collection.

In conclusion, our empirical findings advance the perspective on peer interactions, as our data indicates that entrepreneurs who engage in these interactions have a bidirectional sense. This means that while they ask, they receive, when they give, they are asked. This situation requires further attention, as entrepreneurs initially exchange resources, and as our data showed, this can be transformed into collaborations and social support to others. This will be further developed when we discuss social support.

### 5.2.2 Mentors strategic orientations

When looking at the literature revised, we have not found mention on the interaction between entrepreneurs and mentors, coaches or advisors. Both literatures, effectuation and pivots, refer to

interactions in which entrepreneurs accumulate resources and inputs from stakeholders to aggregate to their ventures. An exception to this is Grimes (2018), who investigated how entrepreneurs incorporated feedback after these mentoring and pitching session. On the other hand, the content of these interactions was less explored. Therefore, our empirical findings bring more clarity to what is exchanged in mentors' strategic orientations as a support to entrepreneurs venture creative process.

Our empirical findings reported that entrepreneurs interacted with mentors through strategic orientations, precisely, in regard to three matters: i) venture structure, ii) venture idea work and iii) individual self. While the first one refers to directive orientations, the last two are more associated with reflective dialoguing. Our data demonstrated that these interactions generated relevant inputs and reflections that entrepreneurs incorporate in their venture's idea work. However, when looking to these three elements of these strategic orientations, we found that the literature covered this, referring to this general idea that entrepreneurs interact seeking resources, new information, and feedback (Arend et al., 2015; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001). In the following paragraphs we detail the discussion of these interactions in regard to the content, in line with our research goals.

In regard to the venture structure, we found counselling interactions where mentors advised entrepreneurs through sharing of their experiences and tips to structure entrepreneurs' venture. In this, our data demonstrated that early stage entrepreneurs received tacit and explicit knowledge about the business model structure, financial means, communication, focus on during creating the venture, and legal structure. When looking at the literature revised, these types of resources and how this new information exchanged are not precisely explained. Nevertheless, we found similarities with Kirtley & O'Mahony's (2020) argument that entrepreneurs seek to accumulate inputs to their venture idea in order to generate future changes. In this, we observed that entrepreneurs interacted with mentors in order to gain information on how to set up their venture, for example. Moreover, considering that entrepreneurs interact to add and/or remove constraints from their venture creative process (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005), our data suggests that mentors can be a source of information that adds and removes constraints on the venture as the entrepreneur seeks to make the venture viable. In turn, our data puts emphasis on the role of mentors' expert knowledge in providing structural tips to the venture instead of seeking knowledge from potential clients, customers and similar. Our findings shed light on the mentors' role in facilitating the incorporation of external inputs, for example.

When looking at strategic orientation in the venture idea work, our empirical findings demonstrated that mentors questioned entrepreneurs' venture idea work and encouraged entrepreneurs to pursue their creative process. From our findings, entrepreneurs were confronted with a range of questions in regard to their market fit, and the public addressed by their venture. This,

in turn, helped entrepreneurs to align their proposed solution with the features of their venture. These empirical findings indicated that entrepreneurs were encouraged to reflect over these elements in order to adjust, criticize and replace aspects that initially, perhaps, were set as essentials. It's worth noting that effectuation literature treats the idea of venture idea work as being more associated with the transformative aspect of means and goals where entrepreneurs evolve through commitments and alliances (Arend et al., 2015; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001). The literature does not mention strategic orientation, however, authors have argued that in regard to the interactions they engage in entrepreneurs reassess their means and goals (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Kerr & Coviello, 2019) and increase their entrepreneurial "means" about how to produce their product (Akemu et al., 2016). In this line, our empirical data indicated that strategic orientations from mentors have this role in supporting the reassessment and increased awareness of entrepreneurial means. This brings the relevance for the role of an external mentor in this process of making sense of entrepreneurs' idea work.

In a similar line, the abovementioned resonates Jiang & Ruling's (2019) notion of "information processing" where entrepreneurs interact and negotiate with stakeholders in their venture idea work. Our data suggests that mentors play a role in this information processing as they put their expertise in practice to help entrepreneurs make sense of their ventures. This is broadly echoed by Fischer & Reuber (2011) when their empirical findings reported that entrepreneurs "*appeared to be cognitively triggered to assess the means available to them after spending some time interacting with others*" (Fischer & Reuber, 2011, p. 8). Nevertheless, this is not further explored in regard to the role of a mentors or entrepreneurs' information processing.

Our empirical findings have also demonstrated that the individual self is a matter discussed within mentoring sessions. Our data reported that mentors encouraged self-assessment practices, emphasizing entrepreneurs' self-assessment to align individual drivers and the venture idea work. In turn, this illuminated entrepreneurs' interests and competences. Effectuation literature does include this notion of individual self-assessments that arise through interactions and entrepreneurs co-construct "*knowledge, identity, and social capital within and across network levels*" (Kerr & Coviello, 2019, p. 15) and as form to enact an entrepreneur's inner learning process (Nielsen & Lassen, 2012). Nevertheless, only recently the literature highlighted the need to address both issues of venture idea work and individual self-identity together (Grimes, 2018). While this can be further researched to understand the intertwining of individual self and idea work during the entrepreneurial process, our data clarifies how this process happens, as entrepreneurs are questioned about their personal drivers and encouraged to self-assess in order to adjust their venture idea work.

We then conclude that our empirical data provides more clarification about the resources and information gained during interactions between entrepreneurs and mentors. Our data confirms that entrepreneurs seek resources and information to create the venture, and at the same time, we provide more clarification of which resources are sought, and how this happens.

First, we found that inputs about the structure of the venture provide clarification to the next step of the venture creative process. Second, we propose to the existent literature that practices such as “challenging” and “questioning” entrepreneurs about their venture idea work and personal drivers can enhance self-reflection, and may potentially transform the venture idea work. This, in turn, reinforces the idea that entrepreneurial means are reassessed after interactions with other (Akemu et al., 2016; Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Kerr & Coviello, 2019). Third, we acknowledge that the effectual literature discusses the self-identity of the entrepreneur (Kerr & Coviello, 2019; Nielsen & Lassen, 2012), however our data highlights the relevance of the alignment between personal and professional drivers in order to create a robust venture idea-work.

### 5.2.3 Collective interactions

Our empirical findings demonstrated that peers come together in groups and shared informally technical knowledge, experiences and feedback to their venture idea work. In this, we found collective resource-sharing and collective sensemaking while entrepreneurs discussed and reflected on their venture idea work. Our empirical findings demonstrated that these group discussions increased the movement of back and forth between reflective observation and incorporation/exclusion of elements to entrepreneurs’ ventures. We found that our results are in consonance with recent literature that is bringing this notion of collective into social interactions.

Our empirical results (P11, P28, P23 and P28) are aligned with Grimes’ (2018) empirical findings since peer-to-peer informal dialogues after mentoring sessions can shape the attention and intention of entrepreneurs’ venture. For instance, in our data, as a result of group discussion, P18 has facilitated the way he/she presented the venture idea work and P28 came out with her/his idea as a result of discussion with colleagues. In turn, this echoes with Kerr & Coviello’s (2019) findings about collective cognition influencing entrepreneurs’ behaviours, which arises through the sharing of knowledge and development of ideas and goals.

Taking this perspective of Kerr & Coviello (2019) on the co-construct knowledge while interacting, our data demonstrated that as a result of group discussion, peers (P23) incorporated an idea of packaging to their venture. The literature has recently called attention to these collective dynamics and intangible aspects of exchanging with others (S. Sarasvathy & Ramesh, 2019). Sarasvathy &

Ramesh (2019) proposed that what comes out of entrepreneurial interactions is not simply a combination of possibilities already existing within each entrepreneur, but a transformation of possibilities or realities. This is where these group discussions are situated. Our empirical data (P02, P04 and P23) indicated this as entrepreneurs created small groups to ask for other's opinions, and reflect on their business ideas.

