

# **The Activity of Entrepreneurial Leadership**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted by me in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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### iii. Abstract

Our knowledge of entrepreneurial leadership has advanced considerably, but research gaps persist. Namely, existing research has prioritized a focus on the individual, neglecting to consider how context may inform our understanding of entrepreneurial leadership. Particularly, we lack knowledge about how ownership can influence the form of social relations within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), in terms of leadership or otherwise. Informed empirically by qualitative research with SME organizational members and theoretically by the notion of ‘activity’, this study addresses these gaps in the literature for entrepreneurial leadership and makes four contributions to this body of work.

*First*, this study contributes a theoretical frame for studying entrepreneurial leadership as an ‘activity’ that is object-driven, mediated by social relations and tools, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process. I argue that this frame is a contribution as it allows us to account for ownership and its relational implications, understand and problematize the social relations between individuals in SME contexts, and understand the form of power relations between individuals in those contexts. *Second*, the study problematizes arguments in the literature that entrepreneurial leadership by an individual results in organization growth. Instead, it is argued that organization growth is the ‘object’ of the activity of entrepreneurial leadership, but a product of human labour that is fetishized in production. *Third*, the study problematizes the significance of transformational leadership for understanding entrepreneurial leadership. Specifically, it is argued that transformational leadership may be relevant for understanding the concept of entrepreneurial leadership, but in the context of owner-managed SMEs, it potentially conceals and contradicts an underlying reality constituted by the capitalist-worker social relation, one that is characterized by exchange, exploitation, domination and struggle.

*Lastly*, this study offers a methodological contribution for how ‘context’ can be operationalized and explored in research for entrepreneurial leadership, in ways that may overcome the ‘heroic’ lustre imbued within existing understandings of it.



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## **1. Introduction**

This leading chapter of my thesis aims to concisely set the context for what follows. To this end, I first offer some background to the original research proposal that precipitated this study. I then provide a brief overview of the study, summarize its contributions, outline the macro-structure of this thesis and conclude with definitions of key concepts relevant to the study.

### **1.1. Background to the Study**

The research reported in this thesis has its genesis in a study which commenced from September 2013, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, United Kingdom. As the Principal Investigator of this study, I had proposed to build on existing research (Leitch et al, 2012) and explore the different forms of capital that enable and emerge from the process of entrepreneurial leadership development. I proposed that the focus would be on the interdependent concepts of human, social and institutional capital, and the relationships of these with leadership development in entrepreneurial ventures. The research was to be qualitative and informed by a case study approach, with semi-structured interviews utilized as the primary data collection technique. At the time, there was the potential to develop access to study participants through an executive development program organized by and run within Lancaster University Management School (LUMS). This was generally the scope of the research initially proposed, and that laid the foundations for commencing my studies as a part-time PhD student at LUMS.

However, much changed in the first year of my studies as I encountered conceptual, theoretical and methodological difficulties relating to the proposed subject matter. For instance, critical discussions in the literature for entrepreneurship, leadership, leader development, leadership development, leadership learning, human capital, social capital, institutional capital and networks – to name a few – led me to seriously re-evaluate the premises and plausibility of my original research proposal. In doing so, I was especially drawn to the idea that the issue to further research was not ‘entrepreneurial leadership development’, but the concept of ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ itself. Indeed, investigating the former seemed to at least depend on some definition of the latter. Definition, however, was not something I was prepared to offer at the time given the volume of critical literature on entrepreneurship and leadership that I was increasingly being confronted with in my first year of studies. At the end of my first eighteen months of studies, the aim of the research was at least relatively clearer than when I began, as far as it involved investigating the concept of entrepreneurial leadership further in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

## 1.2. Overview of the Research

Through a literature review, I argue in this thesis that existing research on entrepreneurial leadership has prioritized a focus on the individual, neglecting how context can inform our understanding of the concept. Particularly, I argue that we are short of knowledge on how ownership can influence the form of social relations within SME contexts, whether these relations are associated with leadership or otherwise. This review thereby facilitates the identification and justification for the research question of the study, namely, *what are the*

*implications of ownership for understanding the concept of entrepreneurial leadership in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises?*

Fieldwork for this study involved qualitative methodological techniques and procedures. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the owner-managers and employees of five different SMEs located in the Northwest of England, and analysed using the techniques of Grounded Theory. The analysis yielded a set of descriptive findings, in terms of five themes that are relatively common across the five organizations or cases – namely, hierarchy, empowerment, culture/social structure, commitment and ownership. These findings were further re-contextualized within a theoretical frame for ‘activity’. This frame was developed after the completion of my fieldwork and during data analysis, was informed by my readings of the dominant conceptualization of ‘activity’ (Engestrom, 1987, 2000, 2001), awareness of debates associated with this (eg. Nicolini, 2012; Avis, 2007; Warmington, 2008), and readings of Marx (1867/1976), Vygotsky (1978) and Leontev (1978, 1981/2009). The engagement with the data, descriptive findings and Activity Theory in the foregoing sense facilitated a re-articulation of entrepreneurial leadership as an activity that is object-driven, mediated by social relations and tools, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process.

### 1.3. Summary of Study Contributions

This study offers four contributions to research on entrepreneurial leadership, all four of which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 of this thesis. First, existing research on entrepreneurial leadership is yet to consider how ownership can influence the form(s) of social relations within SME contexts – social relations associated with leadership or otherwise. This

study offers a contribution through its theorization of entrepreneurial leadership as an activity that is object-driven, mediated by social relations and tools, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process. This theoretical frame is a contribution as it allows us to account for ownership and its relational implications, understand and problematize the social relations between individuals in SME contexts, and understand the form of power relations between individuals in SME contexts.

Second, and through empirical work, some researchers have argued that the ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ of an individual – in terms of traits, behaviours and/or competencies – drives organization growth. This thesis problematizes the foregoing argument, through the re-contextualization of the descriptive findings within the theoretical frame of activity. Particularly, it is argued that the ‘object’ of the activity of entrepreneurial leadership is organization growth. However, in the course of its production, it appears as a ‘thing’ to producers, rather than a product of their labour, and the social relations involved in its production are concealed. It is therefore argued in this thesis that organization growth is not the outcome of individual effort in terms of entrepreneurial leadership, but a product of human labour that is fetishized in production.

Third, transformational leadership has been deployed as a central theoretical resource for a number of researchers studying entrepreneurial leadership, and used in ways that have contributed to the heroic lustre of the latter. This study offers a contribution by problematizing the significance of transformational leadership for understanding entrepreneurial leadership. Particularly, it is argued that transformational leadership may be relevant for understanding the concept of entrepreneurial leadership, but in the context of owner-managed SMEs, it

potentially conceals and contradicts an underlying reality constituted by the capitalist-worker social relation, one that is characterized by exchange, exploitation, domination and struggle.

Lastly, existing research has more broadly neglected to consider how context may inform our understanding of entrepreneurial leadership, despite recent calls for more of such work. This study contributes by offering an understanding of how context can be operationalized and explored empirically in this area of research. In doing so, it outlines an approach that enabled a focus on participant interpretations of their organizational contexts and work that they do, the development of rich accounts of these, and the critical interrogation of the form and salience of 'leadership' in SME contexts.

#### 1.4. Thesis Structure

This thesis unfolds over two parts. Following this introductory chapter, Part I provides the conceptual and theoretical foundations for the research, and consists of Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Part II offers a discussion of the methodology underpinning the fieldwork, along with the descriptive and theoretical findings of this study, and consists of Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis.

In Chapter 2, I provide a narrative review of entrepreneurship and leadership research, organized around the heroic, post-heroic and critical frames of reference. In doing so, this chapter aims to provide an understanding of what constitutes these frames of reference, analyse how research on entrepreneurship and leadership may thematically intersect within these frames, and set the context for a critical approach to the study of entrepreneurial leadership in this thesis.

In Chapter 3, I provide a narrative review of literature on the topic central to this thesis – entrepreneurial leadership. Here, the aim is to understand the concepts and themes from the constituent disciplines that have informed researchers working in the field of entrepreneurial leadership, and derive observations that inform research gaps for this study. Following a general introduction and specification of review questions driving the chapter, the search methodology underpinning this review is discussed. I then briefly highlight some preliminary observations from the results of the review, before discussing the various concepts, theories and themes that have been of interest to researchers. I conclude by addressing the review questions underpinning the chapter, and provide a discussion of specific ways forward for this thesis.

In Chapter 4, I offer a review of the literature on Activity Theory, and particularly, outline and explain a theoretical frame used to re-contextualize the descriptive findings discussed in Chapter 6. Through this frame, ‘activity’ is viewed in this thesis as object-driven, mediated by social relations and tools, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process.

Chapter 5 marks the beginning of Part II of this thesis, through a discussion of the methodological framework that underpins the research. Broadly, this study adopts a qualitative approach, the philosophical position of critical realism, the comparative case study research method, and semi-structured interviewing technique. I discuss these choices further, along with the issues of sampling, access, ethics and data analysis procedures.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the descriptive findings for this study, stemming from my analysis of interview data and other documentary materials collected during fieldwork. This discussion is organized into six parts. I begin with an overview of the five organizations, before turning to a

discussion of five main themes from my analyses. First, I discuss the theme of hierarchy, elaborating on how it is present and enacted in all cases. Second, I discuss the theme of empowerment, and how in all except one case, the data tends to suggest how staff experience autonomy in their work, free from constraint, but within boundaries prescribed by MDs of the respective organizations. Third, I discuss my interpretations of the culture or social structure of each organization, and fourth, how the data suggests that staff respondents are deeply committed to their work. Last, I discuss the theme of ownership, which is principally suggested from the data by two forms of social relations – Superordinate-subordinate relations, and relations of production.

Chapter 7 provides my theoretical analyses of these descriptive findings. This chapter re-contextualizes these findings within the theoretical frame discussed in Chapter 4 to develop the contributions for the study.

Chapter 8 closes out this thesis through a discussion of its contributions to knowledge about the concept of entrepreneurial leadership, limitations of this study and recommendations for further research. Appendices 1 through 8 supplement this thesis, with data structures arising out of my data analyses, evidence of the documentary materials that informed my analyses, and samples of participant information sheets, consent forms and interview schedules.



### 1.5. Definitions of Key Terms

Before moving on, it would be valuable to explicitly define certain terms that are central to this study. In this study, ‘entrepreneurship’, ‘leadership’ and ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ are fundamentally defined as concepts relating to phenomena in the social world – phenomena that would exist regardless of whether or not we had the aforementioned concepts to describe them in the first place. Underpinning this definition is an acknowledgement of the distinction between the transitive and intransitive dimensions of science (Bhaskar, 1978; Sayer, 2000). Our understanding of the world, in conceptual and/or theoretical form, is situated in the transitive dimension. The phenomena that constitute the world are located in the intransitive dimension, and can be indifferent to the ways in which we think about them (although we may certainly make some attempts to change them).

To express this differently, the concept of ‘entrepreneurship’ may refer to various social phenomena such as the demonstration of initiative, proactivity or innovative behaviours, the pursuit of ‘new combinations’ (see Section 2.1.1), or the identification and development of new venture opportunities. Similarly, ‘leadership’ could refer to the ways in which individuals inspire, motivate or influence others, coordinate action, distribute or share authority, or exercise control over subordinates. However, it is quite plausible to argue that individuals and/or collectives would continue to act in all these aforementioned ways, even if we did not have the concepts of ‘entrepreneurship’ and ‘leadership’ as available descriptors to account for such phenomena. ‘Entrepreneurial leadership’ may thus be equally regarded as a concept, albeit a relatively newer one compared to ‘entrepreneurship’ or ‘leadership’. As I will discuss in Chapter 3 of this thesis, researchers have largely conceptualized ‘entrepreneurial leadership’

in terms of the individual – traits, behaviours, skills, competencies, and so on – but there is much promise for articulating this differently.

One other term to define is ‘activity’. I elaborate on this in Chapter 4, but for now, it would be sufficient to note that ‘activity’ in this thesis is defined as object-driven, mediated by social relations and tools, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process. In this sense and for this thesis, ‘activity’ refers to the capitalist labour process. It is orientated towards the production of an object/commodity, and made possible by (i) the physical and/or social instruments of work; and (ii) the social relationships people enter into at work. In this sense, ‘activity’ is not defined in terms of the individual or the collective. Doing so violates one of the central premises of Activity Theory, namely its potential to overcome ‘either-or’ characterizations and dualistic ways of thinking about the world through the notion of mediation (Roth and Lee, 2007; Kaptelinin, 2005; Nicolini, 2012).

## Part I – Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

*“Beginnings are always difficult in all sciences.”*

Marx (1867/1976: p.89)

## **2. Entrepreneurship and Leadership**

This chapter represents the first of three that provide the conceptual and theoretical foundations for this thesis. Here, I provide a narrative review of entrepreneurship and leadership research, organized around the heroic, post-heroic and critical frames of reference. In doing so, this chapter aims to provide an understanding of what constitutes these frames of reference, an analysis of how research on entrepreneurship and leadership thematically intersect within these frames, and provides the context for a critical approach towards the study of entrepreneurial leadership in this thesis. Summaries of the key issues discussed with reference to the heroic, post-heroic and critical approaches are provided at the start of each of the following three sections.

Before moving on, two points should be highlighted. First, my intent here is not to present a complete review of the literature on entrepreneurship and leadership. This would be impossible, given the sheer volume of literature associated with the topics and word count limitations of this chapter and thesis. Some issues of interest to contemporary researchers have thus been omitted. Second, I want to acknowledge that this chapter could have been organized in different ways, for instance, in terms of paradigmatic orientations (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Grant and Perren, 2002; Jennings et al, 2005) or other typologies (eg. Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Grint, 2005a). I did explore these in initial drafts, but these ways of organizing, particularly those implicating philosophical and methodological perspectives, were very complex and difficult to develop. What follows thus represents only one way of carving out the topics of interest. As flawed as it may be, I would suggest that the three broader approaches and thematic overlaps can offer us ways of thinking about the central topic of this study – entrepreneurial leadership.

## 2.1. The Heroic Approach

In this section, I discuss the manner in which the heroic approach to entrepreneurship and leadership can be characterized. This endeavour invariably involves starting with a discussion of the ‘Great Man’ tradition. The work of Joseph Schumpeter and Thomas Carlyle is discussed in regards to how it tended to valorise entrepreneurs and leaders. I then discuss the implications of this, namely in terms of the study of individual differences, the heroic bias and masculine formulations of entrepreneurs and leaders in contemporary literature.

### 2.1.1. The Great Man Tradition

In the entrepreneurship field, the Great Man tradition is arguably implicit in the work of the economist Joseph Schumpeter, for whom the ‘entrepreneur’ was defined as an individual who carries out “new combinations” (1934; p.48). For Schumpeter, ‘new combinations’ referred to five activities, namely the introduction of a new product, a new method of production, the establishment of a new market, the acquisition of a new source of raw materials, or the creation of a new organization. Entrepreneurs were seen as a “special type” (p.62), characterized by “super-normal qualities of intellect and will” (p.74), given that their abilities to carry out such activities were “accessible in very unequal measure and to relatively few people” (p.73). In Schumpeter’s (1934) work, the ‘greatness’ of entrepreneurs was further suggested in what motivated them (p.70). These were unique individuals driven by “the dream and will to found a private kingdom”, sometimes even a “dynasty”. Entrepreneurs were seen to be motivated by “the will to conquer”, or to claim superiority over others, and by “the joy of creating, of getting things done, or simply exercising one’s energy and ingenuity”.

In making such statements, Schumpeter sought to advance an economic theory focused on the entrepreneur, although some have noted his propositions on economics made relatively less impact than those about the individual concerned (Swedberg, 2000). According to Baum et al (2007), David McClelland was significantly influenced by Schumpeter and sought to identify the reasons for economic growth and decline in a society. McClelland (1961) laid the foundations for entrepreneurship traits research in his text *The Achieving Society*, hypothesizing that the economic growth of a country was partly determined by individual needs for achievement. He further proposed that what linked the need to achieve and growth was the entrepreneur, defined as “the man who organizes the firm... and/or increases its productive capacity” (p.205). Entrepreneurs, according to McClelland (1961), were individuals who could be decisive in uncertain conditions, engaged in innovative activity and took responsibility for both success and failure. According to Landstrom (2010), similar ideas were proposed by Everett Hagan, who studied how traditional societies could be transformed into those marked by economic growth. For Hagan, growth was determined by the number of innovative personalities within a society, and individuals from minority groups were thought to have stronger psychological propensities for entrepreneurship than others.