In a different line, our data has also demonstrated that these moments in groups created a moment to take a breather during the very fast pace of the venture creative process. This is associated with the idea of putting things in perspective. We have not found any literature that addresses this issue. Alternatively, Fischer & Reuber's (2011) empirical findings reported that entrepreneurs appear to cognitively reassess their means and goals, after interacting with other. We associate this "moment of respite" with interactions with others, as we saw in our data that this happened after interacting with others, and entrepreneurs reflected over their capabilities and venture idea work. Our field notes suggest the relevance of these moments in association of the self-assessment of entrepreneur's drivers, ventures tasks, and feeling of overwhelming at the venture creative process.

Beyond these reflective discussions, our empirical data also demonstrated that these discussions also influenced entrepreneurial rhetoric. P02 mentioned that during these discussions, other peers shed a light of the relevance of parsimony on her/his speech as P02 works on a venture about energy consumption measurement. This exemplifies how collective cognition may support entrepreneurs' venture. This echoes with Grimes (2018) which argued that feedback helps to improve the rhetoric and clarify how entrepreneurs communicate their venture idea work, besides the collective sensemaking.

We conclude then that discussions in group can be a fruitful for the entrepreneurs as they share and co-construct knowledge and meaning of their ventures. The literature has only recently addressed this issue, while leaving aside a relevant research avenue on collective sensemaking. Besides that, the respite moments during the venture creative process are also not addressed in the literature revised, we propose that this could be an interesting research avenue to reflect on how entrepreneurs find their pace and gain reassurance sharing with others.

## Part II - Outcomes of entrepreneurs’ interactions

After discussing the drivers, content and form of interactions that early stage entrepreneurs engage in, we now turn to the discussion of the outcomes their social interactions. In this, we use the pivot as a marker of change in the entrepreneur's venture idea work considering that: i) pivot relies on interactions with the context to gather information (Kerr & Coviello, 2019) and, ii) it helps us to identify social interactions since the pivot is a form of marker for entrepreneurs. While we aim to answer the question “How do interactions shape the entrepreneurial process?”, we put emphasis on various elements that emerged from the results of social interactions.

When analysing our empirical findings, we found that some elements are congruent with the literature. Yet, we found some dissimilarities. In the next sections, we put the literature revised in chapter II in dialogue with the empirical findings from chapter IV, examining their convergences and divergences. Table 14 denotes our empirical findings and the literature revised. This bring more clarity to the particular aspects of the outcomes that influences the venture idea work.

TABLE 14 - OUTCOMES OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

	Chapter IV -Empirical findings	Chapter II – Literature review
<b>Outcomes of social interactions</b>	<p><b>1) Co-creative acceleration</b>  <i>Individually</i>                      -Effective venture communication                      -Entrepreneurial mindset                      -Self-efficacy</p> <p><i>Collectively</i>                      -Social support                      -Networking                      -Peer partnerships</p> <p><b>2) Adding constraints</b>                      Peer pressure                      Distrust due to impediments</p> <p><b>3) Pivot or not to pivot</b>                      -Defending idea work                      -Reengineering idea work (mentors questioning)                      -Repairing idea work (users’ feedback)                      -Repairing idea work (market knowledge)</p>	<p>-Expansion of resources, adding constraints and creating partnerships. (Dew &amp; Sarasvathy, 2007)</p> <p>- Co-construction of knowledge, of their identity, of their social capital, the spark of ideas(Kerr &amp; Coviello, 2019)</p> <p>- Reassessment of their means (Fischer &amp; Reuber, 2011; Kerr &amp; Coviello, 2019).</p> <p>- Incorporation of feedback in the venture idea work (Grimes, 2018)</p> <p>6Collective sensemaking (Grimes, 2018; S. Sarasvathy &amp; Ramesh, 2019)</p> <p>-Accumulation inputs in order to adjust the venture idea work (Kirtley &amp; O’Mahony (2020); Akemu et al. (2016)</p>



### 5.3. Co-creative acceleration

#### i) Individual-dimension

##### 5.3.1. Effective venture communication.

Pitching is one of the most well-known techniques to present a venture to investors, competitors and stakeholders. Our data reported that, as a result of interactions with others, entrepreneurs gained more abilities to deliver their message. In specific, our empirical findings demonstrated that the participation in different sessions - such, as speed dating, mentoring sessions, pitch sessions and information presentations of their ventures - entrepreneurs clarified their message and adjusted their discourse in accordance with the public. Afterwards, our findings demonstrated that entrepreneurs created effective venture communication as a result of social interaction with others. While Dew et al. (2018) referred to pitching as the process to obtain resources, Grimes (2018) investigated feedback taken from pitch sessions, reporting that investors' input can be additive or subtractive to the venture idea, as entrepreneurs add or remove un/necessary elements of their venture idea work. Overall, our empirical data is in accordance with the literature revised.

Moreover, effective venture communication echoes with the majority of the literature of effectuation, as entrepreneurs expand their resources (Arend et al., 2015; Dew et al., 2018; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001). Looking to our data, entrepreneurs increased their knowledge based means – communication skills - by intensified interaction with others. For example, P02, P24 and P06 learnt how to present their venture and deliver a clear message to the public they faced in response to the feedback from others. In this, our data suggests that practicing entrepreneurs' pitch and presentation skills also influence the clarity of the venture idea work. Moreover, this contributes to the deliberate practice of asking presented by Dew et al. (2018). We clarified the “what” and “how” entrepreneurs interact with others, where entrepreneurs systematically present their venture idea work to persuade stakeholders and obtain new inputs, improving venture communication. Furthermore, our thesis also shed light on communication skills as a relevant resource at the early stage of venture development, as authors aimed for more clarification on exchange within interactions (Dew et al., 2018).

These findings also resonate with the collective aspect of idea development. While Corner & Ho (2010) argued that the venture is nurtured by a multiplicity of actors engaged in the issue with their knowledge, Weerakoon et al. (2019) demonstrated that interacting with stakeholders resulted in skill input. Our data showed that the constant presentation of the venture idea work helps create effective venture communication. In turn, this generates a clarification of the elements of the venture idea. Therefore, our findings suggest that increased communication skills shape the presentation of the idea

work that clarifies elements that constitute the venture. Our findings move forward the clear link between the outcome of social interactions and the venture idea work.

### 5.3.2. Entrepreneurial mindset.

As a result from interactions with others, our empirical findings reported entrepreneurs gaining an entrepreneurial mindset. This occurs after entrepreneurs comprehend the processes, steps, and, as they called, the philosophy that composes venture creation. We observed that entrepreneurs became more aware of the trial and error logic in venture creation after understanding the venture's life cycle. When looking at the literature revised, this trial and error logic is aligned with effectual behaviour, as authors explained that entrepreneurs are in a constant process of seeking information while they experiment with their venture (Arend et al., 2015; Read et al., 2009), seek to achieve a sustainable entrepreneurial path (Grégoire & Cherchem, 2019; Perry et al., 2011; S. D. Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005), and seek to create new product to succeed in major innovation (Arend et al., 2015; Coviello & Joseph, 2012; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007).

Similarly, this trial and error logic echoes with the notion of pivots, as entrepreneurs learned through experimentation of the customers' problems, needs, and preferences, considering the proposed solution (Boddington & Kavadias, 2018; Ries, 2011). Overall, our empirical data put emphasis in this trial and error logic as an entrepreneurial mindset that can be learnt throughout social interactions. This also contributes to the idea of teaching effectuation (Grégoire & Cherchem, 2019), as interacting with others can be a matter of entrepreneurship teaching and mindset.

Our findings demonstrate this logic of "trial and error", suggesting the idea of evolutionary journey of the venture while demystifying entrepreneurs as "heroes". This is in accordance with Sarasvathy's (2008) principles on effectuation theory, as she focused in developing a logic that anyone could be an entrepreneur by understanding the effectual process and principles (S. Sarasvathy, 2001, 2008; S. D. Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005). Following this idea of trial and error, Grimes (2018) has also evoked that interactions with other may shape entrepreneurs' directions and perceptions of the ventures. In this issue, Grimes (2018) suggests that those entrepreneurs who embrace the idea of entrepreneurship as a "game" or as a "sport" have more proclivity to the revision of their venture idea work. Therefore, while our data indicated that entrepreneurs embraced the entrepreneurship journey through this logic of trial and error, it in turn, shows that entrepreneurs are, perhaps, more likely to accept failure and setbacks. However, our thesis did not appreciate the connection between trial and error logic and the proclivity to pivot.

Our data has also demonstrated that this trial-and-error logic is associated with self-efficacy. In the literature revised, Kerr and Coviello's (2019) study shows that social interactions influence cognitive attributes of the entrepreneurs, while, similarly, de la Cruz et al. (2018) argued that interactions reflected on the self-identities of entrepreneurs. This resonates with our findings as entrepreneurs comprehend entrepreneurial ways of thinking, after interacting with others, and then, become more aware of how to create their ventures. In this, we found associations between the increased entrepreneurial mindset and self-efficacy. Our data indicated that some entrepreneurs who gained a better comprehension of the venture creative process have also boosted their self-efficacy. This aspect will be further discussed in the next section.

We conclude then that gain an entrepreneurial mindset entails increasing entrepreneurial means in two intertwined aspects. First, in regard to knowledge-based means, as entrepreneurs acquire knowledge about the path and process of venture creation. In this, our data demonstrates that entrepreneur learn that failure and setback are common to the venture creative process. Therefore, as a result of it, entrepreneurs increased their identity-base as they accept this idea failure and mistakes as part of the process of setting up a venture, and they become more reassured and conscious in moving ahead with their venture creative processes.

### 5.3.3. Self-efficacy

Our empirical findings reported entrepreneurs boosting their self-efficacy in reaction to interactions with their mentors and the community. This demonstrated that entrepreneurs increased their trust in accomplishing tasks and implement their venture idea work. In our data, self-efficacy nourished entrepreneurial means as a result of interactions with the community and the learnings of the venture creative process. First, as an outcome of community interactions, entrepreneurs reduced their feeling of loneliness as a perceived community support helped in their confidence. While entrepreneurs increased their understanding of the venture creative process, as we mentioned in the previous section, they accepted more potential failure which, in turn, motivated entrepreneurs to become more proactive and task-driven. This means that self-efficacy is a result of social interactions with others that increased effectual means. Agreeing with this, Goss' (2005) findings showed that individuals can learn the nature of business venture through interactions with self-confident experts. Similarly, Nielsen & Lassen (2012) demonstrated that throughout interaction and feedback from others, entrepreneurs learn what it entails to become an entrepreneur. Overall, our data is aligned with the literature revised as entrepreneurs increase their self-efficacy after interacting with experts from the context and acquired knowledge of venture creative process.

Moreover, when considering self-efficacy as a resource, our data again resonates with the majority of the literature on effectuation, as entrepreneurs expand their resources (Arend et al., 2015; Dew et al., 2018; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001). While our findings on self-efficacy as an outcome of social interactions seems to not have direct effect on the venture idea work, we found that self-efficacy works as an enabler of entrepreneurial change. For instance, P36 noted that after the acceleration programme, they felt confident to test the venture and adapt it if needed. This shows that self-efficacy may trigger future refinement of the venture idea, if entrepreneurs are up to experiment their ideas and collect more information from the context, for example. In this, our findings also resonate with Kerr and Coviello (2019) on collective cognitions as a result of social interactions. Therefore, we acknowledge that a better understanding of the entrepreneurial role may enable entrepreneurs to reassess and improve their business. This seem in consonance with recent literature that associates components of effectuation and self-efficacy (Hinz, 2017).

Overall, the literature revised tended to not explicitly refer to self-efficacy. Our empirical findings demonstrate how self-efficacy may be a relevant component of the effectual process in order to make entrepreneurs expand their resources and test their ideas (Arend et al., 2015; Dew et al., 2018; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001). Nevertheless, we incite the relevance of effectual behaviour in entrepreneurial self-efficacy. In this, we suggest that as entrepreneurs systematically interact with others, they gain more understanding of the entrepreneurial role and therefore may become more self-effective. However, the literature has not yet developed a robust link between these two elements in which our research demonstrates association.

## ii) Collective-dimension

### 5.3.4. Social support

Our empirical findings reported that entrepreneurs obtained social support as a result of interactions with others. Our data demonstrated the feeling of reassurance and comfort as a result of regular follow up conversations and attentive listening among cohort members and mentors. This helped entrepreneurs to move forward with their venture creative process. The literature revised does not mention explicitly the concept of social support. However, when looking at effectuation literature, Sarasvathy & Dew (2005) indicated that entrepreneurs are embedded in an environment of uncertainty which make entrepreneurs rely on the means of who they are, what they know, and whom they know. In this line, our data showed that entrepreneurs rely on those who they know that may

provide reassurance and social support. Nevertheless, this is not explicitly exposed in the literature of effectuation.

Following that, we identified in the revised literature that Mair & Noboa (2006) indeed evoke, and briefly discuss, social support as trust and cooperation derived from social networks. These authors reported social support as an enabling factor in the social venture creative process. Mair & Noboa (2006) associate it to the facilitation on the provision of resources needed to engage in social venture creation. We did not treat social support in this way, our perspective to frame social support in our data associated the social support to day-to-day exchanges that supported entrepreneurs in the venture creative process, rather than entrepreneurial intentions suggested by (Mair & Noboa, 2006). However, our findings demonstrate association of social support to entrepreneurial behaviour, as entrepreneurs felt reassured and kept moving onward with their venture idea work. Future research may better explore the link between social support and the early stages of development of a venture.

In regard to social support creating this feeling of reassurance in entrepreneurs, we found P10 referring to entrepreneurs who encountered difficulties coming to her to discuss their challenges, and she adopted a quasi-maternal role to her peers. This demonstrates that entrepreneurs who struggled were seeking a certain form of comfort or reassurance. Since the literature is underexplored about this issue, we put forward the relevance of reassurance and the feeling of comfort of entrepreneurs as contribution of our thesis. Our data reported that this reassurance may sustain entrepreneurs in the uncertainties of the early stages of venture development. This relies on the idea that socially supported entrepreneurs may be more resistant to discontinue their venture. Future research could explore the impact of peers and community in comforting and reassuring entrepreneurs in the venture creative process. We suggest that social support may reduce the overwhelming feeling of the venture creative process and enable entrepreneurs to expand their resources, for example.

Still in this issue on comfort and reassurance, we found that this may be associated with individual entrepreneurs' emotions. Widening the literature reviewed, we found studies that may support this discussion such as Cardon et al. (2012) who investigated entrepreneurial emotion referring to feelings and emotion as antecedent to, concurrent with, the venture creative process, or Shepherd (2015) who sheds light on the relationships between emotion and cognition to enhance entrepreneurial action. This can bring more robustness to the effect of social support in the venture creative process.

We conclude that social support is a facilitating feature of the outcomes of social interactions that enact the entrepreneurial creative process. We found very few studies referring to it, while we note that social support can be an avenue for further research in the entrepreneurial context, as an enabler aspect of the entrepreneurs refine their venture creative process.

### 5.3.5. Networking

We found empirical evidence that corroborates that an increased network of contacts is an outcome of social interactions. Our findings showed that entrepreneurs formed a wider network due to the introduction to community members, and also, that they activated their network to introduce their peers to new actors. This resonates with the outcomes of interacting with others in effectuation literature as entrepreneurs expand their resources and attempt to create potential alliances (Arend et al., 2015; Dew et al., 2018; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; S. Sarasvathy, 2001) and change the organisation of their network (Kerr and Coviello, 2019). Nevertheless, our data demonstrates how this happens in a snowballing effect as entrepreneurs found easy in contacting and being introduced to other member of the community.

This also echoes with Høvig et al. (2017) findings that *“entrepreneurs with an effectuation approach altogether have a high proclivity to form networks”*(p.9). This is also suggested by a number of other authors such as Galkina & Chetty (2015), Perry et al. (2011) and Sarasvathy (2001). Moreover, the increased network also resonated with the idea explored in the literature review that effectuation enables the social entrepreneur to consider the resources constraint as a factor to increase network and boost the venture creation process (Corner & Ho, 2010; Malsch & Guieu, 2019). Considering that early stage entrepreneurs are resource constrained, our empirical findings reported an ease in entrepreneurs interacting with others member of the community, which, in turn, demonstrates this idea of seeking resources in environments of resource constraints. In this line, our data suggested this tendency of effectual entrepreneurs interacting among themselves and the entrepreneurial community. Yet, it is worth noting that this was not a matter of scrutinization in our thesis, however, our findings indicate that this can be further explored by other researchers.