Contemporary leadership studies have been similarly influenced by the Great Man tradition, and most notably through the work of Thomas Carlyle (Grint, 2011). In a series of public lectures delivered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Carlyle (2013; p.21) celebrated leaders as individuals who shaped history, or “Great Men... the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain”. These were men who could be further categorized into ‘six classes of heroes’ – those of strong convictions, prophets, poets, priests, authors and kings – and were unmistakably special or separate from the undifferentiated mass of their contemporaries. That such individuals were to be proselytized

by all was clear in Carlyle's lectures, as he exhorted his audience to "ever reverence Great Men... the one fixed point in modern revolutionary history, otherwise as if bottomless and shoreless" (p.31). Some have noted that Carlyle's intellectual status and views on heroes or hero-worship gradually declined in importance. For example, Sorensen (2013) identifies various factors for this, including Carlyle's racial slurs towards disenfranchised groups in society, the questionable alliances he formed, and the public scepticism towards heroic archetypes after the great wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Nonetheless, others have recognized the impact of Carlyle's thinking on how leadership is theorized by contemporary researchers, and argued it warrants further investigation (Spector, 2016).

#### 2.1.2. Individual Differences

One implication of the great man tradition is that differences are assumed to exist between entrepreneurs or leaders and others. Researchers have investigated this in various ways. In the entrepreneurship field, for example, Cooper and Dunkelberg (1987) compared the demographic characteristics of entrepreneurs against those of the general population, claiming, for instance, the former have relatively higher levels of education or parents who own businesses. Others have sought to distinguish the entrepreneur from small business owners or managers. For example, Carland et al (1984) proposed that the entrepreneur is primarily characterized by innovative activity, as opposed to the small business owner who establishes and manages a business in the interest of personal gain. As such, these researchers advocated the analysis of personality traits, such as the need for achievement, independence and internal locus of control. Similarly, Sexton and Bowman (1985) have suggested that entrepreneurs have traits differing in intensity from managers. These traits can represent individual strengths or

weaknesses, but nonetheless include the desire to work independently, an inclination towards taking risks and a disdain for conformity.

Other contemporary research streams have also focused on individual differences. For example, pioneering researchers in the area of entrepreneurial cognitions have theorized that some individuals recognize patterns better or faster than others (Bird, 1992), or that entrepreneurs are more likely to engage in counterfactual thinking (Baron, 1998). Others explored individual cognitive differences across cultures. Busenitz and Lau (1996) have proposed that contextual features, cultural values and personality traits may influence how entrepreneurial knowledge is utilized for business creation. Some empirical work has suggested that certain cognitive abilities may be reasonably stable across national cultures, and these include the ability to diagnose ventures, recognize opportunities or access resources. In other work, De Carolis and Saporito (2006) have sought to explain why some are more likely than others to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities. Drawing on the various dimensions of social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), De Carolis and Saporito (2006) have proposed that the presence of structural holes, trust and strong ties may be related to individual cognitive biases, perception of risk and likelihood to exploit opportunities.

In the leadership field, researchers have similarly investigated individual differences, with early work advanced by Ralph Stogdill through literature surveys (Bass and Stogdill, 1990). Following a survey conducted in 1970, Stogdill suggested that leader emergence could be attributed to traits, situations, or the interaction between both. Stogdill thus identified a host of traits such as self-confidence or a tolerance for ambiguity that could distinguish “leaders from followers, effective from ineffective leaders, and higher-echelon from lower-echelon leaders” (Bass and Stogdill, 1990; p.87). This moderated conclusions drawn from a similar



survey Stogdill (1948) conducted approximately two decades earlier, in which the traits approach was minimized in favour of a situational approach. Elsewhere, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) have also suggested that certain traits distinguish leaders from non-leaders, such as the need for achievement, self-confidence and cognitive ability. For these authors, however, traits must be supplemented by additional behaviours, such as decision-making and problem-solving skills, the creation of an organization vision and the ability to implement that vision. In other work, Zaleznik (2004) has sought to distinguish leaders from managers. Zaleznik (2004) observed that leaders are proactive, shape ideas and influence others to change their perceptions towards goals, whilst managers adopt a more impartial approach, seeking out collaborative relationships that are characterized by low emotional involvement.

The focus on individual differences is also prevalent in other theoretical formulations of leadership. Examples of these are the charismatic and transformational approaches, with the former seen as the “neglected sibling” of the latter (Conger, 1999: p.146). For example, House (1977) hypothesized that charismatic leaders may be differentiated from their non-charismatic counterparts based on traits such as dominance, self-confidence, or the need to influence. For Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leadership is seen to revolve around four main behavioural components – Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Each component is reported to be significantly associated with a range of traits, such as pragmatism, and internal locus of control and sociability. With both approaches, the focus on individual differences also extends to the behavioural level. It has thus been proposed that charismatic leaders act as role models, articulate goals and align followers’ interests with their own (Shamir et al, 1993), or challenge the status quo and share their visions with followers (Conger and Kanungo, 1987). Based on the four behavioural components identified, transformational leaders are also seen to act as role

models, coaches or mentors for their followers, motivating and inspiring, providing meaning to work and stimulating creative responses to problems (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Thus, with respect to either approach, theorists tend to suggest that charismatic and transformational leaders are markedly different from their non-charismatic or non-transformational counterparts in terms of traits and behaviours.

The study of individual differences has thus been foundational in either field. Equally, however, this stream of research has been subjected to critique. In the entrepreneurship field, for example, Begley and Boyd (1987) found that entrepreneurs do tend to have a higher need for achievement, risk-taking propensity and tolerance for ambiguity relative to managers, although the absolute differences between these groups are small. Others have argued that the research on traits contradictorily portray entrepreneurs in highly generic terms (Gartner, 1988), or noted the prevalence of methodological issues such as non-comparable samples and a bias towards successful entrepreneurs (Low and Macmillan, 1988). In the leadership field, House and Aditya (1997) have argued that the initial research on traits was largely atheoretical, lacked valid measurement tools and reliable samples. More broadly, Grint (1997) has argued that trait theories, along with the situational and contingency varieties, denies a view of leadership as socially constructed, by assuming that the fundamental elements of leaders or their contexts are easily identifiable.

Despite such critique, the study of individual differences is nonetheless a going concern in either field. In the entrepreneurship field, Landstrom (2010) has noted that current work has greater conceptual and methodological rigour. This is perhaps reflected by the work of Rauch and Frese (2007), who conceptualize traits as dispositions or propensities towards action that are relatively enduring over time, and may either facilitate or impede individual behaviours.

To advance the field, Rauch and Frese (2007) have advocated the use of meta-analyses over narrative reviews, noting that the former may correct for reliability issues and provide support for the predictive value of personality traits. With reference to leadership studies, Antonakis (2011) has noted that the study of individual differences, particularly in terms of traits, has persisted, although such research has been unable to contribute anything unique to the field. As such, Antonakis (2011) has called for researchers to refine measurement tools and introduce interdisciplinary approaches that may benefit the area. As such, this brief review has illustrated some commonalities between the fields of interest. In particular, whilst the study of individual differences has been foundational, it has also been subjected to critique and further, the subject of resurgent interest amongst some researchers.

Additionally, and before moving on from this discussion, it is worth recognizing that the study of individual differences particularly implicates the question of whether entrepreneurs and leaders are born as such or the product of other factors. Contemporary researchers in either field have sought to address this through an interest in genetics. In general, these findings suggest that genetic and environmental factors matter, although the latter possibly matter more. In the entrepreneurship field, Nicolaou and Shane (2011) have drawn attention to research evidence that suggests the ability to recognize entrepreneurial opportunities, the decision to become an entrepreneur and entrepreneurial performance are genetically influenced. However, these researchers also endorse the widely held view in the field that environmental factors are more important than genes. This argument is similarly held by leadership researchers who have conducted research into the influence of genetic factors on leadership role occupancy (Arvey et al, 2006; Arvey et al, 2007; Zhang et al, 2009). The credibility of this work, however, is limited by the issue of method, as these researchers have employed questionnaires based on self-reports from samples of identical and fraternal twins. De Neve et al (2013) have apparently

pinpointed a specific gene, which they argue may influence leadership role occupancy, or the development of traits that predispose individuals to adopt leadership roles. However, these authors also note caution in interpreting their results, as explanations must take environmental factors into account, or the interactions between genetic and environmental factors.

### 2.1.3. 'We can be Heroes'

The notion that leaders may be deemed heroic is certainly obvious from the statements of Thomas Carlyle, as discussed previously. In contemporary terms, it would appear that the Great Man tradition has substantially influenced popular and academic narratives concerning leadership, such that the prototypical visionary, charismatic leader is often imbued with a heroic lustre (Alvesson, 2013; Spector, 2016). In the entrepreneurship field, any notion of heroism is perhaps more difficult to sustain if we are to consider Schumpeter's classical, but somewhat contradictory, statements. Despite celebrating the entrepreneur's motivations, Schumpeter (1934) was keen to de-emphasize any "glorification of the type" (p.75) and the entrepreneur's role as a "genius or benefactor to humanity" (p.75). Nonetheless, however, the notion of the heroic entrepreneur is a prevalent one. As numerous researchers have indicated, the entrepreneur is frequently styled as an individual who single-handedly overcomes "great odds to build companies through superhuman efforts" (Shane, 2008: p.40), or as the "heroic figurehead of capitalism" (Williams and Nadin, 2013: p.554) regardless of the way in which entrepreneurship is conceptualized and studied (see Cunningham and Lischeron, 1991). As such, heroic portrayals are persistent, and as others have argued, the literature exploring individual differences has been particularly complicit in exalting both entrepreneurs and leaders (Pettigrew, 1979; Ogbor, 2000; Yukl, 1999, Gronn, 2011).

A number of researchers have sought to dispel the ‘myth’ of the heroic entrepreneur. The study of metaphors has received some attention, and researchers have argued that entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship may be paradoxically represented by members of the public in equally positive and negative terms (Hyrsky, 1999; Dodd, 2002; Anderson et al, 2009). Others have argued the media plays a key role in mythicizing the entrepreneur, with particular focus given to the British and French press (Nicholson and Anderson, 2005; Radu and Redien-Collot, 2008). Underpinning much of this work is the notion that concepts are socially constructed and attributions of meaning vary across different contexts (Anderson et al, 2009). Whilst this work has been illuminating, however, the mythical entrepreneur has tended to prevail particularly conceived as a change agent. For example, Dodd and Anderson (2007) underscore this by noting the entrepreneur must remain front and centre, given that entrepreneurs “capture or produce change” and entrepreneurship is the “manifestation of change” (p.342). This is further evident where the entrepreneurial function is viewed in terms of “creating new realities; transforming ideas into new ventures, and transposing old ideas into new situations” (Nicholson and Anderson, 2005: p.154), or as a “dynamic and widespread activity which is mainly concerned with producing change” (Hyrsky, 1999: p. 30).

There are, of course, critical perspectives on this. For some, the academic view of entrepreneurs as change agents is ideologically driven. As Ogbor (2000) argues, entrepreneurship theory finds its justification through its appeal to capitalism and the neoliberalist ideal of free markets, which in turn compels researchers to portray the entrepreneur as a hero with innately positive characteristics. In other work, Eagleton-Pierce (2016) has argued that the proliferation of academic and popular knowledge on entrepreneurship, and idolatry of the entrepreneur, has both reflected and reproduced the neoliberalist ideals of individualism and freedom. For Jones and Murtola (2012b), change is inherent in Schumpeter’s notion of creative destruction and the

entrepreneurial function can only be comprehensible within the context of the capitalism. Yet, as these researchers argue, contemporary discussions fetishize the entrepreneur, decontextualizing the entrepreneurial function “from its social and above all economic function” (p.123). Whilst the concepts of ‘ideology’ and ‘capitalism’ are perhaps as porous or promiscuous as ‘neoliberalism’ (Peck, 2010), the ideas discussed here nonetheless draw attention to how there may be more sinister reasons for any normative depiction of the entrepreneur as a hero, within academia or otherwise.

In contrast, some leadership researchers have questioned and unpacked the heroic myth in their field through a particular interest in attributions of causality. Early efforts to do so can be identified in work by Pfeffer (1977), who noted the dearth of evidence concerning the effects of leaders on organizational outcomes. In doing so, he argued that leadership is a phenomenological construct, and attributions of causality towards leaders may be grounded in a belief that individual actions are more controllable than contextual variables. As Pfeffer (1977) noted, the leader thus represents a symbol for the causation of organizational outcomes, providing observers with a “simpler and more readily changeable reality” (p.109). James Meindl and colleagues have been instrumental in taking such ideas further. As Meindl et al (1985) argued, leadership is romanticized when it is assumed that the individuals or activities associated with it can influence organizational outcomes. For these researchers, romanticism stems from an attributional bias, as individuals choose one interpretation over another when attributing causal relationships to events in highly complex systems that may be beyond the realms of reasonable comprehension. This, however, has dual implications, as whilst leaders may be given credit for the successes of organizations, they may be equally culpable for its failures.

Central to this romanticism and attributional bias is the process of socially constructing organizational realities, which subsequently obtained further resonance in other streams of research. For example, Meindl (1995) argued for a constructionist, follower-centric approach to leadership which emphasizes followers' constructions of leaders and contextual factors, and the implications of these on their behaviours. In doing so, Meindl (1995) sought to emphasize a focus on followers' lived experiences as a means for understanding leadership and its significance to organizational actors. In other work, Chen and Meindl (1991) have investigated how the business press and its readers influence each other to determine how leaders are construed and leadership is constructed, whilst Guthey and Jackson (2005) have argued for studying visual representations of top executives in the social construction of leadership. Gemmill and Oakley (1992) have argued that attributions of causality towards leaders partly stem from a process of reification, through which the social construct of leadership is objectified and mystified. As these researchers argue, the concept of leadership is thus rendered as a 'psychic prison'. Those accorded the status of 'leader' are trapped within a "mode of existence that serves to meet various unconscious emotional needs" (p.114) of organizational members, who in turn are resistant to resistance or conceiving alternative options for themselves. To all these ends, it would seem that the symbols, imagery and myths that imbue the concept of leadership with a heroic lustre have certainly been taken seriously as objects of study (Bligh and Schyns, 2007).

#### 2.1.4. Mainstream, 'Malestream'

Finally, for this section, it may be argued that the heroic approach and great man tradition tend to foreground particularly masculine formulations of entrepreneurs and leaders. In the entrepreneurship field, some have argued that masculinity is particularly emphasized through use of the male pronoun and gendered adjectives applied in describing heroic qualities (Ahl, 2006; Bird and Brush, 2002). According to Ahl (2006), classical entrepreneurship theorists such as Schumpeter have been especially culpable of gender bias by perpetuating an image of the entrepreneur as “the heroic self-made man” (p.599). Further, she argues that masculinity is reinforced in accounts characterizing the entrepreneur as ambitious, independent, assertive, decisive and so on, given that such characteristics are themselves not gender-neutral. In the context of leadership studies, there is the obvious, inescapable gender bias inherent in Carlyle’s statements positioning leaders as great men. Additionally, others have noted attributions of causality towards the masculine form, given Carlyle’s rendition of history as “unfolding through the effects of dominant males” (Spector, 2016: p.251). As Grint (2011) notes, such gender bias was prevalent in the Victorian ages, when leadership was generally construed as “irredeemably masculine, heroic, individualist and normative in orientation and nature” (p.8).