Kerr and Coviello's (2019) findings also reported that interacting with others generates collective cognition, which arises through the sharing of knowledge and development of ideas and goals, and the shape the structure of network structure. Following that, our empirical findings show agreement as entrepreneurs demonstrated that being introduced to members of the community resulted in relevant inputs to their venture idea work and introductions to other new stakeholders. This demonstrates that increasing their network led to the assessment of shared means and intensifies the relationship with potential stakeholders. Thus, our data suggests that networking may affect the venture idea work.

### 5.3.6. Peer partnerships

We found empirical evidence of entrepreneurs creating partnerships with peers such as entrepreneurs joining forces in order to accomplish a venture task. Effectual literature argues that entrepreneurs interact with others seeking commitment from stakeholders (Kerr & Coviello, 2019; S. D. Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005). Following this line, the literature argues that those stakeholders who are interested to come on board, as first clients, partners or providing resources to the venture, are considered committed stakeholders (Arend et al., 2015; Spedale & Watson, 2014). Our data is in consonance with this as entrepreneurs created these collaborations within the members of the acceleration program.

Stakeholders commitment also takes place in the on-going process of experimentation (Spedale & Watson, 2014). When looking at our data, we identified P23 who submitted a joint project with P25 as an opportunity to P25 prototype her/his venture idea work. Similarly, P04 organized a first event of her/his venture with a partner association that made possible to test her/his venture idea work. This, in turn, resonates with effectual logic of entrepreneur that focuses on creating partnerships and strategic alliances with stakeholders and/or competitors rather than taking over their market (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Sarasvathy, 2001).

However, in our data we found these pre-commitments can manifest in partnership, or collaborations, at a single project, or venture task, that may provide individual knowledge to entrepreneurs without necessarily impacting the venture idea work. This can be seen in P26 who developed a collaboration with an alumnus, which provided different inputs to P26's venture. However, the venture idea work and its features remained the same. In a similar perspective, our data resonates with Weerakoon et al. (2019) that social entrepreneurs do not primarily seek commitments, instead they *"apply existing combinations of resources to develop a solution to the challenge identified initially."* (p16). This puts emphasis on collaboration rather than in precise commitments with those who take on board entrepreneurs' venture ideas, as effectual literature describes (Kerr & Coviello, 2019; Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005). Conversely, this idea of peer partnerships may be associated with a certain type of relational commitment. While these relational commitments could be further explored by researchers, we incite the investigation of these collaborations in effectual literature as an alternative, or complementary approach, to the logic of commitments that are sometimes scarce in early stage venture creation.

Although our empirical evidence showed that entrepreneurs who had a high propensity to share among themselves, our data indicated a limited tendency to create partnerships internally (among peers) in incubators. In specific, we found seven entrepreneurs partnering to accomplish a

venture task. This is in line with Høvig et al. (2017) findings that reported entrepreneurs in incubation programmes perceive the internal network resources relatively low value, even though they engage into exchanging with them. This also resonates with Reymen (2015), who argues that entrepreneurs are open to the involvement of others, as committed stakeholders, but the authors do not quantify the commitments. This reinforces the idea mentioned above about collaboration, and not precisely commitments established by entrepreneurs in their very early stages of development.

The literature revised argued that stakeholders bring access to resources and reduce uncertainties while shaping entrepreneurs' venture direction (Read *et al.*, 2009). In this, our data does not present these changes on the venture idea work based in networking, and we found that networking bring resources that support the venture creative process in developing a venture task. We identified certain types of labour inputs<sup>19</sup> from partnerships - for example, our data shows how collaborating took place in the form of training sessions for a peer venture, or an afternoon working on the ventures' strategy, or on the business model. This appears as relevant steps in the first stages of the venture creation process.

## 5.4. Adding constraints

### 5.4.1. Peer pressure

While interactions with cohorts may inspire and motivate entrepreneurs, our empirical data has also referred to entrepreneurs driven by peer pressure who rushed their creative process, and ended up burning key stages of their venture's development. In this, entrepreneurs suffered from a momentary reduced flow of their venture creative process, since they had to rework parts of their ventures. Social interaction is considered a key component of effectuation theory, however, only a few papers have zoomed in on this specific aspect of the effectuation process (Mansoori & Lackeus, 2020). While the acceleration programme aimed to promote exchanges between peers who were in different stages of development as a form of motivation to peers, our data brought the attention to the reverse effect of these peer-to-peer exchanges.

While effectuation theory denotes that entrepreneurs add constraint to their venture ideas as a result of social interactions. This is a way of drastically reducing possible changes in the future, while at the same time restricting who can and cannot be admitted into the stakeholder network (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; S. D. Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005). Therefore, these constraints are results from inputs

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<sup>19</sup> Labor inputs refers to the employment of work hours and human capital.



and the search for information about the context. Effectual literature indicates that these constraints are associated with external aspects of the venture creative process, such as environmental context, market and opportunity-based information (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007). Nevertheless, our results shed light on constraints that can result from social interactions that trickle down the development of the venture. Following that, Reuber et al. (2016) have suggested that interactions may stabilize and destabilize the entrepreneurs' shared understanding when they over-engage in interaction with other.

On this issue, Fischer & Reuber (2011) argued a certain type of "*effectual churn*" as an ongoing unproductive cycle of interactions without progressing in the effectual process. These last findings suggest that entrepreneurs may not always benefit from effectual cognitions as they over-engage in interactions with others, without advancing to behaviours that result in their desired outcomes. Our data suggests that over-exchanges with peers or being misled during these exchanges may create a setback on the venture creative process, as entrepreneurs do not move forward as they planned. For example, P05 described to us that, inspired by more advanced entrepreneurs, she/he tried to speed up the development of their venture. As a result, P05 found that her/his market analysis was superficial and after the six months of support, P05 found herself/himself redoing the market research from scratch to understand the market she/he intended to address. At the same time, this echoes with the trial and error logic of effectuation (Spedale & Watson, 2014), however the influence of peers in this trial makes us reflect on the peer pressure beneath the exchanges with peers. This means that at the same time that it is common to have setbacks during the venture creative process, we wonder if these setbacks may be increased by this feeling of rush or speed up, motivated by advanced stages entrepreneurs.

From a pivot perspective, McMullen (2017) and Hampel et al. (2019) have suggested that while entrepreneurs need to collect and guide the venture by costumers' responses, they have to pay attention to not pivot away their passion and the core goal of their venture. When looking at a social interaction's perspective to our data, we found that peer pressure should be perceived as a point of attention to entrepreneurs when interacting with others in order to pay attention to their tasks and accomplish their ventures. In this, we suggest that this pressure may rush the development of the venture into unplanned directions.

In conclusion, our empirical data sheds light on nuances of negative effect of peer interactions, as entrepreneurs felt this pressure to keep up the evolution of their venture idea work.

#### 5.4.2. Distrust due to impediments in mentors' driven interactions.

While in the previous section we discussed peer pressure that added constraints to the flow of venture creative process, in this section we discuss distrust that created constraints in interactions with particular stakeholders. We shed light on impediments after interactions caused distrust in later interactions between entrepreneurs and their mentors. In our data, these impediments are reported as lack of mentors' technical expertise, lack of regularity in exchanges, and lack of affinity with the mentor. This, in turn created a trust-damaging relationship. These trust damaging behaviours are poorly explored by effectual literature. While effectuation argues that entrepreneurs engage into interactions with self-selected stakeholders, we found that in reality, entrepreneurs interact with a wider range of stakeholders, and sometimes prescribed interactions – such as those with mentors - the relationship may be compromised when impediments rise. This suggests that this selection process of stakeholders happens organically when entrepreneurs interact with others while impediments and distrust may be present throughout the selection of who is and who's not engaging in the venture creative process.