In contemporary research, some have argued that researchers themselves have been particularly complicit in perpetuating masculine formulations of entrepreneurs and leaders. For example, Hamilton (2006, 2013) has argued that the experiences of male entrepreneurs are often taken as the norm and focal point by researchers, to the extent that women’s experiences are rendered invisible. According to Stevenson (1990), women and their experiences may sometimes be judged against such norms, typifying a form of ‘sexual imperialism’ that subordinates women to masculine value systems. Similar points have been raised by leadership researchers as well.



Stead and Elliot (2009) note that male experience has represented the dominant resource for theorizing leadership. Notably, however, these researchers argue there are other reasons for such gender bias. For instance, Stead and Elliot (2009) partly attribute the entrenchment of masculinity in leadership research to the gender of researchers themselves, given that “much of the leadership literature is developed by men, generally researching other men in leadership roles” (p.23). Also, the research sites, namely large organizations, that may be accessed for empirical work are cited as a source of bias. As Stead and Elliot (2009) argue, the upper echelons of these organizations are dominated by males who lend their voices to research studies with an interest in theorizing leadership. In either case, the dearth of research on women has been highlighted and problematized, particularly given their extensive participation in activities that may be deemed ‘entrepreneurial’ or appointment to prominent leadership roles (Brush, 2008; Carli and Eagly, 2011).

Aside from contemporary researchers, it would appear that the media has also been complicit in perpetuating the male archetype of entrepreneurs and leaders. In the French press, for example, Radu and Reiden-Collot (2008) have identified a “figurative core of the entrepreneur’s social representation” (p.277). According to these researchers, the entrepreneur is thus overwhelmingly portrayed by the media as male, with a very small minority of articles addressing women’s entrepreneurship. Nicholson and Anderson (2005) have also identified the resiliency of the masculine norm in portrayals of the entrepreneur in the British press over a 12-year period. Amongst leadership researchers, Stead and Elliot (2009) have argued against simplistic and stereotypical ways in which women leaders may be represented in the media. In particular, these researchers highlight three media stereotypes of women leaders – the Queen Bee, Iron Maiden and Selfless Heroine – arguing that such depictions trivialize the success of the individual in question, whilst also spreading prejudice.

To conclude here, I will acknowledge that debates on the topic of gender in either discipline are highly complex, and I have only offered a cursory treatment of some of these due to space constraints. Before moving on, however, I will also acknowledge that formulations of the entrepreneur or leader within the heroic approach are not just gendered and masculine, but perhaps highly racialized as well. For instance, Ogbor (2000) has drawn attention to these issues in the entrepreneurship field. With regards to race and ethnicity, he has argued that such concepts have been repressed, possibly because researchers are “intimately driven by an identification with the particular class or race to which they not only belong, but which is most admirable in the order of things” (p.619). This argument is indeed relevant, given that studies of non-white entrepreneurs must be labelled as ‘ethnic minority entrepreneurship’ (eg. Basu, 2008) just as those of women entrepreneurs must be qualified in terms of an interest in gender (Hamilton, 2013). In leadership studies, Collinson and Hearn (2014) have argued that the white masculine form of the ‘leader’ has shaped debates about who this individual is, his behaviours and ultimately, who should be excluded from leadership roles. However, it would appear that the question of race and ethnicity has only been addressed in fits and starts. More recently, for example, Liu and Baker (2016) have drawn on critical race theory to explore how ‘whiteness’ underpins the portrayals of philanthropic leaders in Australian media. This study has questioned contemporary leadership studies for its relative silence on the issue of race and power relations, but more research can valuably move the conversation further.

## 2.2. The Post-heroic Approach

The post-heroic approach, as a mode of theorizing, is one that is most closely associated with contemporary leadership studies. As such, I take my cues from this body of work to develop the relevant arguments and themes in this section. Theorizing within the post-heroic approach has tended to adopt a collective and relational approach, whilst at times emphasizing the importance of followers, followership and the influence of context on leadership dynamics (Collinson, 2011, 2017). A range of models subscribing to this broad church of post-heroism would thus be relevant here, including distributed, shared, relational and quiet leadership. However, owing to space constraints, I focus mainly on distributed and shared leadership – two models of noted popularity amongst researchers adopting the post-heroic approach (Bolden, 2011).

According to Fletcher (2004), there are three main distinguishing features of the post-heroic approach – namely, the conceptualization of leadership as a bundle of practices enacted by individuals at all levels of an organization, a focus on the interactions and relations that constitute leadership dynamics, and a focus on collective learning. This is valuable but in what follows, I will argue that certain other core themes are identifiable within the distributed and shared models. Further, I relate these themes to entrepreneurship research, particularly the literature on entrepreneurial teams. As such, the following discussion first centres on critiques of the heroic approach that have premised the shift towards more collective modes of theorizing. Second, although post-heroic narratives may espouse egalitarianism, I argue that these obscure the issue of top-down control that is nonetheless implicit.

### 2.2.1. Critiques of the Heroic Approach

According to Linstead et al (2009), the origins of the term ‘post-heroic’ may be associated with the work of Bradford and Cohen (1984). In their text *Managing for Excellence*, Bradford and Cohen (1984) outlined their ideas concerning the ‘post heroic leader’, which represented a “fundamental reorientation away from the heroic model as well as a minor alteration in focus” (p.60). Central to this was their view of the manager or leader as an individual who seeks to develop subordinates’ management responsibilities, whilst simultaneously cultivating their abilities to share in the management of organizational performance. Bradford and Cohen (1984) referred to this as the *Manager-as-Developer* model, contrasting it against two others - the *Manager-as-Conductor* and *Manager-as-Technician* models – deemed to be heroic in orientation. Although conceding the latter two models could result in adequate performance, they nonetheless argued such approaches towards leading would inhibit organizational excellence. Namely, the conductor and technician models tended to unquestionably assume competence and control on the part of the leader, undermining subordinates, underutilizing their abilities and demoralizing them in the process.

Other researchers mooted similar ideas at the time. For example, Bennis and Nanus (1985) sought to dispel myths concerning leadership as a skill or quality of charisma that an individual is born with, or as an outcome of hierarchical modes of organizing. Particularly, they argued that the notion of a leader who “controls, directs, prods, manipulates” was possibly the “most damaging myth of all” (p.224). Leadership was unequivocally “the main stem-winder” (p.3) in envisioning the futures of organizations and mobilizing the effort needed to realize that vision, but followers nonetheless needed to be empowered to enhance their work and organizational commitment. In later work, Bennis (1999) would go further to proclaim “the end of [heroic]

leadership without the risk of hyperbole” (p.71), or at the very least, a more “subtle and indirect form of influence” (p.76) for effective leadership. As he argued, team-working and the full inclusion of followers or their “creative alliance with top leadership” (p.73) was paramount for organizational success, due to changes attributable to globalization and disruptive technology. Elsewhere, Heifetz and Laurie (1997) similarly offered strong arguments against heroic models of leadership. Such models, as these authors argued, were inappropriate due to the hierarchical control relations that were presupposed between leaders and followers. Heifetz and Laurie (1997) argued that all organizational members, rather than just individuals at the top of a hierarchy, had to take responsibility for organizational problems and performance in lieu of increasingly challenging business environments.

Indeed, Bennis and Nanus (1985), Bennis (1999) and Heifetz and Laurie (1997) never explicitly invoked the term ‘post-heroic’ in these articles. However, their commitment towards dismantling the hierarchical influence processes implied in the heroic model in favour of the post-heroic approach was nonetheless evident. Additionally, similar critiques have resonated through theoretical formulations of leadership subscribing to the post-heroic approach. Writing on shared leadership for example, Pearce and Manz (2005) have argued that hierarchical influence processes tend to connote leader-follower relationships grounded in compliance based on fear and intimidation tactics. In contrast, these researchers have argued that theorizing about shared leadership involves examining lateral influence processes between peers, along with those between managers and subordinates. Echoing the statements of Meindl et al (1985) concerning romanticism, Gronn (2000) has argued that the individualistic assumption underpinning heroic approaches to leadership implies a “belief in the power of one” (p.319). In turn, this underscores a dualistic form of reasoning which abdicates followers of responsibility and casts them in a dependency relationship relative to their superior ‘others’,

leaders. Gronn (2000, 2002) along with others (eg. Spillane et al, 2001; Spillane, 2005) have thus advanced the notion of distributed leadership, although some have noted further conceptual rigour is perhaps necessary to distinguish this from shared models (Bolden, 2011).

In entrepreneurship studies, those conducting research on entrepreneurial teams have similarly questioned the heroic myth that has dominated the field. Reich (1987), for example, sought to expose this by juxtaposing the myth of the ‘entrepreneurial hero’ against that of the ‘worker drone’. Whilst the former appeared to personify values such as freedom or creativity, taking the initiative to build innovative organizations, the latter was cast into a spectacularly unheralded role – reliable as a cog in the machine, but pliable and subject to control. For Reich (1987) such mythologizing was outdated and obsolete, due to the increasing pace of globalization and competitive pressures. Organizations thus had to be designed to facilitate coordination and communication amongst all members, rather than in the interest of command and control, and entrepreneurial skills had to be diffused throughout to meet external challenges. According to Cooney (2005), however, research into entrepreneurial teams started in earnest with work by Kamm et al (1990). For Kamm et al (1990), mythologizing about the individual entrepreneur was problematic, given the volume of research illustrating how frequently new firms are started by teams of individuals, regardless of geography, industry, or the gender of founders. Expanding on this, Cooney (2005) has noted that the myth of the lone entrepreneur reflects a form of narrative device that exalts independence, individualism and personal achievement. As he has argued, however, such ideas are misplaced in the context of entrepreneurship studies, given the reality that “successful entrepreneurs either built teams around them or were part of a team throughout” (p.226).

### 2.2.2. The Resilience of the Individual

Given the critiques of heroic approaches outlined above, it would perhaps appear that the post-heroic approach espouses egalitarian models of leading or entrepreneurial activities. Whilst so, however, it may be argued that such rhetoric does not match realities, as theorizing in this vein has tended to obscure the vertical or hierarchical relations that are nonetheless implicit. This, for example, may be observed in some of the more general statements concerning shared leadership. As Pearce and Conger (2003) indicate, shared leadership is not just characterized by lateral influence processes between peers, as it may also include upward or downward influence processes along hierarchical organization structures. This blend of vertical and horizontal influence processes, and the relations between, is further elaborated by Pearce and Manz (2005). As these researchers argue, the sharing of leadership is indeed characterized by mutual influence processes and the frequent emergence of formal or informal leaders within teams, but the existence of this is partly dependent upon the presence of formally designated leaders. Senior-most leaders are thus paramount, serving as role models who offer positive reinforcement for the ‘correct’ behaviours exhibited by subordinates. For Fletcher and Kaufer (2003), however, this can be difficult to implement in practice. Leaders may face a dilemma, as they are expected to both “set themselves apart – and above – the group, while at the same time interact as an integral part of the group, even as co-equals with other members” (p.25).

The presence and contributions of formally designated leaders would perhaps appear to be less apparent in the context of distributed models. As Gronn (2002) argues, for example, distributed leadership may be characterized by the notion of ‘conjoint agency’, whereby individuals coordinate their actions and plans in relation to their sense of team membership and the actions or plans of others. Conjoint agency thus involves three successive stages of ‘concertive action’.

In the first instance, individuals with complementary skills and resources collaborate as a team to solve a problem before disbanding. Subsequently, regular interactions between these individuals may lead to intuitive work relationships, which in the final stage, may be formalized as committees and teams that deal with work projects. Such ideas are perhaps helpful as an analytic framework to understand how leadership emerges in the middle or lower-levels of organizations. However, in his reflections on the work of Gronn (2002) and others (eg. Spillane et al, 2001; Spillane, 2005), Bolden (2011) has observed that further clarity is needed to understand who distributes leadership, and what, if anything, is being distributed. In other work, Bolden et al (2009) have argued that the literature on distributed leadership largely celebrates bottom-up influence, whilst failing to acknowledge that top-down processes can be as significant, if not more. Drawing on research conducted in the Higher Education sector within the United Kingdom, Bolden et al (2009) reveal how the experiences of academics and professional staff in relation to distributed leadership in universities is one of tension, as they struggle to manage the competing pressures of collegiality and managerialism, or individual autonomy and collective engagement.

In the body of work on entrepreneurial teams, there is a similar tendency for researchers to espouse the shared or collective ideals associated with the post-heroic approach. For example, general statements alluding to this can be identified in the work of Gartner et al (1994) who have argued for more plural conceptions of entrepreneurship, on grounds that entrepreneurial activities are more often dispersed across teams rather than located in lone individuals. Elsewhere, Harper (2008) has similarly argued for a definition of entrepreneurship that is impartial in terms of unit of analysis - the individual or team. According to Harper (2008), this would allow for a much broader conception of entrepreneurial discovery, one that involves the collective exercise of imagination and judgment in identifying opportunities and developing or



evaluating solutions. For Harper (2008), the discovery of opportunities in teams may thus be viewed as a “socially distributed process” (p.617) and the result of joint conjecture or mutual evaluation between members. In other work, West (2007) has argued that the important decisions regarding prospects for growth or survival in a new venture are often made collectively, rather than by a lone individual. Whilst members of a team may certainly have differences of opinion, decision-making processes in new ventures are nonetheless guided by a collective knowledge structure or perspective concerning its future.

Arguments in favour of collectivism in entrepreneurial teams are indeed pertinent, but they tend to be complicated by those concerning the role and responsibilities of lead entrepreneurs. According to Timmons and Spinelli (2007), lead entrepreneurs perform a crucial function, determining the necessity, size and composition of the team, or assessing the existing and required resources and capabilities of the team. As they argue, the role of the lead entrepreneur is to “craft a vision and then to lead, inspire, persuade, and cajole key people to sign up for and deliver the dream” (p.292) which enables the success and performance of the new venture. Empirically, Ensley et al (2000) have sought to confirm the existence of lead entrepreneurs, or ‘alpha heffalumps’, in new venture teams. Drawing on survey data from members of high-performing new ventures in America, these researchers have suggested that teams typically do have lead entrepreneurs. Further, such individuals tend to have stronger visions of their organizations and higher degrees of self-efficacy compared to their team members, although other skills such as opportunity recognition and development may be relatively equally distributed throughout the team.

Furthermore, arguments in favour of collectivism are particularly complicated by the issue of ownership, the division of which has been considered an “early critical task for the lead

entrepreneur” (Timmons and Spinelli, 2007: p.299) and an “important cost of assembling effective entrepreneurial teams” (Kamm et al, 1990: p.11). Indeed, the importance of this issue is underscored by Timmons and Spinelli (2007) who note a common pitfall amongst teams is the attempt to demonstrate a parity of individual status through “democratic trimmings” (p.297) such as equal stock ownership plans, salaries and office spaces. Consequently, what remains are difficult, unanswered questions concerning where or with whom authority for the venture and decision-making may be located, or how differences in opinion are to be resolved. However, and despite its importance, little research has been conducted into the issue of ownership and entrepreneurial teams. Addressing this gap for the first time, Breugst et al (2015) have recently explored perceptions of fairness concerning equity distribution through interview and observational data collected in research with entrepreneurial teams. These researchers reveal that perceptions of fairness are positively associated with team interactions, but note further studies are needed to explore the impact of ownership control on decision-making processes in teams with an unequal distribution of equity. Given the paucity of research, it may also be beneficial to explore how ownership and equity distribution influence team processes, such as mission evaluation, strategic planning or team coordination (Klotz et al, 2014), and whether these are jointly or severally enacted in entrepreneurial teams.

## 2.3. The Critical Approach

In this section, I briefly examine the critical approach to understand the ways in which it may be constituted. To this end, I discuss the influence of Critical Management Studies, the extent to which debate is central to the critical approach, and the ways in which entrepreneurship and leadership have been re-considered, focusing particularly on the issue of capitalism.

### 2.3.1. The Influence of Critical Management Studies

To start with, it is worth acknowledging that critical approaches to entrepreneurship and leadership (eg. Jones and Spicer, 2009; Collinson, 2011) are influenced by work in the area of Critical Management Studies (CMS). According to some, CMS is rooted in critiques of capitalism originating in the work of Weber, Marx and Durkheim (Alvesson et al, 2009), and disciplines such as industrial relations, labour economics and sociology (Prasad et al, 2015). However, it appears scholarly interest in critical approaches to management and organization gained pace in the 1990s, fuelled particularly by a collection of articles edited by Alvesson and Willmott (1992). In this text, the authors argued in favour of problematizing the neutrality of management practice and theorizing, foregrounding Critical Theory a lens for doing so. Through the publication of this text, the identifier, ‘Critical Management Studies’ thus emerged. Given the historical precedence, it is perhaps reasonable then to view this text as a moment in the “ongoing problematization of the institutions and the curricula in and with which individuals worked and continue to work” (Burrell, 2009; p.559). Nonetheless, CMS has advanced in the decades following the publication of this text through a steady proliferation of associated ideas, and as some would have it, its institutionalization as a brand (Thompson,

2005). Such advancement has undoubtedly been supported through the publication of books (eg. Grey and Willmott, 2005; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000), dedicated global conferences and workshops (Grey et al, 2016), and scholarly journals or special issues that are sympathetic to the core aims espoused within CMS.

In entrepreneurship research, Jones and Spicer (2009) have drawn on the ‘tenets’ of CMS (see Section 2.3.2 for a brief discussion of these) to argue that a critical approach towards entrepreneurship may be comprised of four elements – critiques of representation, affects, structural limitations and agency. In doing so, these researchers argue that a critical approach towards entrepreneurship serves to “free us from ill-considered ideas and politico-economic regimes of domination” (p.25). For these researchers, such aims stand in contrast to functionalist approaches that seek efficiency and effectiveness, and interpretive approaches that apparently only attempt to understand the lived experience of entrepreneurship. In leadership studies, the influence of CMS is evident in a body of work associated with yet another identifier, ‘Critical Leadership Studies’ (CLS). According to Collinson (2011), CLS draws on theoretical resources associated with CMS – such as post-structuralism, labour process theory and critical realism – but addresses a shortcoming of the latter by scrutinizing the concept of leadership. Indeed, a good number of researchers employing post-structuralist forms of analyses have offered valuable work in these terms (eg. Collinson, 2006, 2014; Ford, 2006; Ford et al, 2008; Harding, 2014), but it would seem there is still a relative dearth of research informed by labour process theory or critical realism, for example. Nonetheless, it is fair to surmise critical studies of entrepreneurship and leadership share some intellectual heritage by drawing on a relatively more established body of research and ideas.

### 2.3.2. The Centrality of Debate

This next argument is a paradoxical one – that debate is foundational to the critical approach, and any attempt to restrict this through, for example, rigid definitions of what constitutes it can be seen as being antithetical to its aims. Indeed, this entire section of this chapter may generate some hostility and provocation, namely by responding to the question of what constitutes a critical approach. In the context of CMS, the centrality of debate is suggested in the various discussions that have been offered regarding the core features that constitute the field. For some, three features - denaturalization, (non or anti)-performativity and reflexivity – characterize the diverse body of work associated with it (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Grey and Willmott, 2005). However, the claims relating to some of these have been contested.

For instance, Grey and colleagues have argued that anti or non-performative intent characterizes CMS. As these researchers argue, conventional approaches share a concern with improving managerial or organizational effectiveness, thus valorising knowledge based on the outcomes it may achieve. In contrast, CMS questions such motives, and is concerned with performativity “only in that it seeks to uncover what is being done in its name” (Fournier and Grey, 2000: p.17). This, however, has been challenged on the basis that it forecloses practitioner engagement and prevents researchers from offering anything beneficial in lieu of their critique (Spicer et al, 2009). Others have proposed concepts such as ‘critical performativity’ (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Spicer et al, 2016) or ‘progressive performativity’ (Wickert and Schaefer, 2015). Broadly, such ideas provide researchers with guidelines on how to intervene in organizational or managerial practices, subtly challenge these, and encourage new forms of thinking and acting amongst organizational actors. Some further debate surrounds the issue of reflexivity in CMS. According to Grey and Willmott (2005), accounts of

managerial practice and the production of these by researchers and participants are embedded within socio-historical conditions. CMS thus insists that the assumptions underlying such accounts and their production are queried to present a “methodological and epistemological challenge to the objectivism and scientism of mainstream research” (p.6). However, according to Thompson (2005), this characterization of CMS is particularly untenable, given that most interpretive approaches to the social sciences call for some form of reflexivity anyway.

Despite this, there is some consensus regarding the characteristic of denaturalization (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Grey and Willmott, 2005). Denaturalization is generally seen to involve questioning the forms of knowledge about managerial practice and organizations that have become deeply embedded and taken for granted (Adler et al, 2008). For Alvesson and Ashcraft (2009), CMS challenges the “ideologies, institutions, interests and identities” (p.63) that dominate representations of management, exploring how actors “habitually naturalize, reify or in other ways freeze culturally dominant understandings” (p.64). In other instances, some have particularly foregrounded the social relations that constitute managerial practice and organizational life as the target for denaturalization. As Alvesson and Willmott (1992) indicate, this may involve viewing management as a socio-political function, rather than just in terms of technical activities such as the physical or intellectual distribution of labour. As a socio-political function, managerial practice is rendered as a fundamentally political issue, replete with struggles between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ – those with the interests and resources to impose practices, and those subordinated to such endeavours, without the means to mount a challenge (Adler et al, 2008). Elsewhere, it is the concepts used to elaborate management and organization studies that are taken to task (Alvesson et al, 2009). For example, Child (2011) has sought to problematize the centrality of ‘hierarchy’ in organizational theorizing. As he argues, hierarchy can facilitate social order through the allocation of responsibilities and

rewards, but simultaneously can preserve inequality or the privilege of those in power and shield them from scrutiny.

In entrepreneurship studies, some differences are identifiable in the discussions of what constitutes a critical approach to the discipline. For Rehn et al (2013), it would appear that denaturalization is particularly relevant to the critical approach, which for these researchers, involves demystifying the conceptualization and practice of entrepreneurship. As such, these researchers argue for more research, and indeed, draw attention to examples, that challenge dominant assumptions, such as those related to economic growth or the kinds of effects that entrepreneurship is conventionally thought to engender. As indicated earlier in this section, however, Jones and Spicer (2009) have argued that four elements of critique are relevant. For these researchers, such critique aims to question the apparent stability of the categories ‘entrepreneur’ and ‘entrepreneurship’, investigate the “political struggles in the process of entrepreneurship”, and enquire into how academic knowledge is “bound up with the relations of domination associated with the entrepreneur” (p.26). In other work, Essers et al (2017) have argued that a critical approach to entrepreneurship should subject associated concepts to scrutiny via a range of alternative theoretical and methodological lenses. In doing so, researchers may examine how entrepreneurship is routinely privileged as a “distinct field of economic action and an exclusive activity for distinct groups of people”, whilst also considering other “collective and value-based forms of entrepreneurial organizing and exchange” (p.2).

In leadership studies, some debate is certainly identifiable in discussions concerning the conceptual terrain of critical approaches, particularly in recent articles by Learmonth and Morell (2016) and Collinson (2017). According to Learmonth and Morell (2016), CLS lacks a

radical edge and is unreflexive about its use of the ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ categories. For these researchers, such categories serve to deny the ‘structured antagonism’ within the labour process between capital and labour. As such, Learmonth and Morell (2016) advocate questioning the “effects of the language of leadership – and considering the use of alternatives – rather than routinely deploying it ourselves” (p.11). In response, Collinson (2017) has argued against the use of conceptual categories such as ‘capital’ and ‘labour’, noting that different forms of conflict are “likely to be missed and/or obscured by a Marxist binary that prioritizes the structural economic conflict between managers and workers” (p.5). In the end, however, Collinson (2017) does nonetheless appear to concede that Marxist concepts such as class relations or struggle, the commodity, labour-power and ownership of the means of production can be valuable for understanding and advancing critical research on leadership.

### 2.3.3. Reconsidering Entrepreneurship and Leadership

Critical research has thus explored various themes of interest to offer novel forms of knowledge about entrepreneurship and leadership. In entrepreneurship studies, for instance, researchers have explored the theme of play and creativity, most recently in a special issue of *Organization Studies* edited by Hjorth et al (2018). According to Hjorth et al (2018), further knowledge about these concepts – play, creativity and entrepreneurship – and the relations between them can generate new understandings of “the urge to master creativity (and innovation), openness and heterogeneity as organizational conditions for collective creation” (p.157). Gender and race have also been themes of particular interest. Some of the literature on these topics were previously discussed in Section 2.1.4 (Ahl, 2006; Bird and Brush, 2002; Hamilton, 2006, 2013; Ogbor, 2002). More recently, however, Marlow and Martinez Dy (2017) have observed that



much critique of masculinity in entrepreneurship has led to studies “about women and by women” such that “women as a category have become a generic proxy for the gendered subject” (p.4). Instead, these researchers argue for more research informed by feminist theory that explores the context-dependency of gender and how it acts as a resource in entrepreneurial activity.

In leadership studies, researchers adopting a critical approach have sought to examine the power relations that support dominant conceptualizations, identifications and/or attributions of leadership in different ways (Knights and Willmott, 1992). One early, and influential, attempt in this regard is found in the work of Smircich and Morgan (1982). Through ethnographic work, these researchers have argued that power defines leadership processes, as the sense-making activities of leaders are prioritized over those of others. Leaders thus engage in the ‘management of meaning’ to mitigate organizational uncertainty, or embody the “meanings and values conducive to desired modes of organized action” (p.269). Others have taken the transformational approach to task. For instance, Collinson (2011) has argued that mainstream theorizing has often conceptualized it in terms of a hierarchical, uni-directional influence process that prioritizes leaders whilst de-emphasizing the role and contributions of followers. Informed by the work of Giddens and Foucault, Collinson (2011) has argued for dialectical modes of analysis that may draw attention to the power relationships between leaders and followers that “are likely to be interdependent as well as asymmetrical, typically ambiguous, frequently shifting, potentially contradictory and often contested” (p.185). In other work, some researchers have sought to reveal the more unseemly aspects of transformational leadership (Tourish, 2011; Tourish and Pinnington, 2002). In doing so, these researchers have argued that the component behaviours commonly associated with the transformational approach, such as individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation, can equally be identified amongst

leader-follower relationships in cults. The articles discussed here are only some examples of the kinds of valuable research conducted to question, challenge and provide alternative ways for understanding leadership (other examples include Stead and Elliot, 2009; Liu and Baker, 2014; O'Reilly and Reed, 2010; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003).

Researchers adopting a critical approach have thus explored a myriad of themes. I have indeed only touched on some of these, and fuller discussions are difficult given the word count limitations of this chapter. However, I want to touch on one more theme of relevance before concluding this chapter, and doing so requires firstly re-visiting CMS for a moment. According to Adler et al (2008), much CMS research is motivated by the problems associated with the patterns and structures within the worlds we inhabit. In this regard, Adler et al (2008) especially draw attention to capitalism, or the “form of society characterized by wage employment (thus domination by the class of owners, distinct from cooperative ownership) and competition between firms” (p.157). For these researchers, CMS thus shifts the focus away from individuals and the ways in which they manage or lead. Informed by theoretical resources such as Marxism, Critical Theory and Labour Process Theory, critique is reoriented towards the broader social, economic, material and/or ideological structures and patterns that reproduce inequalities in organizational contexts and amongst social actors.

Of these theoretical resources, Marx's analyses of the capitalist mode of production are of particular interest in this discussion and thesis, and their relevance as a mode of analysis for understanding contemporary society is notable. Adler (2019), for instance, has recently discussed the various social 'crises' confronting modern society, highlighting the structural aspects of the capitalist system as an underlying cause in ways that clearly implicate Marx's concerns. As he writes, we must acknowledge first that capitalism has certainly generated its

share of economic and societal improvements. For example, capitalism has stimulated innovation within industries. Organizations, in an effort to grow and compete with their rivals, must seek better, cheaper or faster ways of producing commodities to satisfy rapidly evolving consumer needs. Additionally, capitalism has enabled commerce to extend its reach into rural areas, bringing these into interaction with their wider communities, thereby stimulating employment or infrastructure growth. In a related sense, capitalism has thus stimulated ‘globalization’, which Marx himself alluded to, with Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto* well over a century ago, arguing that the “need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe... [to] nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere” (1848/2008: p.38). In these ways at least, we may acknowledge that capitalism has improved our material circumstances *to a degree* over the course of its historical development in certain ways.

However, at least one of Marx’s chief concerns may broadly be seen in terms of the detrimental effects wrought by the capitalist mode of production, and one way to explain this is to re-contextualize the category of ‘organization growth’ within his analyses. As Adler (2019) argues, organizations must minimally seek profits in their commercial activities, or otherwise risk countenancing failure and being forced into closure. In Marx’s (1867/1976) analysis, the notion of ‘growth’ is perhaps most usefully read in terms of the process of accumulation, which is cyclical in nature, expansive, and in principle, limitless. For Marx, this process involves purchasing the means of production (including labour power), setting these to work in the production of commodities, extracting surplus value from workers through exploitative practices, and selling commodities that are produced to realize this surplus value in the form of profit or ‘money’ capital. A portion of this surplus value may be retained by owners of capital but some is also re-invested back into production, in order to reproduce both the process

of accumulation and the class relation between capitalists and workers. Marx's analyses in these terms are fruitful, in so far as they raise formidable questions about the object of 'growth' that many profit-seeking organizations orientate themselves towards – particularly, the extent to which organization growth may be underpinned by or perpetuate practices of exploitation and conditions of inequality of various forms within the material circumstances of work settings in contemporary organizations. Further, his analyses raise intriguing questions about the forms of discursive representations that 'mask' such practices and conditions, effectively obscuring them from view through an economy of language that works to rationalize the politicized nature of organizational life.

Marx's analyses arguably have further relevance in the study of entrepreneurship and/or leadership. In entrepreneurship studies, for example, the issue of capitalism was indeed discussed at length by Joseph Schumpeter in his text *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942/1976). Buttressed by a critical appraisal of both Marx and Marxism, Schumpeter (1942/1976) argued that capitalism would create "conditions in which it will not be able to live" (p.61), whilst simultaneously distancing himself from any claims that socialism was its heir apparent. In doing so, Schumpeter (1942/1976) recognized that the entrepreneurial function (the pursuit of 'new combinations') was indeed the "prime mover" (p.132) of capitalism, but argued the evolution of the capitalist economy would render this function obsolete. According to Schumpeter (1942/1976), technological evolution associated with capitalism routinizes progress and innovation whilst substituting individual initiative with the bureaucracy of committees. These statements do indeed highlight the salience of contemporary arguments that the concept of, and phenomena related to, entrepreneurship can only make sense within the context of capitalism, and any separation of the two is vulgar (Jones and Murtola, 2012b). In more recent work, for instance, Jones and Murtola (2012a) have thus sought to

restore the study of entrepreneurship to the political-economic context of capitalism. According to these researchers, various streams of work, such as networking, social capital and social entrepreneurship, at least implicitly recognize the Marxist concepts of cooperation and the socialized worker. Thus, entrepreneurship itself can be conceived, in one sense, as “production from the common, in common and of the common” (p.647). However, these researchers argue that the resilience of individualism in the discipline contradictorily also suggests an ‘expropriation from the common’ – the socialized nature of production implicit in entrepreneurship is denied by the focus on an individual who lays claim to creation or that “one or one’s corporation has been the source and locus of creation” (p.649).

Marx’s (1867/1976) analyses are also relevant, for instance where we consider the deceptively simple proposition that entrepreneurship can be regarded as a form of ‘work’. Arguably, this is at the very least suggested in popular biographies of individuals represented by the category of ‘entrepreneur’. Contrary to recent formulations of entrepreneurship as a form of ‘play’ (Hjorth et al, 2018), it may be argued that the ‘business’ of building a business does in itself involve significant toil and labour. Further, where at the outset the returns on one’s physical, physiological or financial investments cannot be predicted with certainty, to whatever extent one may try, it may potentially even be seen as work that entails a substantial degree of risk and precarity. Of interest here are Marx’s (1867/1976) arguments concerning the nature of work within the capitalist system, particularly its ‘alienating’ tendency. Briefly, alienation refers to the quality by which an individual or individuals are dispossessed of, or become ‘alien’ from, the product of their labour or the labour process, their environments, the social relations of production, or themselves (Petrovic, 1991). Workers, for instance, enter into the labour process out of necessity, exchanging their abilities to work for wages that allow them to reproduce the conditions of their existence. Work is alienating for workers, as in receiving

wages, they are obliged to accept the authority of the capitalist or agents of capital who retain discretion over how work is to be configured, the outputs of work, and how the fruits of workers' labour are to be distributed.