The acceleration programme put regular mentoring sessions in place, stimulating interactions between mentors and entrepreneurs, in order to support and advise their venture creative process. However, we found that some entrepreneurs developed distrust toward the mentors who lacked the features they sought. For example, P18 exposed the lack of value in their mentors' suggestions since the mentor had no technical expertise to add to his/her venture and, therefore, did not provide substantial inputs. This, in turn, resulted in entrepreneurs, like P18, not reaching out to mentors for further advice on their ventures. Overall, effectuation theory is not compatible with distrust. Effectuation is based in reaching trust-based flexible stakeholder agreements and commitments (Sarasvathy, 2008). In this line, the literature put emphasis in the relevance of creating trust between stakeholders and entrepreneurs, focused on the individual and not in the development of the opportunity (Burns et al., 2016). Therefore, trust appears as a pillar to networking activities and stakeholder engagement (Galkina & Chetty, 2015).

Few authors demonstrated that trust-damaging behaviours may terminate relationships between business angels and entrepreneurs (Maxwell & Lévesque, 2014). Following this, our findings demonstrate similar results, but in regard to entrepreneur-mentor relationships. We observed a lack of interest among entrepreneurs in later interactions with mentors in our data, even in incorporating their inputs once they discredited their advice. Therefore, our data indicates that these trust-damaging behaviours may also impact other stakeholders beyond the financial support from business angels, Maxwell & Lévesque (2014) argued.

In conclusion, our empirical findings illuminated these trust damaging interactions that rise from initial interactions with mentors. While effectuation uses trust to reduce uncertainty, further research may explore the impact of these trust-damaging interactions to the venture creative process and its impact in the relationship with the mentor.

## 5.5. To pivot or not to pivot

In this section we focussed the discussion on how social interactions shape entrepreneurial pivots in order to explore the elements that trigger and enact pivots. It is important to note that instead of looking at the small evolutions of the goal, and the pre-commitment established in the venture creative process, we concentrate on the entrepreneurial pivots to understand the effect of social interaction on the venture idea work. Entrepreneurial pivots are celebrated among entrepreneurs as they appear as a substantial change in the venture creative process. Therefore, using pivots as a marker simplifies the investigation of how social interactions that shape venture idea work evolution (Ghezzi, 2019).

When looking to the outcomes of social interactions, we found mentors' questionings, users' feedback as triggers and market knowledge as enablers for entrepreneurial pivots. However, when we put the trigger in dialogue with the literature, we found nuances between trigger and enabler. To this, we considered trigger as something that causes another thing to start and we refer to enabler as something, or someone, that allows or makes it possible for putting into action.

Therefore, in the following sections, we discuss mentors' questionings and users' feedback as triggers of entrepreneurial pivots and market knowledge as enablers of entrepreneurial pivots. In addition to this, we found entrepreneurs who were reluctant to pivot because of their venture stage and the focus on gaining business knowledge.

### 5.4.1. Defending venture idea work

Our findings demonstrated entrepreneurs defending their venture idea work. Specifically, we found that this reluctance was associated with: i) clarification of the market need in relation to the early stage of ventures' idea work and ii) justification of the venture as entrepreneurs focussed on gaining knowledge of how to implement the venture. Our data demonstrates alignment to this as Grimes (2018) argued *"although mentors had suggested significant changes to the ideas, these founders were unwilling to implement them"* (p35). In this, Grimes (2018) argued that entrepreneurs who defend their venture idea work into efforts to clarify, justify and expand their venture idea work.

Therefore, our data demonstrates consonance with what the literature suggests about the process in which entrepreneurs defend their venture idea work in efforts to clarify, justify or expand assumptions of their creative idea.

Nevertheless, while Grimes (2018) investigated precise feedback to the venture idea work, we looked at social interactions. Considering our broader perspective, we perceived that constraint in the social interactions may be associated with this reluctance to pivot. For instance, our empirical data demonstrated that distrust in the relationship with the mentor may be associated with defending venture idea work while entrepreneurs put effort to expand entrepreneurial knowledge. In a similar line, our results also indicated that the idea of rushing into venture tasks because peer pressure may be associated with defending approach to their ventures as entrepreneurs seek to clarify their market analysis.

Two elements that we paid attention in our data are the pivot culture and the flexibility to change the idea of the entrepreneurs' strategy. In terms of the pivot culture, we found that this culture is strong in accelerator environments where entrepreneurs are encouraged to pivot as a way of demonstrating progress in venture development. Therefore, in regard to pivot culture, our data is in line with the literature review covering this issue (Hampel et al., 2019; McMullen, 2017)

With regard to flexibility to pivot, it is worth noting that this is not the subject of our thesis. However, we found that most entrepreneurs were flexible to this change, with the exception of P26 and P27 who claimed that they had no interest in pivoting at this stage of development. In this line, Palmié et al. (2019) reported that flexibility in the venture creative process may be associated with entrepreneurial logics used. These authors indicated that leaders who follow causation tend to engender inflexibility. In this line, our data suggests that effectual entrepreneurs, those who are more inclined to interact with other, have more flexibility. Nevertheless, more research on this topic is needed. Future research may clarify that the entrepreneurial logic used by entrepreneurs may influence the performance of pivots.

### Trigger vs enabler

In investigating the triggers of the pivots in light of social interactions, it became clear that some entrepreneurs pivoted without particular social interaction-related triggers, as their market knowledge enabled the incorporation of information into their ventures leading to business model adjustments. Therefore, taking this closer look, we identified that other entrepreneurs had more visible triggers that were linked to the reappraisal of their ventures in the light of self-assessment and users' feedback.

Looking at the literature, we find that the vast majority still interchangeably use the idea of triggers and enablers (Boddington & Kavadias, 2018; Grimes, 2018; Kirtley & O’Mahony, 2020). However, recently, Flechas Chaparro & de Vasconcelos Gomes (2021) have referred to knowledge as an enabler rather than a trigger. Thus, we discuss the outcomes of social interactions by classifying them as triggers and enablers

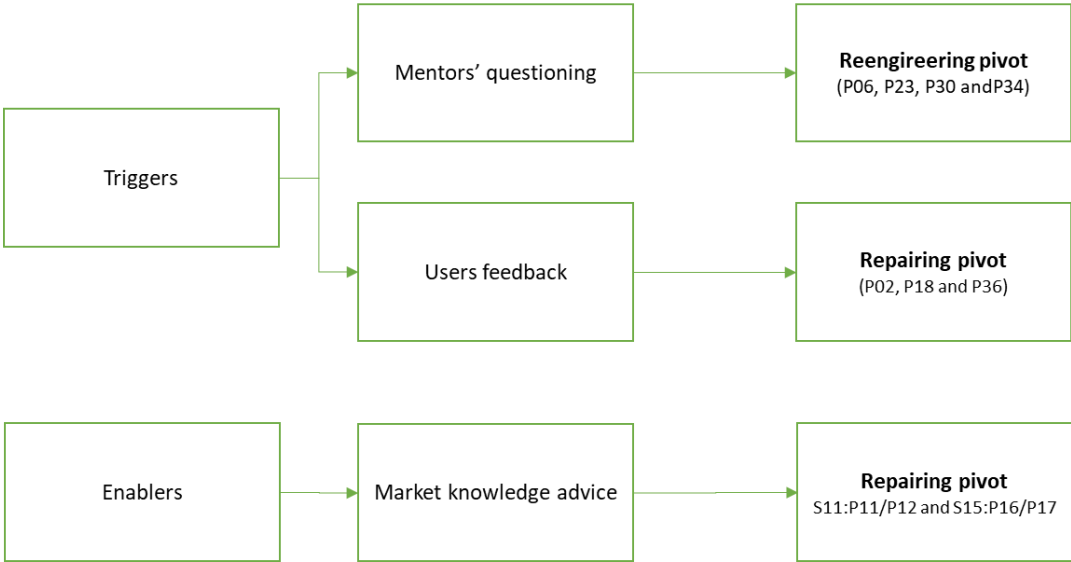


FIGURE 21 - TRIGGERS AND ENABLERS

Thus, in the following sections we discuss these nuances defining the differences found in our empirical data.

*Triggers*

5.5.2. Mentors’ questionings triggering re-engineering idea-work

Our empirical findings reported entrepreneurs’ reassessing their entrepreneurial and individual means after being questioned by mentors. In specific, our data demonstrated that questionings through the form of criticism (P30, P34) and advice (P23, P06) triggered self-assessments which, in turn, led entrepreneurs to criticise and/or replace aspects of their business model. Grimes

(2018) calls this form of pivot a re-engineering pivot. Therefore, our findings associate questioning social interactions with re-engineering pivots.