Capitalists, however, are equally subject to the alienating tendencies of the system. As personifications of the economic category of 'capital', these individuals are beholden to the 'coercive laws of competition', and must find ways and means of exploiting workers to extract surplus value that can be re-invested to keep production viable. As Marx (1867/1976) argues, capitalists are thus able, or indeed required, to appropriate surplus value from workers by 'flexibly' deploying a range of strategies, such as lengthening the working day, improving productivity through the application of technology, or techniques of work intensification. Thus conceived, work within capitalism for its agents or members of the main classes entails a loss of 'selfhood', the subordination of all to the inner workings of the system, or alienation (Petrovic, 1991). Marx's analyses therefore press us to consider the alienating tendencies of entrepreneurship, where it is regarded as a form of work, or indeed, as the 'prime mover' of capitalism in the sense articulated by Schumpeter (1942/1976). Further, this potential loss of selfhood through entrepreneurial work within the capitalist system may be juxtaposed against the notion of 'entrepreneurship' as the embodiment of the neoliberal ideals of individualism, choice and autonomy. Specifically, entrepreneurship, when located between a neoliberal ideology and the materialist sub-strata of capitalism, may possibly be seen to embody a real contradiction, one characterized by the notion of 'freedom'.

Marx and Engels (1848/2008) famously declared in *The Communist Manifesto* that the "history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (p.33), struggles typified by the forms of antagonistic social relations characteristic of the modes of production antecedent and

giving way to the capitalist system. Some care must possibly be taken when appreciating their argument in this respect as the manifesto itself may be viewed as a polemic with revolutionary intent, designed to persuade the working class as much as, if not more than, it aimed to educate its members. Nonetheless, their declaration or argument is noteworthy here for its relevance to leadership studies, particularly in terms of the writings of James MacGregor Burns. In his seminal text *Leadership*, Burns (1978) valuably criticised existing work on the subject for its recurrent tendency to dichotomize leadership and followership, and its reliance on the notion of ‘great men’ as the makers of history. Notably, Burns (1978: p.52) equally dismissed the notion that “history is forged in the crucible of class struggle rising out of consciousness of relative social and economic deprivation”, arguing instead that leadership studies should aim to formulate “more sophisticated theories of causation”.

One of Burns’ (1978) central theses concerned the contrast between ‘transforming’, and transactional leadership, and prioritization of the former over the latter for conceptualizing leadership action. As he argued (p.20), the former occurred when individuals as “leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality”, thereby enhancing “the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led”. In contrast, transactional leadership occurred through individuals “making contact... for the purpose of an exchange of valued things... economic or political or psychological in nature” (p.19). Individuals within this ‘bargaining’ process were seen to be conscious of each other’s power resources, and bound to each other by that process, going their separate ways upon its completion. In later work Burns would recognize the ‘over-dichotomization’ of his initial attempts to contrast transforming and transactional leadership, and the potential for both to be operationalized on a spectrum by leaders (see Collinson, 2014).

However, what is notable here is, (i) Burns' characterization of an 'inferior' form of leadership as an 'exchange'; (ii) the positioning of 'transforming' leadership as the more preferential, even ethical, form; and (iii) the centrality of 'exchange' as a concept in Marx's analyses of capitalism. For Marx (1867/1976), the conceptual resource of 'exchange' was important to his analyses and could be understood in a number of different ways – for instance, as a form of value and therefore one aspect of the dual nature of any kind of commodity, the process by which commodities are transacted, or the process by which capital is valorized. Alternatively, it is possible to understand the conceptual resource of 'exchange' in terms of the economic relations presaging the need for institutional arrangements in the form of private property ownership that allowed the capitalist mode of production to flourish. In the aforementioned senses, there are arguments to be made for how Burns' initial writings in *Leadership* had the effect of relegating Marxist analysis into the background, if not dismissing it entirely, and in a sense, curiously de-politicizing a form of leadership that was designed to be significant for political action in the first place. In turn, this may lead us to another appreciation of how 'transforming' or transformational leadership might have been 'damaged' or erroneous from the very outset (Spector, 2013), underscore its potentially ideological function (Alvesson and Karreman, 2016), and in this latter sense, how it conceptually serves to naturalize "the interests of elites while de-radicalizing critique" (Learmonth and Morrell, 2016: p.3).

More broadly, the foregoing discussion has sought to justify a Marxist analysis in the study of leadership, just as much as it has relevance to the study of entrepreneurship. As a final point, another way to appreciate the value of Marx's analyses for the study of leadership would simply be to observe his direct statements on the subject. For instance, Marx (1867/1976) did argue that the communality and socialized nature of production in the labour process necessitates supervision, hierarchy and ultimately, that someone assumes the function of direction in



capitalist enterprises. As such, Marx (1867/1976) offered the (gendered) argument that “it is not because he is a leader of industry that a man is a capitalist; on the contrary, he is a leader of industry because he is a capitalist” (p.450). Thus, Marx’s position on ‘leadership’ was that it was an ‘attribute of capital’, and certain individuals were able to lead fundamentally because they had ownership and/or control of the means of production. The implications of Marx’s work remain notably unexplored in contemporary studies of leadership (and followership), although as suggested earlier, its relevance has clearly been acknowledged. The articles by Learmonth and Morell (2016) and Collinson (2017) do indeed suggest that, despite differences over what constitutes the conceptual terrain of CLS, Marxist concepts are certainly valuable. More broadly, it would appear there is still some conceptual terrain left to explore in relation to the context-dependency of leadership – particularly, the implications of Marx’s analyses and critiques of the capitalist mode of production for understanding how individuals perceive their rights to lead, how they lead or how they are led in organizations.

#### 2.4. Chapter Conclusion

To conclude, I have provided a narrative review of entrepreneurship and leadership research in this chapter, organized around the heroic, post-heroic and critical frames of reference or approaches. Doing so has allowed me to generate some understanding of what constitutes these approaches, examine how entrepreneurship and leadership research thematically intersect in these terms, and set the context for a critical approach towards the study of entrepreneurial leadership in this thesis. As such, I have argued that the heroic approach is underpinned by the Great Man tradition, as suggested in the work of Schumpeter and Carlyle. In more contemporary terms, the heroic approach tends to assume identifiable differences exist between

entrepreneurs/leaders and ‘others’. In addition, this approach typically involves attributing causality to the individual for organizational or societal outcomes, and assuming masculine formulations of the entrepreneur or leader.

The post-heroic approach may be regarded as being premised upon critiques of individualist, heroic approaches. Following such critiques, researchers have typically advocated more collective forms of leading or entrepreneurial activity, whilst nonetheless (implicitly) maintaining some interest in the role of the individual. The critical approach is somewhat harder to define – indeed, as I have noted, attempts at definition can be regarded as antithetical to the aims of critical approaches as this only restricts debate. Nonetheless, critical approaches to entrepreneurship and leadership studies are broadly united by their influence from CMS, a commitment towards denaturalization and subjecting associated concepts to scrutiny via alternative theoretical and methodological lenses. The next chapter proceeds with a review of literature on entrepreneurial leadership, the topic of central relevance to this thesis. Following this, I discuss how the preceding discussion of heroic, post-heroic and critical approaches adds to our understanding of entrepreneurial leadership.

### 3. Entrepreneurial Leadership

In this chapter, I provide a narrative review of literature on the topic that is central to this thesis - entrepreneurial leadership. The aim of this chapter is to understand the concepts and themes from the constituent disciplines (or otherwise) that have informed researchers in the area, and derive observations that inform research gaps for this study. This chapter is structured as follows. I begin with an introduction to the topic and highlight the two review questions driving this chapter. These review questions are (i) *How have concepts and/or theories from entrepreneurship and leadership studies (or otherwise) informed research on entrepreneurial leadership?* and (ii) *what observations may be derived from this for this study?* I then discuss the search criteria and methodology that underpinned this review, before briefly highlighting some preliminary observations derived from the tabulated results of this search process. This is followed by a lengthier discussion of the various concepts, theories and themes that have been of interest to researchers. I conclude with a discussion that addresses the two review questions stimulating this chapter, and specific ways forward in terms of the main research question for this study.

### 3.1. Introducing Entrepreneurial Leadership

Based on my readings, it was Schumpeter (1934: p.67) who first alluded to the topic at hand, describing an “entrepreneurial kind of leadership” that is distinct from other forms of “economic leadership such as we should expect to find in a primitive tribe or a communist society”. Schumpeter (1934: p.67) described this form of leadership in a few senses, but most pertinently, noted it involved leading “the means of production into new channels... by buying [people] or their services, and then using them as [the entrepreneur] sees fit”. Following this, the earliest and explicit application of the term ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ seems to appear first in the work of Chester McArthur Destler in the year 1946. In this article, Destler (1946) focused his analysis on a particular group of American businessmen operating in various industries such as railroad construction and manufacturing from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Destler (1946) emphasized that despite amoral behaviours such as stock speculation or political corruption, these individuals contributed significantly to American economic progress by creating organizations, valuable employment opportunities and extending businesses into emergent fields of enterprise. The aforementioned work seems to have slipped from view as the literature on entrepreneurial leadership has expanded in the last decade. For some, entrepreneurial leadership has come to represent a “new paradigm” (Fernald Jr. et al, 2005: p.1). Others view it as increasingly vital for organizations in lieu of turbulent and competitive business climates (Gupta et al, 2004), or increasingly relevant given the contribution of entrepreneurship to wider economic progress (Kuratko, 2007).

Despite such claims of novelty or increasing relevance, however, it would appear that the concept of ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ is difficult to pin down. For example, researchers have proposed a number of wide-ranging definitions informed by ideas from the constituent

disciplines such as entrepreneurial opportunity, influence and direction. Entrepreneurial leadership has thus been defined as “influencing and directing the performance of group members toward the achievement of organizational goals that involve recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities” (Renko et al, 2015: p.2). For some researchers, it involves “the ability to influence others to manage resources strategically in order to emphasize both opportunity-seeking and advantage-seeking behaviours” (Wang et al, 2012: p.507). Muddying the waters further, Darling et al. (2007) have proposed a definition of “entrepreneurial management leadership” (p.5) as a process of value creation that recognizes and exploits opportunities. In the strategic management literature, Gupta et al. (2004) define it as “leadership that creates visionary scenarios that are used to assemble and mobilize a supporting cast of participants who become committed by the vision to the discovery and exploitation of strategic value creation” (p.242). Similarly, Surie and Ashley (2007) define entrepreneurial leadership as something which is “capable of sustaining innovation and adaptation in high velocity and uncertain environments” (p. 235).

Additionally, there is little consensus as to the kinds of organizations that entrepreneurial leadership applies to, thus compounding the elusiveness of the concept. To elaborate, a body of literature views entrepreneurial leadership as applicable to both small and large organizations (Renko et al, 2015; Greenberg et al, 2013; Ripoll et al, 2010; Surie and Ashley, 2008; Darling et al, 2007; Kuratko, 2007; Cohen, 2004; Gupta et al, 2004; Ireland et al, 2003; Swiercz and Lydon, 2002). A relatively smaller number of authors view entrepreneurial leadership as applicable to only the small business context (Leitch et al, 2013; Wang et al, 2012; Kempster and Cope, 2010; Jones and Crompton, 2009; Chen, 2007; Jensen and Luthans; 2006; Ensley et al, 2006; Fernald Jr. et al, 2005). Others invoking the term ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ specify different organizational forms for their studies, such as higher education

settings (Bagheri and Pihie, 2012, 2011; Roomi and Harrison, 2011; Ruvio et al, 2010), family owned and controlled businesses (Ng and Thorpe, 2010; Kansikas et al, 2010), or the public sector and political institutions (Currie et al, 2008; Young, 1991). For some researchers, the question of organizational scale is unproblematic, as entrepreneurial leadership “is not specific to any type of organisation, industry or culture and can flourish in different settings” (Leitch and Volery, 2017: p. 148). More broadly, however, it would seem there is an issue of conceptual definition in contemporary studies of entrepreneurial leadership.

On the one hand, this is problematic since research on the topic is in its infancy (Leitch et al, 2012; Leitch and Volery, 2017). The lack of definition may disenfranchise the concept and obstruct it from gaining legitimacy. This may vex some, as a number of authors have attempted to delineate the parallels between the constituent disciplines, albeit without addressing the concept of ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ *per se*. For example, Cogliser and Brigham (2004) have identified the overlapping themes between both fields, including vision, influence and creativity. Through a similar analysis, however, Becherer et al. (2008) have argued that entrepreneurship and leadership are not overlapping constructs. Rather, both are separate manifestations of a deeper phenomenon, which these researchers refer to as the “need to create”, or “the propensity to engage one’s environment, to create something new, and to change craft within it” (p.20). Elsewhere, Vecchio (2003) has reported on an analysis of the “common trends and common threads” (p.303) between both disciplines. Vecchio (2003), perhaps to the chagrin of entrepreneurship scholars and delight of their leadership counterparts, settles on the view that entrepreneurship is leadership within a specific narrow context. From this, a possible question is whether decades of entrepreneurship scholarship may thus be subsumed under the heading of a field that itself has witnessed currents and counter-currents in the form of functionalist, interpretive and critical perspectives (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012).

On the other hand, however, the issue of conceptual definition is arguably par for the course given that similar problems have resonated through the constituent disciplines. For example, Cunningham and Lischeron (1991) have identified no less than six perspectives from which entrepreneurship may be viewed, noting that the term may signify a wide range of activities such as new venture creation or management. Anderson and Starnawska (2008) have argued that entrepreneurship is an elusive concept due to the multi-faceted ways in which individuals can be entrepreneurial. Informed by Lacanian theory, Jones and Spicer (2005) have suggested entrepreneurship is not a “coherent and stable discourse”, but “a paradoxical, incomplete and worm-ridden symbolic structure that posits an impossible and indeed incomprehensible object at its centre” (p.236). With regards to leadership, the sheer volume of material on the topic has led to wry observations about the futility of pursuing a common definition. For Grint (2005a), we “appear to be no nearer a consensus as to its basic meaning” (p.14), whilst Alvesson (1996) has observed that a common definition “is not practically possible, would not be very helpful if it was, does not hit the target and may also obstruct new ideas and interesting ways of thinking” (p.458).

The aim of this chapter is thus to explore the conceptual make-up of ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ through a narrative review of existing literature. This review is stimulated by two questions; (i) *How have concepts and/or theories from entrepreneurship and leadership studies (or otherwise) informed research on entrepreneurial leadership?* and (ii) *what observations may be derived from this for this study?* The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. I first discuss the literature search methodology underpinning this narrative review and offer some preliminary observations on the results. This is followed by a discussion of concepts from the entrepreneurship field that have informed the study of entrepreneurial leadership, and a similar discussion of leadership theories. I then turn to a discussion of other themes or issues

that have concerned researchers in the field, before concluding to address the review questions and discuss specific ways forward in this thesis.

### 3.2. Literature Search Methodology and Results

The search methodology for this review is an adaptation of what has been applied by Jack (2010) and Busenitz et al (2003) in entrepreneurship research. For this review, articles were selected based on four criteria using the ABI/Inform Complete database. First, two sets of search terms were specified – (i) ‘entrepreneurial leadership’, and (ii) ‘entrepreneur’ and ‘leader’. Second, all articles had to be published between the years 1988 and 2019, inclusive. Third, all articles had to be published within English scholarly journals. Using the first search term provided a return of 93 results, whilst a considerably larger result of 324 articles was obtained through the second set of search terms. Fourth, abstracts of all results were further assessed to determine the extent to which the concept of entrepreneurial leadership was discussed. The number of articles to be reviewed in this chapter was further narrowed to 49. The following tables display the results of this search methodology. Table 1 displays the results in terms of the journals the articles have been published in, the number of articles within each journal, and the articles that are empirical (ie. Involving data collection and analysis) or not. Tables 2 and 3 organize the results further in terms of empirical and non-empirical articles. These highlight the themes from entrepreneurship and leadership literatures (or otherwise) that have interested researchers, along with the key findings from each article.



Table 1: Articles Reviewed

Journal	No. of Articles (1988-2018)	Non-empirical Articles	Empirical Articles
International Small Business Journal	5	Sklaventi (2017)	Dean & Ford (2017)
		Leitch and Volery (2017)	Zacch and Baldegger (2017)
		Koryak et al (2015)	
International Journal of Management Reviews	1	Cope et al (2011)	
Journal of Small Business Management	7	Harrison et al (2015)	Renko et al (2015)
		Galloway et al (2015)	McGowan et al (2015)
		Henry et al (2015)	Lewis (2015)
			Bamiatzi et al (2015)
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research	3	Thompson (1999)	Kansikas et al (2010)
			Kempster and Cope (2010)
Journal of Management	1	Ireland et al (2003)	
Journal of Management Studies	1	Haynes et al (2015)	
Journal of Business Venturing	2		Gupta et al (2004)
			Ensley et al (2006)
Organizational Dynamics	1	Uhl Bien and Arena (2017)	
Journal of Leadership and Organization Studies	1	Kuratko (2007)	
Leadership and Organization Development Journal	2		Jensen and Luthans (2006)
			Swiercz and Lydon (2002)
Human Resource Development International	1	Bagheri and Pihie (2011)	
Journal of Education for Business	1		Bagheri and Pihie (2013)
Public Administration Review	1		Miao et al (2018)
Creativity in Management	2		Huang et al (2014)
			Chen (2007)
British Journal of Management	1		Leitch et al (2012)
Gender in Management	1	Patterson et al (2012a)	
Journal of Enterprising Culture	1	Dimovski et al (2013)	
Southern Business Review	1	Fernald et al (2005)	
Asia Pacific Business Review	1		Wang et al (2012)
Journal of Strategy and Management	1		Jones and Crompton (2009)
Asia Pacific Journal of Management	1	Gupta & Wang (2004)	
Journal of Business Ethics	1	Surie & Ashley (2008)	
European Management Journal	1		Nicholson (1998)
California Management Review	1		McCarthy et al (2010)
Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship	1	Darling & Leffel (2010)	

Journal of Leadership Studies	2	Kuratko & Hornby (1999)	
		Tian & Smith (2014)	
Organization Development Journal	1	Darling & Beebe (2007)	
European Journal of Training and Development	1		Patterson et al (2012b)
Journal of Workplace Learning	1		Harrison et al (2016)
Journal of Business Ethics Education	1	McKone-Sweet et al (2011)	
Career Development International	1	Prabhu (1999)	
Leader to Leader	2	Cohen (2004)	
		Greenberg et al (2013)	
Total	49	26	23

Table 2: Empirical Articles Reviewed

Authors	Entrepreneurship Themes	Leadership Themes	Other Themes	Key Findings	Methods
Gupta et al (2004)	Entrepreneurial Orientation	Transformational Leadership		EL involves envisaging opportunities to transform an organization, and assembling competent individuals to execute vision; Findings suggest validity of proposed EL construct	Survey
Renko et al (2015)	Entrepreneurial Orientation; Entrepreneurial Opportunity	Transformational Leadership		EL involves influencing the performance of groups to achieve organizational goals that involve developing entrepreneurial opportunities; Findings suggest EL more prevalent amongst founder-leaders than non-founder leaders	Survey
McCarthy et al (2010)		Transformational Leadership		Findings suggest sample of Russian entrepreneurs overwhelmingly exhibit transformational leadership behaviours; Supports the notion that EL style may be consistent across countries and cultures	Surveys & Interviews
Chen (2007)	Entrepreneurial Orientation; Entrepreneurial Opportunity			EL involves engaging in an effective combination of risk-taking, pro-activeness and innovativeness; Findings suggest EL can influence creativity of entrepreneurial team in new venture context	Survey
Jensen and Luthans (2006)		Authentic Leadership		Findings suggest employees who perceive their entrepreneur/leader to be more authentic are more committed and satisfied with work; Perceptions of authenticity may indirectly impact venture performance	Survey
Jones and Crompton (2009)		Authentic Leadership		Findings suggest EL more influential in small, owner-managed firms, especially if entrepreneur has authentic concern for developing employees and enhancing firm's value and turnover	Interviews

Wang et al (2012)	Entrepreneurial Opportunity	Situational Leadership		EL style in Chinese firms influenced by traditional Chinese philosophical beliefs; Also influenced by individual's personal experience, knowledge, skills and attributes	Interviews
Ensley et al (2006)		Situational Leadership		Findings suggest environmental conditions dictate leadership style; Transactional leadership more effective in stable environments, whereas transformational leadership more effective in dynamic environments	Survey
Huang et al (2014)		Situational Leadership		Findings support contextual models of EL; Dynamic environmental conditions can amplify relation between EL and exploratory innovation, but attenuate relation between EL and exploitative innovation	Survey
Zaech and Baldegger (2017)		Situational Leadership		Explore transformational and transactional approaches in new ventures; Findings suggest founder-CEOs must be able to adapt their leadership behaviours to the situation and context to be most successful	Survey
Swiercz and Lydon (2002)			Individual Competencies	Findings suggest that as a firm grows, entrepreneurial leader must acquire functional competencies (in operations, finance, marketing and HR) and other self-competencies	Interviews
Bagherie and Pihie (2013)			Entrepreneurship Education; Individual Competencies	Findings suggest entrepreneurship education develops students' EL competencies in terms of personal attributes and interpersonal abilities. Programs also provide opportunities for leadership learning and entrepreneurial work	Interviews
Harrison et al (2016)			Entrepreneurial Leadership Attributes	Findings highlight the EL attributes required to overcome challenges in the retail pharmacy sector within developing economies; Findings based on interviews with entrepreneurs and employees	Interviews
Kansikas et al (2012)			Familiness	Findings suggest the strategic resource of 'familiness' influences dimensions of entrepreneurial leadership, such as innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking, and opportunity recognition	Interviews
Miao et al (2018)			Psychological empowerment	EL seen to focus more on empowerment than control strategies, operationalized using scale from Renko et al (2015); Findings suggest EL positively influences employees' innovative behaviours by enhancing the meaning and impact dimensions of psychological empowerment	Survey
Kempster and Cope (2010)			Entrepreneurial Leadership Learning	Findings draw attention to the various factors that shape and restrict leadership learning in small businesses	Interviews
Leitch et al (2013)			Entrepreneurial Leadership Development	Findings suggest the enhancement of human capital only occurs through the development of social capital, which is enhanced through institutional capital	Interviews

Nicholson (1998)			Personality Traits	Findings suggest an EL personality profile	Surveys
Patterson et al (2012b)			Gender	Findings highlight women's experiences with EL, in terms of their struggles in identifying as entrepreneurial leaders and with managing difference	Interviews
McGowan et al (2015)			Gender	Findings suggest that young women may be insufficiently resourced to assume EL roles or lead the development of their enterprises due to factors such as personal circumstances and social/cultural contexts	Interviews
Lewis (2015)			Gender	Findings draw attention to how EL is enacted by a female entrepreneur over time and how being a leader is integrated into entrepreneurial identity development via gendered identity work	Interviews
Bamiatzi et al (2015)			Gender	Findings suggest that a sample of female small business owner-managers tend to adopt a transformational leadership style; a style evidently linked to their perceived personal and entrepreneurial competencies	Surveys
Dean and Ford (2017)			Gender	Findings highlight the fluidity of the EL concept, how entrepreneurs themselves embrace multiple and potentially conflicting identities, and draws attention to the dominant gendered leadership behaviour which valorises economic growth	Interviews

Table 3: Non-Empirical Articles Reviewed

Authors	Entrepreneurship Themes	Leadership Themes	Other Themes	Key Findings
Koryak et al (2015)	Entrepreneurial Opportunity; Entrepreneurial Cognition and Motivation		Dynamic and Growth Capabilities	Advance research framework depicting relationships between EL (in terms of cognition and motivation), dynamic capabilities, growth capabilities and growth outcomes
Darling and Leffel (2010)		Situational Leadership	Teams	Suggest that members of an EL team must understand their own and others' leadership style, and be able to adapt their own where appropriate for the team to function effectively
Sklaventi (2017)			Co-action; Post-heroic	Advances theoretical notion of 'co-action' as a means of studying EL; Focus on four inter-related processes of creativity and direction genesis or enactment, highlights significance of 'relationality' amongst venture participants
Dimovski et al (2013)			Chinese Philosophy; Post-heroic	Propose that principles of Daoist philosophy may benefit the study of EL; Implicates post-heroic ideas that represent a shift from leader-centric assumptions

Cohen (2004)			Shared/distributed leadership; Post-heroic	Discusses how EL can exist at all levels of an organization, implicates post-heroic ideas of leadership
Cope et al (2011)			Distributed leadership; Post-heroic	Argue that distributed leadership can facilitate SME growth, but also recognize the potential problems of developing distributed leadership in those contexts; Suggest contextually sensitive interventions, and a research agenda (which includes investigating leader-follower relations in SME contexts)
Thompson (1999)			Strategic Management	Argue that entrepreneurial leadership is required to create and sustain congruence between the organization's environment, resources and values or culture
Ireland et al (1993)			Strategic Entrepreneurship	Advance a model of 'Strategic Entrepreneurship' that includes EL as a component; Suggest further research to investigate how entrepreneurial leaders manage resources strategically to create competitive advantages
Kuratko and Hornsby (1998)			Strategic Management	Suggest specific elements of enacting EL in corporations, including the development of vision, innovation and teams, and structuring for an entrepreneurial climate
Kuratko (2007)			Strategic Management	Elaborates on global impact of EL
Surie and Ashley (2008)			Ethics; Pragmatism	Suggest that sustaining EL for value creation necessitates ethical action to build legitimacy
Gupta and Wang (2004)			Crisis Management	Suggest that in times of crisis, EL can be a means for turnaround strategies that strengthen organizations and their value generation capabilities
Uhl-Bien and Arena (2017)			Complexity	Argue that EL involves generating innovation, learning and growth in organizations; Represents one of three leadership functions that enables organizations to adapt and mitigate environmental complexity
Haynes et al (2015)			Personality Traits; Human and Social Capital	Suggest a model that depicts how entrepreneurial leaders' greed and hubris may variously affect human and social capital, and thus indirectly impact organizational performance
Fernald et al (2005)			Personality Traits	Findings concerning the characteristics common between entrepreneurs and leaders are suggested as the groundwork for further work on the characteristics of entrepreneurial leaders
Greenberg et al (2013)			Skills	Discuss key principles of EL - Cognitive ambidexterity; A commitment to social, environmental and economic value creation; Self-awareness
Darling and Beebe (2007)			Communication Skills	Identify the various communication skills that can enhance EL
Prabhu (1999)			Social Entrepreneurship	Discuss similarities and differences between social and economic enterprises, and between social and regular entrepreneurs

Tian and Smith (2014)			Leadership Skills; Social Entrepreneurship	Identify three leadership skills - acceptance, differentiation and integration - that can help social entrepreneurial leaders overcome the paradoxical tensions arising from managing profit and social goals
McKone-Sweet et al (2011)			Entrepreneurial Leadership Development	Discuss a pedagogical approach for developing entrepreneurial leaders
Bagheri and Pihie (2011)			Entrepreneurial Leadership Development	Propose a model for EL development that involves learning from experience, observation, and social interaction; and transforming acquired knowledge to effectively lead entrepreneurial ventures
Patterson et al (2012)			Gender	Suggest that existing conceptualizations of EL are not particularly gendered either way; EL might be a useful concept to explore women's EL experiences from a gender perspective
Harrison et al (2015)			Gender	Argue that entrepreneurial contexts are distinctive and mainstream leadership theories not suitable for study of EL; Suggest a research agenda for the gendered analysis of EL
Galloway et al (2015)			Gender	Argue that feminist theory and the notion of 'performativity' can contribute towards gendered analyses of EL; Argue for studies that seek to understand EL activities as they occur in reality and whom these benefit
Henry et al (2015)			Gender	Special Issue Editorial; Seek to illustrate the diversity and complexity of women's EL, highlighting that it is both contextually and economically embedded
Leitch and Volery (2017)			Conceptual and theoretical Devpt	Special Issue Editorial; EL defined as 'leadership role performed in entrepreneurial ventures' but not specific to any kind of context; Discuss SI articles and suggest further research agenda

The foregoing tables permit some initial observations about research into entrepreneurial leadership. For instance, Table 1 suggests research has been published in a variety of high-quality journals, such as the International Journal of Management Reviews, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Studies and Journal of Business Venturing. A special issue of the Journal of Small Business Management was published in 2015, dedicated to gendered analyses of entrepreneurial leadership. In 2017, a special issue was published in the International Small Business Journal, dedicated to conceptual and theoretical development. More broadly, much of this does suggest that, in recent years, valuable and rigorous work has been conducted to advance the conversation about entrepreneurial leadership. Tables 2 and 3 suggest some interesting trends concerning empirical and non-empirical work on the topic. Amongst empirical work, it would appear there has been more effort to draw on existing concepts from the constituent fields, such as entrepreneurial orientation, opportunity, transformational leadership or situational leadership. Amongst the non-empirical work, there is an interesting push towards what could be regarded as post-heroic forms of understanding, but these seem to reside on the margins of the dominant way of thinking about entrepreneurial leadership. The following sections serve to develop my argument concerning this dominant way of thinking.

### 3.3. Themes from the Entrepreneurship Literature

In the following sub-sections, I discuss key concepts from entrepreneurship studies that have informed extant research on entrepreneurial leadership. The discussion thus centres on the concepts of ‘entrepreneurial orientation’ and ‘entrepreneurial opportunity’. In each sub-section, I begin with a brief overview of the concept in question, and follow this with a critical evaluation of its application within the articles. To conclude, I provide a brief summary of the preceding discussion and highlight the central findings from the analyses.

#### 3.3.1. Entrepreneurial Orientation

In the entrepreneurship discipline, ‘entrepreneurial orientation’ refers to a set of policies or practices for strategy formulation describing *how* new entry is undertaken (Rauch et al, 2009), or the “processes, practices and decision-making activities that lead to new entry” (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996: p.136). Five dimensions are commonly applied to operationalize it. Three dimensions – proactiveness, risk-taking and innovation – were first proposed by Miller (1983) as a means for exploring the process of organizational renewal. The remaining two, autonomy and competitive aggression, were added on by Lumpkin and Dess (1996) for the purpose of clarification. Additionally, these researchers sought to establish a framework for investigating the link between entrepreneurial orientation and organizational performance. The concept has obtained some currency following the evolution of the discipline. For instance, Rauch et al (2009) note that a substantial body of empirical work in the area has led to its wider acceptance of meaning and relevance. Nonetheless, its meaning is debatable, as elsewhere, researchers note that entrepreneurial orientation is often used interchangeably with other terms such as



‘entrepreneurial behaviour’, ‘strategic posture’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ itself (Davidsson and Wiklund, 2001).

Further, Covin and Lumpkin (2011) have noted a general consensus in the wider field that entrepreneurial orientation is a firm-level construct. Two arguments for this focus seem to be particularly pertinent. First, some researchers have argued for the firm-level focus, given the limitations of individual-level views emphasizing entrepreneurial traits and behaviours. In recognition of this, Miller (1983) for example has argued that organizations are complex and renewal requires more than the efforts of just one individual. Second, the firm-level focus is bolstered by the notion that behaviours matter, albeit at the organizational level and for measuring performance. As Covin and Slevin (1991) argue, behaviours are “overt and demonstrable”, and knowing how they manifest enables us to “reliably, verifiably, and objectively measure the entrepreneurial levels of firms” (p.8). Furthermore, recent work suggests that the level of analysis may not be compromised. As Covin and Lumpkin (2011) indicate, “stretching the EO concept to other levels or units of analysis for the sake of generalizability may dilute the construct’s value by creating ambiguity” (p.857).