The notion of social interactions triggering reassessment aligns with the latest investigations on effectuation processes that indicated that there is no starting point of the effectuation (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Kerr & Coviello, 2019; Kitching & Rouse, 2020). Our findings are in line with recent findings in the literature on effectuation, in which it is explained that the process of effectuation has no starting point in the reassessment of means. (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Kerr & Coviello, 2019; Kitching & Rouse, 2020). In this issue, for example, our data (P23, P06, P34, P30 and P13) showed that social interactions trigger reassessment of entrepreneurial means in light of mentors' contributions. In specific, our data (P06 and P23) demonstrated that entrepreneurs clarified relevant aspects of their ventures enacted by contributions that encourage self-assessment of entrepreneurial and individual means. In this microprocess, our data illuminated that entrepreneurs went through the clarification, and/or strengthening, of their entrepreneurial means, and then, self-assessment dynamics that, finally, oriented the choice of the next step of the venture creative process. This also resonates with Jiang & Ruling (2019) as entrepreneurs juggle during exchanges between external real-time information and internal real time information in order to process and make sense of information acquired. Overall, our study brings more empirical data to the recent findings of effective literature in which we illuminate the relevance of social interactions, and the potential to trigger the re-evaluation of entrepreneurs' means. Besides that, we have also presented links of social interactions outcomes with the information processing presented by Jiang & Ruling (2019).

Our findings also indicated that throughout social interactions, entrepreneurs increased the awareness of their entrepreneurial means. In this, our data (P06, P23, P30 and P34) demonstrated how advice is a relevant resource to guide entrepreneurial self-assessment. For instance, mentors pointed out that P23 team had the competences required to develop the product they envisioned. After that, P23 reassessed with the team and it became clear of the possibility of producing a hybrid product. In this issue, social interactions increased the awareness of entrepreneurial means that triggered a reengineering pivot. This is in consonance with Boddington & Kavadias (2018) and Kirtley & O'Mahony (2020) as these authors recognise that new information may trigger considerable strategic reorientation. In a similar vein, Grimes (2018) suggested that these clarifications are a result of the "*breadth*" of the venture creation experience in which the interplay between the reappraisal of the venture idea and how the entrepreneur perceives himself in regard to the venture idea work. Our research findings resonate with the aforementioned, however, and our data has presented more clearly the potential of social interactions in bringing light to individual resources.

In different parts of this thesis, we have shown that social interactions help entrepreneurs to make sense of their venture idea. While stakeholder interactions are emphasized as an important activity that drives the goal of the emerging venture (Dew et al., 2011; Reymen et al., 2017; Sarasvathy, 2001; Wiltbank et al., 2006), we observed that “interactions with others” are more complex than entrepreneurs actively engaging with the context uncertainty by being reactive to information and leveraging existing means (Read, Song, and Smit, 2009; Sarasvathy, 2001; Wiltbank *et al.*, 2006) or “asking” others information (Dew et al., 2018). As we have seen in chapter II, effectuation literature has investigated social interactions as a mode of action (Dew et al., 2018) to mobilise resources (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Fisher, 2012) which also shapes entrepreneurial identity (de la Cruz et al., 2018; Nielsen & Lassen, 2012). This is present in our empirical data (section 5.2), which also underlines the potential of social interactions in making sense to ventures idea work and individual self.

Following this line, effectuation literature begins to show indications of the relevance of the topic when Kerr & Coviello (2019) noted that interacting with others generates collective cognitions which arise through the sharing of knowledge. Similarly, Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019) suggest the importance of intersubjective aspects of interacting with others where entrepreneurs do not combine resources but transform resources by interacting with others. At the same time, our findings also demonstrate that entrepreneurs add or remove constraint to their venture considering the self-assessment of their ventures (Read, Song, and Smit, 2009; Sarasvathy, 2001; Wiltbank *et al.*, 2006) Therefore, this evolution of effectuation literature is displayed in our results. Our empirical data (P23, P06 and P30) corroborates with Kerr & Coviello (2019) and Sarasvathy & Ramesh (2019) as we found entrepreneurs making sense of how to reorganize the venture structure throughout interactions with others. In specific to this, P06 told us how the mentors' questioning and guidance helped her to make sense of her self-identity and thus incorporate it into the work of her enterprise idea, while being reassured during this process of creating the enterprise.

Our findings (P06, P23, P30 and P34) demonstrated that the practice of questionings or interrogation during interaction with others triggered substantial change in the venture creative process. Borrowing Grimes' (2018) perception on pivot, we identified that entrepreneurs (P06, P23, P30 and P34) performed a re-engineering pivot as they criticized or replaced relevant elements of their venture creative process. This also echoed with Kirtley & O'Mahony (2020), who explain that new information may conflict with or expand entrepreneurs' beliefs and assumption and result in strategic addition or exit. As such, the notion of questioning that we argue in our thesis resonates with Kirtley & O'Mahony (2020), as entrepreneurs, after questioned, seems to assess their beliefs and assumptions. While our findings resonate with the revised literature, our research highlighted this practice of “questioning” that stimulates self-assessment during entrepreneurs' journey. In this line,

our findings suggest that considerable information emerges from these mentors' questioning practices.

Aiming to improve further research on this topic, we suggest that entrepreneurial pivots are not only triggered by social interactions, but that they are composed by different conditions that make the entrepreneurs strategically change. Even so, we concentrate on and highlight the social interactions that triggered the pivots, and our empirical findings corroborate with the vision that pivots emerge from a multiplicity of information, as Kirtley & O'Mahony (2020) argued. In this we recognise that other elements such as mentor's legitimation (P30), venture maturity (P23), entrepreneurial flexibility (P13), attachment to the venture idea work (P34), and personal traits (P06) perhaps are composing elements of this evolution. We suggest that these elements could be avenues for future research.

In conclusion, we reinforce the idea that questionings (Politis et al., 2019) and idea sharpening feedback (Grimes, 2018) may trigger entrepreneurial pivots. In this, our empirical results put emphasis on how social interactions may shape entrepreneurial pivots, widening the perspective of pivots as results of market interactions and customer's information. We highlight the role of external factors in supporting how entrepreneurs make sense and process this information.

### 5.5.3. Users-feedback triggering repairing idea work

Our empirical results have also demonstrated entrepreneurs pivoting based on feedback from potential users. These users were market actors such as associations, companies and potential clients that adjusted or validated venture assumptions (Drucker, 1995). This is in consonance with the effectuation and pivot literature, as both literatures suggest stakeholders' interactions to gain more knowledge about the context. In other words, our data is aligned; with the stakeholders market approach of effectuation theory (Dew et al., 2018; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Lackéus et al., 2016) and with the notion that pivots emerge from knowledge from the context (Boddington & Kavadias, 2018; McDonald & Gao, 2019).

In specific, our data (P02, P18 and P36) highlighted entrepreneurs incorporating the needs of their potential customers into the proposed venture. This aligns with the perspective that pivots are engendered by environmental factors (Flechas Chaparro & de Vasconcelos Gomes, 2021) in which entrepreneurs respond to external challenges such as customer preferences. In this, the pivot emerged from the interaction between the entrepreneur's offer and the market need. This also allows



experimentation and flexibility which are also in consonance with the trial and error logic of effectuation theory (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007).

When looking to other elements associated with social interactions that nourished the pivots, we have also verified that our data indicated a twofold role of mentors: as, clarifiers of the venture path, and as “motivator” to boost entrepreneurs towards the prototype of the venture. This shed light on how externals nourish entrepreneurial change, helping entrepreneurs to make sense of these inputs, as we mentioned in section 5.5.1, and motivated entrepreneurs to move to next step. We suggest that this sense of support may also provide reassurance to entrepreneurs, as we mentioned in the section 5.3.4. Therefore, reassurance and motivation appear as potential nourishment to entrepreneurial pivot. The literature does not mention much about reassurance and motivation. In this, we identified in literature that authors have initiated discussions on the influence of emotion, feelings and cognitions in enhancing entrepreneurial action (Cardon et al., 2012; Shepherd, 2015). This may be a stream to further justify reassurance and motivations as elements that lead to entrepreneurial pivots.