My review of research on entrepreneurial leadership suggests three articles have been particularly informed by the concept of entrepreneurial orientation, but consider it in terms of the individual. To elaborate, Gupta et al (2004) argue it is central to their study of entrepreneurial leadership, as firms are thus able to adapt their resources and capabilities to meet emergent competition. Gupta et al (2004) further indicate that entrepreneurial orientation is encouraged by a few conditions – the articulation of a coherent entrepreneurial vision, processes that nurture innovation or serve resource-acquisition needs, and the capacity for continuous exploration and idea generation. Much of this suggests a firm-level emphasis, but

the empirical component of this research rests on identifying relevant individual-level attributes. A similar issue lies in the work of Chen (2007) and Renko et al (2012) who also draw on the concept in question. These authors draw on the dimensions of proactiveness, risk-taking and innovation, but ultimately conceptualize entrepreneurial leadership in terms of the individual.

If we accept that entrepreneurial orientation is a firm-level construct, then a pertinent issue is whether firm-level behaviours may simply be transposed on to its constituents. Further, we may reverse this line of reasoning and object to the assumption underpinning the concept of entrepreneurial orientation itself - that is, individual-level behaviours may be aggregated to represent a firm-level phenomenon as the concept proposes. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) tend to suggest this, noting that “the small business firm is simply an extension of the individual who is in charge” (p.138). However, Rehn and Taalas (2004) oppose this notion, arguing that this confines analytical perspectives by viewing organizations through a fixed set of characteristics or behaviours, or ignores the nature of social phenomena as dynamic processes.

### 3.3.2. Entrepreneurial Opportunity

The notion of opportunity has become the centrepiece of entrepreneurship studies for some contemporary theorists and perhaps even the field more generally. In a seminal article, Venkataraman (1997) states as much, indicating that entrepreneurship as a scholarly field “seeks to understand how opportunities to bring in to existence ‘future’ goods and services are discovered, created and exploited, by whom and with what consequences” (p. 120). This definition has been highlighted again by Venkataraman and his co-author Scott Shane (2000),

in an article which received the 2010 Academy of Management Review Decade Award for its contributions to the entrepreneurship field. Reflecting on the impact of this article and the award, Shane (2012) has noted that the aforementioned definition has achieved some degree of consensus amongst researchers. Consequently, two issues are of interest to scholars by virtue of this definition – first, the sources of opportunities themselves, and second, “the nexus of opportunity and enterprising individuals” (Venkataraman, 1997: p.121). The value of these is perhaps undeniable if we consider the assertion of Short et al. (2010), that “without an opportunity, there is no entrepreneurship. A potential entrepreneur can be immensely creative and hardworking, but without an opportunity to target these characteristics, entrepreneurial activities cannot take place” (p.1).

My review of the research on entrepreneurial leadership suggests the theme of opportunity has been captured in some articles. To elaborate, Renko et al (2013) make a passing reference to the work of Shane and Venkataraman (2000). For Renko et al (2013), “opportunity recognition is about perception, exploitation is about action, and the goals set by entrepreneurial leaders involve both” (p.4). In doing so, leaders are thus able to extract commitment from and influence employees to behave in entrepreneurial ways that benefit the organization. For Chen (2007), creativity, particularly that of lead entrepreneurs, is vital for driving opportunity recognition processes in teams. For Wang et al (2012), the theme of opportunity is central to their definition of entrepreneurial leadership. These researchers argue entrepreneurial leadership “requires the entrepreneurial ability to identify opportunities for change, and the leadership ability to motivate others and mobilize resources to make change happen” (p.507). These research articles suggest an individualistic focus, although Koryak et al (2015) do appear to buck this trend. For these researchers, entrepreneurial leadership is a collective activity that at least partly involves identifying and exploiting opportunities.

The key issue to emphasise here is that this research on entrepreneurial leadership tends to offer a heroic slant with respect to opportunity recognition. This is particularly so as, for example, individual “perception” (Renko et al, 2013: p.4), “creativity” (Chen, 2007: p. 241) or some generalized “ability” (Wang et al, 2012: p. 507) are seen to mediate the opportunity recognition process. Jones and Spicer (2005) have critiqued such heroic views, arguing these imply that the identity of the entrepreneur is a limited title conferred upon a select few who appear to legitimize rhetorical appeals for innovation, creativity and freedom of expression. Others have drawn attention to the entrepreneur as a mythical figure and “warrior, superman, captain, pioneer, sportsman” (Dodd and Anderson, 2007: p.349), or a special person with “the ability to generate and husband resources” (Tedmanson et al, 2012: p.537). If such heroic representations do indeed guide our sense of reality (Dodd and Anderson, 2007), one might question whether such representations also implicate prescriptive and/or normative assumptions about who we believe entrepreneurs, leaders or entrepreneurial leaders are, what these individuals do, and consequently how practices of entrepreneurial leadership are to be performed.

### 3.3.3. Summary

In summary, I have discussed in the preceding sub-sections how key concepts from entrepreneurship studies have informed extant research on entrepreneurial leadership. I have highlighted how some researchers have operationalized the concept of entrepreneurial orientation at the individual-level, despite the assumption in the wider entrepreneurship field that it is a firm-level phenomenon. Further, I have suggested that research tends to offer a heroic slant with regards to opportunity recognition. As a concluding note, we might consider that images of heroism equally apply to the concept of entrepreneurial orientation, particularly where the focus is on the individual and ‘dimensions’ such as pro-activeness, the capacity to take risks and innovative behaviours are emphasized.

### 3.4. Themes from the Leadership Literature

In the following sub-sections, I discuss how certain leadership theories have informed research on entrepreneurial leadership. I focus particularly on the transformational approach, authentic leadership and the situational approach. The structure of this section is similar to the previous - Each sub-section begins with a brief overview of the leadership approach in question, which is then followed by a critical evaluation of its application within the identified articles listed in Tables 2 and 3. To conclude, I provide a brief summary of the preceding discussion and highlight the central findings from my analysis.

#### 3.4.1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership refers to the process of influencing significant changes in the attitudes and motivations of organization members (Yukl, 1989; Jackson and Parry, 2011). According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leaders motivate others by setting challenging expectations and empowering followers, and tend to elicit more satisfaction and commitment from followers. As numerous authors have indicated, this leadership approach typically considers four key factors to be important, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2010; Diaz-Saenz, 2011). Based on these factors, leaders thus act as role models with high ethical standards, communicate their expectations to motivate and inspire, stimulate creativity and innovation amongst their followers and focus on the actualization needs of those individuals (Northouse, 2010). As Table 2 highlights, the transformational approach has mainly informed researchers who have published empirical articles on entrepreneurial leadership

(Gupta et al, 2004; Renko et al, 2015; McCarthy et al, 2010). However, the aforementioned factors have been applied in various ways.

For Gupta et al (2004), the commonality between transformational and entrepreneurial leadership lies in the individual's ability to "evoke superordinate performance by appeals to the higher needs of followers" (p. 245). For these researchers, the factors of transformational leadership are identified as individual-level attributes. Such attributes permit a conceptualization of entrepreneurial leadership as one that involves creating scenarios of possible opportunities for exploitation, and assembling the required stakeholders and resources to accomplish these envisaged scenarios. For Renko et al (2013), the focus is on intellectual stimulation as a factor, as entrepreneurial leaders "seek new ways of working, seek opportunities in face of risk, and are not likely to support the status quo" (p. 4). For these researchers, influence and inspirational motivation are de-emphasized, particularly because the entrepreneurial leader acts as "a role model in entrepreneurial behaviour, inspiring imitation" (p.5). Renko et al (2013) also disregard individualized consideration, on the basis that entrepreneurial leaders consider followers in terms of their passion and self-efficacy for entrepreneurial endeavours. Findings from a study conducted by McCarthy et al (2010) suggest that, within a sample of Russian entrepreneurs, an "open style... consistent with the characteristics of transformational leadership – educating, inspiring, energizing and exuding charisma" (p.55) are overwhelmingly evident. These researchers suggest that this may potentially be consistent across countries and cultures.

Two issues may be highlighted with this research on entrepreneurial leadership. The first relates to the issue of conceptual clarity within the transformational approach. As Northouse (2010) has noted, the transformational approach encompasses a wide range of activities, at the

expense of precisely defining the parameters of interest. Similarly, Yukl (1999) has discussed that this approach includes diverse behaviours that partially overlap, which thus underscores issues of ambiguity and validity. These points of contention are particularly applicable in the works of those who propose constructs of entrepreneurial leadership for empirical testing, namely Gupta et al (2004) and Renko et al (2013). For Gupta et al (2004), the diversity of parameters is apparent as these authors identify nineteen attributes for empirical testing. Renko et al (2013) emphasize the relevance of intellectual stimulation to their proposed construct. However, this is somewhat ambiguous, as their accounts do not explain how leaders may in fact seek new ways of working or challenge the status quo. Relatedly, the issue of whether the transformational approach is a trait or behaviour-level perspective may be raised (Northouse, 2010), as the items used for scale construction in either study are not adequately clear in this respect.

Second, the identified literature tends to assume a heroic bias in characterizing the actions and behaviours involved in entrepreneurial leadership. As the preceding discussion should highlight, this heroic bias is fundamentally grounded in the focus on the individual as the unit of analysis. From this perspective, effective performance is thus viewed as dependent upon the individual with the optimal mix of skills or attributes that contribute towards influencing and motivating followers (Yukl, 1999). The stereotype of individuals as heroes is presaged in views of the entrepreneurial leader eliciting superior levels of performance from followers. This heroic bias engenders a view of leadership as a top-down and unidirectional process, one that effectively undermines the reciprocal influence followers may have on leaders (Yukl, 1999; Northouse, 2010; Collinson, 2011). The directive quality that leaders have over followers tends to be underscored by the notion that the entrepreneurial leader “must orchestrate” (Gupta et al, 2004: p. 246) rather than negotiate changing role definitions.



### 3.4.2. Authentic Leadership

Theorizing about authentic leadership has been influenced by a number of different sources. Its conceptual origins are in the works of the humanistic psychologists Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, whose focus was on how individuals accurately develop perceptions of their selves (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). It has also been informed by positive perspectives in the fields of psychology, organizational studies and organizational behaviour, and more notably, by the trenchant critiques of transformational leadership (Jackson and Parry, 2011). In response to criticisms regarding ethical issues and attributions of deceitful behaviours in the influence process associated with the transformational approach, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) have argued that a distinction must be drawn between pseudo-transformational and authentic transformational leaders. With regards to the latter, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) note that morality is a principle virtue. Authentic transformational leaders are thus individuals who “aim towards noble ends, legitimate means and fair consequences” (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999: p.211).

Various authors note how these notions of morality and ethics, and consequently authentic leadership, have achieved resonance in the last decade, particularly given the growing disenchantment with the performances of leaders in various settings and the scandals that have plagued the corporate world (Northouse, 2010; Gardner et al, 2011; Jackson and Parry, 2011). However, whilst increasingly popular, the notion of authentic leadership is a complex one, particularly if we consider the plethora of definitions associated with it. In a recent review, Gardner et al (2011) highlight and summarize thirteen definitions that are associated with a range of prescriptive components such as the acceptance of personal responsibility, the non-manipulation of subordinates and the importance of self instead of role requirements. Noting

its complexity, Northouse (2010) highlights three perspectives that are “unique and helpful” (p.206) in defining authentic leadership. *Intrapersonal* and *developmental* perspectives are leader-centric. Whilst the former considers the individual’s self-knowledge, self-regulation and self-concept, the latter views it as various individual-level behaviours that can be nurtured over the course of a lifetime. The *interpersonal* perspective emphasizes that authenticity emerges from the reciprocal interactions between leaders and their followers.

Authentic leadership has received some attention in the field of entrepreneurial leadership, particularly focusing upon the small business context (See Table 2.2 - Jensen and Luthans, 2006; Jones and Crompton, 2009). Both sets of authors acknowledge life experiences, positive psychological capital and the organizational context as antecedents to authentic leadership. Jensen and Luthans (2006) seek to understand the effects of authentic leadership in terms of individual performance. Their findings provide empirical support for the hypothesis that perceptions of a leader’s authenticity can have a positive impact on employees’ job satisfaction and commitment. For Jones and Crompton (2009), the purpose is to explore the extent to which authentic leadership can be identified within small firms experiencing growth and changes in everyday practices or routines as a result of external market forces. Through interviews with owner-managers of small businesses, these authors suggest authentic leadership can be influential, particularly if “that style is authentic in the entrepreneur’s concern for employee development as well as enhancement of the firm’s value and turnover” (Jones and Crompton, 2009: p.345).

Both pairs of authors go some way towards defining the construct of authentic leadership, proposing numerous antecedents and consequences for it. However, the first notable problem arguably rests in the nature of authenticity. In the case of Jensen and Luthans (2006), the

entrepreneurial leader's authenticity is based on reports submitted by employees. This highlights the question of whether authenticity may be an attributed quality, one that is vested upon the individual leader by followers. For Jones and Compton (2009), findings are based on self-reports by the individual leaders themselves. Here, the question is the extent to which the quality of authenticity is manufactured, projected and controlled by the individual. In either case, the paradox underlying theory on authentic leadership more generally is brought into sharp focus – That is, whether the act of being authentic and striving towards one's 'true' self may be an intentional one and thus contrived (Caza and Jackson, 2011; Goffee and Jones, 2005). These methodological issues are acknowledged in the articles of interest to some, albeit limited, degree. Jensen and Luthans (2006) further highlight their convenience sampling procedure, a cross-sectional research design and the lack of social desirability measures as significant issues that limit the generalizability of conclusions.

### 3.4.3. Situational Leadership

As Yukl (1989) writes, situational approaches consider leader behaviours and effectiveness in relation to a number of factors, such as the leader's authority, the type of work performed, followers' attributes and the nature of the organization's external environment. Usefully, Yukl (1989) has highlighted that research on situational approaches may take two streams – The first seeks to establish how contextual variables influence behaviour and the extent of variation in behaviours, whilst the second seeks to understand how those variables may moderate the relationship between leader behaviours and effectiveness. Contextual variables differ depending on the theory adopted, ranging from the competence and commitment levels of followers in Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Theory of Leadership, to leader-member

relations, task structure and position power in contingency theories (Northouse, 2010). Vroom and Jago (2007) underscore the importance of contextual variables as well, noting that this has implications on individual behaviours and organizational effectiveness.

As Tables 2 and 3 indicate, a number of empirical articles and one non-empirical article have been informed by associated ideas. For instance, Ensley et al (2006) have argued that transactional approaches are more effective in benign environments when leader behaviours are “more routine” (p.259) and geared towards maintenance functions. In contrast, these researchers suggest that transformational approaches are more effective in dynamic environments and times of crisis. In their study of small Chinese manufacturing firms, Wang et al (2012) have argued that the strategic focus of the firm determines the choice between transactional and transformational approaches. Zaech and Baldegger (2017) have similarly explored both approaches in the context of new ventures. These researchers suggest founder-CEOs must be able to adapt their leadership behaviours to the situation to be most successful. In non-empirical work, Darling and Leffel (2010) have argued that entrepreneurial team members must understand their own and others’ leadership styles, and ‘flex’ these where necessary for effective team performance.

The issue to highlight here is that these studies tend to retain an individualistic and somewhat deterministic feel, namely because the focus is on how situational variables influence *leader behaviours*. This tends to be foregrounded given the focus on individuals who are “most likely to influence venture performance” (Ensley et al, 2006: p.252), or the “Founder(s) who were entrepreneurial leaders” (Wang et al, 2012: p.516). Further, conclusions tend to be offered in somewhat prescriptive, and perhaps more importantly, overly dichotomized terms. This dichotomization is particularly evident as transformational and transactional approaches are

‘played off’ against each other, and the suitability of either is viewed as dependent upon the dynamism of the firm’s environment (Ensley et al, 2006) or its strategic focus (Wang et al, 2012). As Collinson (2014) has observed, such dichotomization is prevalent in leadership studies and perhaps necessary to some extent, but it reduces the complexity inherent within the shifting relationships that may be characteristic of leadership dynamics.