In this section, we confirm what the broad literature of effectuation and pivot argue that knowledge from the context is central to venture idea work evolution (Boddington & Kavadias, 2018; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007). In addition to this we also suggest that reassurance and motivation are fuel to changes in the entrepreneurial process, in which future research can lean on to provide more empirical findings.

## Enablers

### 5.5.4. Market knowledge enabling repairing idea work

Our findings demonstrated that market knowledge was an enabling element of entrepreneurial pivot. In specific, our data showed that P11 and P17 mentioned market access advice as enablers to repair their venture idea work, meanwhile, P10, P21 and P24 referred to mentors’ advice to operationalize their ventures that repaired their business model. Entrepreneurs incorporated mentors’ business inputs directly into their business model, which, in turn, changed their proposed solution to a version more adapted to the problem they encountered. These findings are in accordance with the majority of the literature, however, it shed light on the need of further clarification of effectual literature.

We understand that effectuation represents a strategy of how to become an entrepreneur based on strategic interactions with the market (Sarasvathy, 2008). In this line, effectuation proposes

that entrepreneurs interact to aggregate knowledge about the market and their business in order to put it into practice. Effectuation literature is comprehensive in this sense, where it generalises that entrepreneurs seek information and resources (Arend et al., 2015; Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007). However, when using effectuation as mode of action as suggested by Grégoire & Cherchem (2019), we verified that effectuation theory needs clarification in what is considered market knowledge.

Early stage entrepreneurs in acceleration programs are embedded in a resource-based knowledge ecosystem. However, we perceive that the literature somewhat leaves aside the notions of business knowledge to implement the venture. Our findings places relevance on knowledge to pivot the venture idea work and launch it. Therefore, our data sheds light on particular market access knowledge as an enabler of the pivot, as mentors' advice helps entrepreneurs to transform ventures' ideas and market inputs into a viable venture. For example, P21 noted that knowledge about the viability of an innovative legal entity allowed the pivot to happen, since the entrepreneur was not aware of this possible legal structure. In this, we suggest that market access knowledge is relevant for early venture entrepreneurs, and at the same time, we suggest that effectuation literature could provide more clarification of the types of market knowledge needed to create entrepreneurial action more aligned to the stage of the venture development. Therefore, our thesis incites that market access knowledge is exchanged in effectual asks (Dew et al. 2018) at the very early stages of social venturing.

In another vein, we contribute to Flechas Chaparro & de Vasconcelos Gomes' (2021) discussion of potential enabler of pivots, pointing out that market access knowledge can enable entrepreneurial pivots. This also reinforces the idea from Kirtley & O'Mahony (2020) on the accumulation of different decisions to perform a pivot, as the market inputs and entrepreneurs' ideas were also present at triggers of pivot. Yet, our findings demonstrated that market access knowledge was an enabler of repairing pivots as it permitted the feasibility of the changes in the venture idea work.

Following that, our data brings the attention to the role of externals in the process of making sense of information during entrepreneurial pivots (Jiang & Ruling, 2019). For example, our empirical findings demonstrated that entrepreneurs pivoted oriented by mentor's guidance on their decision-making process (P11) and the alignment process with his/her co-founder (P17) as result of mentors' interactions. While we acknowledge that effectuation is an actors-dependant logic, the entrepreneur is embedded in a context where she/he received a diversity of inputs and resources. This sheds light on the need for more explanations on how entrepreneurs incorporate and make sense of these external inputs. Following that, effectuation literature refers to accepting, gathering, and incorporating unexpected feedback and information, leading to changing paths of the venture creation (Galkina & Chetty, 2015; Reymen et al., 2015). Nevertheless, we suggest that effectuation literature focuses on

the rough vision of the evolution of entrepreneurial goals leaving relevant details of how mentors' business orientations help entrepreneurs make sense of their means and goals.

Effectuation depends primarily on the search for co-operative commitments through interactions with potential partners, suppliers, customers and other stakeholders. Thus, while recognising that this is embedded in the context and the idea is to provide a comprehensive theory of entrepreneurial expertise. We perceive a complementary feature since our thesis sheds light on knowledge that helps entrepreneurs operationalise their ventures, and the literature on the subject is global.

The reality of venture creation seems more complex. Using an analogy to explain, it is not because we have paints, brush and canvas that we will know how to paint but, rather, it takes orientation, skills and tools that provide learnings for an individual to do a great piece of work. With regard to our thesis, this is visible in our empirical findings, as our data showed that market access advice helped entrepreneurs to include inputs to their venture idea work.

## 5.6. Contributions to theory and practice

### 5.6.1. Contributions to theory

Our research was an effort to clarify the social interactions of early stage entrepreneurs and to demonstrate how social interactions help shape the venture idea. As we saw in chapter I, authors have called for more research on social interactions as a central theme of the entrepreneurial process. As well, other authors have suggested that social interactions play a relevant role in the development of business creation. We found that our research was successful in clarifying interactions and demonstrating how social interactions may lead to pivots.

Exploring the complexity of everyday social interactions that entrepreneurs engage in, gave us a broader understanding of the drivers, the form and the content of early stage entrepreneurs' social interactions during venture creative processes. This has also helped us to understand what entrepreneurs brought with them out of these social interactions into their venture idea work. We defined a clear link between social interactions and pivot, as entrepreneurs make sense of their venture idea work. This thesis contributes to the literature of effectuation in clarifying the resources exchanged in the very early stages of venture formation, and the applicability of pivots in effectual process as a useful tool to make effectuation logic operational in practical behaviours.

Our first contribution to effectuation theory is the understanding of what is exchanged in early stage venture creation when it comes to interacting with others. Peer-to-peer asks demonstrated that entrepreneurs in early stage venture creation ask and give advice on venture communication, venture structure, use of tools and materials, also exchanging feedback about their venture idea work. Moreover, our findings complement effectual literature demonstrating the role of mentors' strategic orientations at counselling the venture structure, reflections on the venture idea work and individual self. In addition to this, our results demonstrated that collective interactions also are present in these early stage interactions as entrepreneurs interact with others, sharing resources and making sense of their ventures. Our goal was not to generalise the everyday social interactions, but to understand what happens in very early stages interaction of entrepreneurs in an acceleration program.

Our second contribution refers to the further outcomes of entrepreneurs interacting with others. Although part of our findings demonstrate consonance with the literature revised, we contributed to the literature, bringing relevance to: communication skills in building up a clear vision and communication of the venture; entrepreneurial mind-set and self-efficacy in constructing elements of the entrepreneurial persona. In turn, this shed light on the relevance of reassurance and comfort to entrepreneurs to continue the venture creation process. Emotions in entrepreneurial process seems to provoke quite an impact in entrepreneurs and venture, however, literature remains scarce on the subject. Other outcomes of social interactions identified in our study such as networking, partnerships and social support were also present in our empirical findings that demonstrated an impact on the collective group of entrepreneurs. This has also reinforced the idea of reassurance as a crucial element for entrepreneurs in very early stages of development. By putting these outcomes together, we obtained an overview of the complexity that social interactions provide as resources to entrepreneurs and their ventures.

Our third contribution to the literature stems from the connection of social interactions and pivots. The central goal of this thesis was to create associations between what and how entrepreneurs interact about and the reorientation of venture idea work pivots. Part of our findings demonstrated that outcomes of social interactions trigger pivots and others enable the pivot to happen. This brings clarification to informational signs that led to particular entrepreneurial pivots. In this, we highlighted that mentors' questioning triggers larger ventures' idea changes, while users' feedback suggested more adjustments to the venture creative idea.

Existing literature about social interactions remains broad and general focusing mostly in intangible aspects of the social venturing. This thesis narrows the links between outcomes of social interactions and entrepreneurial pivot. At the same time, they shed light on the impact of social interactions in the venture idea work, which seems to be present all along the early stages of social

venturing. This thesis presented several types and outcomes of social interactions to bring more effort in the investigations of the interplay of social interactions and venture idea work.

### 5.6.2 Contributions to practice

Several entities, such as nascent entrepreneurs, managers, staff-members, founders, support organizations and policy makers, may benefit from the theoretical enlightenment to define, develop and enhance practices on ground. As we mentioned, we also aimed at providing recommendations to practitioners that are vital to the development of entrepreneurial ventures.

Nascent entrepreneurs and support programmes should bear in mind the relevance of social interactions. Interacting with others may be a resourceful tool to gather information and reflect over their venture idea work. We verified that peers may exploit more of the resource sharing practices to gather expertise from the background of these peers. Moreover, we noted that entrepreneurs can nourish themselves from the strategic orientations offered by legitimized mentors. At a first sight, we observed that support programs may need to increase mentoring performance by better aligning profiles of entrepreneurs and their assigned mentors. We acknowledge that in fast-dynamic environments it may be difficult, but our data suggests that this can improve the interactions and engage entrepreneurs in their venture creative processes. Yet, entrepreneurs should be aware about the relevance of debriefing, self-reporting, and dialoguing with peers and managers about the inputs received. This seems to create a strong collective sensemaking in to entrepreneur's venture idea work.

This being said, we recognise that communication skills and the development of entrepreneurial mindsets are relevant for nascent entrepreneurs. While entrepreneurs need to bear in mind these abilities, support programmes may drive them during entrepreneurial learning. We noted that the sense of community and the social support were crucial to reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed during venture creation. These mechanisms can create a trusting and fruitful environment for entrepreneurs to create change and improve their skills and idea work. We also bring the attention to trust damaging behaviours that may "disrupt" relationships and the flow of the venture creative process. We understand that all interactions may not flow the way we wanted, however, we find it important to encourage proactivity to allow entrepreneurs to find different ways to resource themselves.

We find it important to mention that pivot seems to be a combination of internal and external elements that create the spark to change the venture. We encourage organisations to promote some of the elements abovementioned in order to provide this fruitful environment to change. At the same

time, we encourage interactions that help entrepreneurs reflect on their ventures, and we shed light on the relevance of knowledge that permits these changes. Some pivots were mainly enacted by accurate knowledge from the market that should be available to entrepreneurs.

Additionally, support organisations must be aware, and establish a clear communication with entrepreneurs to understand their perceived and actual needs. We recognise that acceleration programmes are tailored for very early stages of venturing; however, the pace that entrepreneurs take during the early stages is different, and this should be managed closely. Moreover, as the acceleration programme proposed, we find it important that support organisations stimulate internal and external interactions among entrepreneurs. This seems to provide a relevant asset to entrepreneurs to create entrepreneurial thinking, reduce loneliness and be reassured to take the next steps of their ventures.

## 5.7. Limitations

Limitations apply to our research in regard to the data collected. Most of the data collected was self-reported, and some entrepreneurs did not answer all the questions of the interview. The social interactions and the outcomes discovered from the data were entrepreneurs' own perceptions and attributions. Also, we gathered data on the internal ecosystem of the acceleration program, and if we collected data from external mentors, alumnus and external partners' perspectives, the results might be different. We had this in mind while collecting data, however, we only had access to the participants' perspectives during the data collection phase.

Moreover, analysing past events on pivots and outcomes of social interactions required reconstruction and recalling. Through time, the perception that we have in the phenomenon may change. In cases where entrepreneurs performed only small changes or did not pivot at all, it was even more difficult to recall and concentrate on the facts of the past events. That is why it was so important to triangulate the data, but in some cases, it was not possible since, sometimes, the interview on the second round did not happen.

Conducting a research in two languages was a limitation. Once we adopted a translation system, we developed a dictionary for similar words and expression that made the data analysis more comprehensive. In addition to this, translation was a time-consuming word that impacted on the conduction of the third round of interviews. Therefore, the initial third round planned became informal emails with entrepreneurs to make sure we had the same understand of the evolution of their ventures.

## 5.8. Suggestions for further research

### i) Effectuation Literature

From our empirical results, we comprehended the social interactions nascent entrepreneurs engage in. On one hand, researchers in the future may choose to focus on the analysis of particular actors – peers, mentors, advisors, angels, program managers, etc - entrepreneurs engage with acknowledging that they are immersed in the context. This can bring more clarity to the vision and role of the context in effectuation literature. Still on this, our research demonstrated, for example, that peer-to-peer interactions and mentors' drives are still underexplored in effectuation literature. On the other hand, we believe in the collective aspect of interacting with other during venture creation process, mainly by the examination of the impact of collective sense-making in venture creation. Further investigation in this sense is needed in order to bring more consistency to the reflective dialoguing affecting the venture idea work.

We acknowledge the need for more qualitative research on the types of social interactions. Thus, a call for research into questioning and counselling interactions can help understand the process of incorporating ideas into enterprises. However, due to the complexity of the topic, an in-depth case study on the situations that occur in these interactions can bring more knowledge to effectuation theory on how, and why, entrepreneurs re-assess their means and goals.

Moreover, researchers may pay attention to peripheral elements of the venture creative process such as reassurance, comfort and emotion that affect the development of the venture. At the same time that effectuation relies in trust, we comprehend that trust-damaging behaviours may affect the interactions, and, therefore, the evolution of entrepreneurs' reflections. Future research may reveal different venture development in those who enhanced social support and reassurance and those who do not. Our findings reinforced the relevance of these elements in early stage entrepreneurs.

Further research may explore the differences of pivoting in effectual and causal logic. We call for more investigation, alignment, between entrepreneurial methods, as our research put emphasis in effectuation theory and pivots.

## ii) Pivot literature

Social interactions appear crucial to entrepreneurial pivots. Future research may examine the role of each outputs from social interactions in pivoting process. We encourage the inclusion of different dimensions, not only the shift on the venture, but reassurance, prior market knowledge and entrepreneurial mindset to pivot. The emergence of management research in pivots demonstrates that venture shift is the result of an evolutionary process, however, the elements and conditions that makes this are not yet clear. In this, we call for researchers to assess entrepreneurial pivots in regard to what makes entrepreneurs ready to pivot. This may bring more consistency to what the necessary conditions are for entrepreneurs incorporate change to their venture idea work.

## 5.9. Final considerations

It remains daunting to determine all the interactions entrepreneurs engage in. As we clarify the interactions within the internal dynamics of the accelerator programme, we find that these interactions are interlinked and reflect each other as they all happened intertwined in complex reality. This being said, we can say that entrepreneurs engage in resource sharing interactions with peers and strategic orientations interactions with mentors, and together this creates collective interactions that help entrepreneurs make sense of their venture idea work.

Moreover, it is hard to determine that one social interaction leads to particular pivots. We recognised that some interactions are more propitious to create specific pivots. For example, stimulation to reflection on the venture idea work and the individual self seems to provoke more drastic change in the venture idea work.

This being said, we suggest that interactions that encourage self-reflection may have higher contribution to entrepreneurs venture creative process. It is not our intention to say that entrepreneurs should only be stimulated to reflection. However, it is important to find a good balance between entrepreneurial tools, the reflections on the venture idea - including self-identity - and gain confidence to perform a pivot. Reality is complex and interactions are a way to help other to make sense of their worlds.



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Attestation de dépôt  
Certificat de conformité avec la version de soutenance

Je soussigné **CARLOS EDUARDO MOTA PEREIRA** atteste par la présente la conformité entre la version de ma thèse "**Accélération des entreprises d'impact positif: Comment les interactions affect les processus entrepreneuriale?**" déposée sous forme numérique (dans mon espace personnel ADUM) et la version présentée lors de la soutenance.

Il consiste en :

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**Nom de fichier** : 111150\_MOTA PEREIRA\_2021\_archivage

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Fait à *LILLE... 13 OCTOBRE 2021*

Date et signature du doctorant



**CERTIFICAT DE SCOLARITÉ**  
**2020/2021**

Le Président certifie que

**Monsieur CARLOS EDUARDO MOTA PEREIRA**

Id. National : 0cpzrr01e06

N° étudiant : 11825904

Né(e) le 27/05/1988

à RIO DE JANEIRO (BRESIL)

a été régulièrement inscrit(e) pour l'année universitaire 2020/2021

Diplôme : DOCTORAT Sciences de gestion  
Année : DOCTORAT Sciences de gestion  
Composante : Institut Administration des entreprises

Fait à LILLE, le 27/09/2021  
Jean-Christophe CAMART