#### 3.4.4. Summary

To summarize, I have discussed in the preceding sub-sections how various leadership theories have informed the study of entrepreneurial leadership. With transformational approaches, I have argued that the literature implicitly assumes a heroic bias and portrays entrepreneurial leadership as a top-down and unidirectional process that undermines the reciprocal influence of followers. This approach may also be challenged on the grounds of conceptual clarity and its application in SME settings. Authentic leadership is problematic, similarly given the individualistic focus and the paradox of authenticity. Researchers have drawn on situational approaches to consider how different variables influence leaders’ choices between transformational and transactional behaviours.

### 3.5. Other Themes

Through the literature review conducted, it appears a number of other themes have captured the interest of researchers working in the area of entrepreneurial leadership. For instance, some researchers have investigated the issue of personality traits (Nicholson, 1998; Prabhu, 1999; Fernald et al, 2005; Haynes et al, 2015; Harrison et al, 2016). Work by Harrison et al (2016) particularly stands out, as these researchers have taken a relatively unorthodox approach of interviewing entrepreneurs and their employees. Ultimately, Harrison et al (2016) argue that certain attributes, such as the abilities to take risks and communicate an entrepreneurial vision, are important for overcoming challenges in developing economies. In another empirical article concerning this theme, Nicholson (1998) appears to draw a distinction between entrepreneurial leadership and management, arguing that unlike managers, entrepreneurial leaders are “stress-resistant, unselfconscious, assertive, non-experimental in their actions, conscientious, conformist and competitive” (p.537). Such assertions are perhaps provocative, but draw attention to critiques of entrepreneurial traits research raised four decades ago. Nicholson’s (1998) personality profile of entrepreneurial leaders does tend to “portray someone larger than life, full of contradictions... a sort of generic ‘Everyman’” (Gartner, 1988: p.21). Aside from traits, researchers have also proposed the kinds of skills that entrepreneurial leaders must have to be successful (Darling and Beebe, 2007; Greenberg et al, 2013; Tian and Smith, 2014). Others have empirically investigated the kinds of functional or self-competencies that entrepreneurial leaders must acquire as their organizations grow (Swiercz and Lydon, 2002).

Hence, the traits, skills and competencies of individuals have been of interest to researchers. Aside from this, another theme that is apparent from the literature review relates to the issue of education, learning and development. On the topic of education, Bagheri and Pihie (2013) have

conducted interviews with students to argue that undergraduate entrepreneurship programs serve to develop the personal and interpersonal attributes required for entrepreneurial leadership, whilst also providing opportunities for leadership learning and entrepreneurial work. On the topic of learning, Kempster and Cope (2010) have conducted interviews with entrepreneurs to explore how these individuals learn in the context of building their organizations. Particularly, these researchers have drawn attention to the somewhat surprising finding that the majority of respondents within their sample had difficulty in even sustaining a conversation about leadership. Of the two respondents who were indeed able to, one discussed leadership in somewhat heroic terms (ie. ‘inspiring, providing motivation, being up and being enthusiastic’). This does foreground the potential for research into the possibly variegated ways in which owner-managers give meaning to occupying the social position of ‘leader’ within their respective organizations. Other researchers have explored the topic of entrepreneurial leadership development in non-empirical work (McKone-Sweet et al, 2011; Bagheri and Pihie, 2011). In contrast, Leitch et al (2013) have conducted a qualitative, longitudinal study with owner-managers engaged on an executive development program. These researchers have argued that different ‘forms of capital’ – human, social and institutional capital – interrelate in the development of entrepreneurial leadership.

From the literature review, it is apparent that the theme of gender has been of particular interest to researchers. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that gender is highly topical, relevant and current within the constituent disciplines. Nine articles were identified based on the selected criteria applied for this review. Of these, six were published in a special issue of the *Journal of Small Business Management* – one is the special issue editorial (Henry et al, 2015), three are empirical (McGowan et al, 2015; Lewis, 2015; Bamiatzi, 2015), and the remainder are non-empirical (Harrison et al, 2015; Galloway et al, 2015). Of the empirical articles, researchers

have drawn on semi-structured interviews, and in one instance, surveys (Bamiatzi, 2015), with individual women entrepreneurs to highlight the complexity of their experiences with entrepreneurial leadership. Collectively, articles from this special issue do provide insightful findings and/or novel directions for further research. For example, Harrison et al (2015) have argued that mainstream, gendered, leadership theories are not amenable for the study of entrepreneurial leadership, as “context matters... and concepts, frameworks and modes of analysis that are appropriate and effective in one domain may not be so in another” (p.697). These researchers thus propose an ambitious research program informed by a range of more critically oriented frameworks that investigate issues such as gender, race and power relations. This research agenda has been advanced to a considerable extent in empirical work by Dean and Ford (2017). Drawing on a feminist post-structuralist theoretical lens and interviews with female owner-managers, these researchers challenge the masculine norm underpinning normative descriptions of entrepreneurial leadership to highlight the fluid, multifarious nature of the concept itself.

A relatively fewer number of researchers have proposed exploring entrepreneurial leadership in ways that implicate the collective and relational ideals of post-heroic frameworks (Collinson, 2011). For example, Dimovski et al (2013) have highlighted the potential of the Chinese philosophical framework of Daosim for studying entrepreneurial leadership. According to these researchers, this framework emphasizes leader traits such as altruism, modesty, humility and transparency. One interpretation of this article is that the proposed framework relaxes leader-centric assumptions that pervade contemporary leadership theorizing and acknowledges followers’ roles in shaping leadership processes or the contexts and conditions in which these occur. Elsewhere, Cohen (2004) tends to recall the principles of shared leadership (eg. Pearce and Conger, 2003) in discussing entrepreneurial leadership. As he argues, modern



organizations require leaders to devolve authority and facilitate employee initiative or innovation. This can enable employees to act entrepreneurially, what Cohen (2004) refers to as “perhaps the ultimate expression of entrepreneurial leadership” (p.18). In a more recent article, Sklaveniti (2017) has introduced the notion of ‘co-action’ as a means of theorizing entrepreneurial leadership. As she argues, this facilitates a relational conception of the ways in which processes of creativity and direction are (re)constructed between venture participants as an organization grows. Finally, Cope et al (2011) have explored the potential of studying entrepreneurial leadership through the theoretical lens of distributed leadership. According to these researchers, distributed leadership can facilitate SME growth, particularly as organizations grow and responsibilities have to be devolved. However, Cope et al (2011) recognize the theoretical issues with this model of leadership, additionally calling for contextually sensitive interventions and a research agenda that includes inquiring into leader-follower relations in SME contexts.

### 3.6. Discussion

Informed by the preceding discussions, the review questions underpinning this chapter may now be addressed. To reiterate, these questions are *(i) How have concepts and/or theories from entrepreneurship and leadership studies (or otherwise) informed research on entrepreneurial leadership? and (ii) what observations may be derived from this for this study?* With reference to the first of these, it is clear that researchers have drawn on some established concepts and theories from the constituent disciplines to articulate the concept of entrepreneurial leadership. From the entrepreneurship discipline, the concepts of entrepreneurial orientation and entrepreneurial opportunity have thus figured prominently. I have argued that researchers have

operationalized the concept of entrepreneurial orientation by taking the individual as the unit of analysis. At this level of analysis, an emphasis on the dimensions associated with entrepreneurial orientation – pro-activeness, the capacity to take risks and innovative behaviours – implicate the view that palpable differences exist between entrepreneurial leaders and ‘others’. This is further underscored by the concept of entrepreneurial opportunity, as for example, individual “perception” (Renko et al, 2013: p.4), “creativity” (Chen, 2007: p. 241) or some generalized “ability” (Wang et al, 2012: p. 507) are seen to mediate the opportunity recognition process in that entrepreneurial leaders engage.

From the leadership field, contemporary approaches such as transformational leadership, authentic leadership and situational leadership have informed the study of entrepreneurial leadership. This has led to arguments that entrepreneurial leaders engage in behaviours associated with the transformational construct, influence employee or organizational performance through some brand of authenticity, or detect contextual changes and adjust their behaviours accordingly. Aside from these concepts and theories, it is clear from the foregoing review that researchers have taken an interest in exploring the traits, skills and competencies of entrepreneurial leaders. Others have considered the question of education, learning and development with respect to entrepreneurial leaders. A particularly prominent theme that emerged through this literature review relates to gender. Perhaps spurred on by discussions in the constituent disciplines, a considerable number of researchers have sought to understand the complexity and diversity inherent within women’s experiences of entrepreneurial leadership. I concluded the previous section with the observation that a relatively smaller body of research has proposed exploring entrepreneurial leadership in ways that implicate the collective and relational ideals espoused by post-heroic approaches to entrepreneurship and leadership.

Examples of this include the notion of ‘co-action’ proposed by Sklaveniti (2017), and advocacy for distributed leadership in studying entrepreneurial leadership (Cope et al, 2011).

This leads on to the second review question concerning the observations that may be derived. First, the review draws attention to how the dominant way of conceiving entrepreneurial leadership is in terms of the individual and the heroic approach more broadly. Minimally, this has been implicated by claims that entrepreneurial leaders are somehow different from ‘others’ due to certain traits or abilities they possess or their behaviours. Further, this heroic approach has entailed some attributions of causality to the individual for organizational outcomes. Particularly, and through empirical studies, some researchers have argued that entrepreneurial leadership contributes to organization growth (Chen, 2007; Gupta et al, 2004; Swiercz and Lydon, 2002; Ensley et al, 2006; Huang et al, 2014). According to Zaech and Baldegger (2010), for instance, leadership drives new venture performance in terms of sales growth, and founding CEOs must therefore adapt their behaviours to the context for organization success. For McCarthy et al (2010), entrepreneurial leaders with ‘an open leadership style’ that “demonstrate the essence of transformational and authoritative leadership” can more effectively secure competitive advantages and grow their organizations in volatile business environments. Some have of course argued that entrepreneurial leadership is masculine in form, thus arguing for more gendered analyses of the concept (eg. Patterson et al, 2012a, 2012b; Harrison et al, 2015). On the margins of this heroic approach, certain researchers have advocated more collective and relational approaches. For instance, Sklaveniti (2017) has offered a valuable, alternative and novel theoretical formulation of entrepreneurial leadership in processual and relational terms, but this is premised upon a critique and rejection of “entitative perspectives [that] comprise an individual-centric ontology” (p.199). In other work, Cope et al (2011) have argued for a post-heroic approach. These researchers appear to

recognize the potential contributions of distributed models of leadership in the context of growing firms, but also recognize the difficulties with distributing leadership due to ownership structures.

More broadly, it may thus be argued that the dominant heroic approach suggests a highly individualized, essentialist, gendered, racialized and romanticized conception of entrepreneurial leadership. This approach tends to imply that entrepreneurial leadership is to be considered in terms of an individual who is different from others on the basis of identifiable traits, behaviours, skills and competencies, is notable for the kinds of organization outcomes the individual engenders, and is the special province of white males. Arguably, the heroic approach is deeply problematic, as it imposes a very narrow conception to which entrepreneurial leadership can refer. Indeed, writing in the context of leadership studies, Gronn (2011: p.439) has argued that historically, the heroic approach has served to “residualize or ignore the possibility of credible alternatives to focused individual perspectives”. This argument may equally apply to research on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial leadership that reproduces the assumptions associated with the heroic approach. Particularly, espousal of and advocacy for the heroic approach can be deemed to be counter-productive, as it undermines alternative approaches and prevents us from expanding the ways in which we might understand concepts we take an interest in as researchers (Alvesson, 1996; Learmonth and Morell, 2016).

Second, through the foregoing review, it may be observed that existing research neglects an understanding of how context may inform our understanding of ‘entrepreneurial leadership’. To elaborate, I discussed in Section 2.1 that a key problem with the research is a lack of specificity concerning the kinds of organizations to which entrepreneurial leadership applies. Researchers have thus applied it towards studies of large organizations, the small business

context, higher education settings and public sector organizations. Indeed, the question of organizational scale or context would appear to be unproblematic for some researchers, as entrepreneurial leadership “is not specific to any type of organisation, industry or culture and can flourish in different settings” (Leitch and Volery, 2017: p. 148). Some research on entrepreneurial leadership has accounted for context, but in a limited or partial way. Particularly, research informed by situational approaches to leadership (see Section 3.4.3) has indeed considered the various dimensions of context relating to new and small organizations, such as culture or environmental dynamism. However, this body of work has tended to confine theoretical and analytical perspectives to how context influences individual leader behaviours. Further, such research has tended to present dichotomized analyses, drawing attention to how leaders ‘switch’ between either transformational or transactional behaviours depending on the changes in their environments.

The notion of ‘context’ can of course be deemed as being quite broad, or even vague. Indeed, it has been conceptualized or operationalized in different ways, both in the social sciences more widely (eg. Layder, 1993) and the constituent disciplines (eg. Porter and McLaughlin, 2006; Zahra and Wright, 2011). Nonetheless, certain researchers have argued it is important to account for context in the study of entrepreneurial leadership. According to Harrison et al (2015), the contexts in which entrepreneurial leadership is produced, practiced, enacted or socially constructed are distinctive, due to factors such as ambiguity, organizational or environmental uncertainty, or organizational size. As these researchers note, concepts and approaches developed within and for the context of large organizations may not readily translate into entrepreneurial ventures or Small and Medium Enterprises. This underscores the relevance of alternative ideas and perspectives for thinking about leadership in the latter settings, but particularly, it highlights the value for more knowledge of how context influences

the ways in which leadership is practiced, enacted and construed by organizational actors within SME environments.

With regard to context, I would argue that we are especially short of knowledge of how ownership can influence the form of social relations within SME environments. To elaborate, research on entrepreneurial leadership has thus far neglected to consider how ownership structures in terms of the distribution of shareholding within small firms implicates various issues. These issues include, but are potentially not limited to, the ways in which individuals construe their rights to lead, the ways in which they lead, the ways in which others perceive they are led, and more broadly, the structures or relations, conditions, and consequences of what might be termed as ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ in the contemporary literature. Particularly, a focus on ownership can facilitate further understanding of power relations, those implicated by the “definite set of social relationships existing between individuals involved in the productive process” (Giddens, 1973: p.35). More broadly, and much like ‘mainstream’ leadership studies (Collinson, 2011), the question of power has not been of concern in the majority of work on entrepreneurial leadership. This is contradictory, given that some research has implicated a view of entrepreneurial leaders as omniscient beings with an unquestionable power to motivate, influence and direct others through inspirational appeals, by manufacturing some brand of authenticity, or detecting contextual changes and adjusting their behaviours accordingly (see Section 3.4). Some researchers have indeed called for examinations of power in studies of entrepreneurial leadership, but in terms of gendered analyses (eg. Harrison et al, 2015; Stead and Hamilton, 2018). As such, further research into ownership and the power relations these engender is justifiable.

To summarize the foregoing discussion, what we are lacking in the study of entrepreneurial leadership is an investigation and analysis of the implications of ownership for understanding the concept of entrepreneurial leadership in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises. To address this gap, I would firstly suggest that one should engage with the theoretical ideas of Karl Marx, whose body of work at least partly sought to analyse and critique the form(s) of social relations engendered through private ownership of the means of production within the political-economic context of capitalism. In the latter stages of this study and during data analysis, I found it difficult, if not impossible, to intellectually engage with the issue of ownership without also engaging with Marx's ideas on these terms. As it will be shown in this thesis, an engagement with Marx's theoretical ideas is valuable as it can enable us to explore and investigate the multiple, overlapping and potentially contradictory forms of social relations between individuals within SMEs – social relations associated with 'leadership' or otherwise. Second, Marx's *oeuvre* can be regarded as wide-ranging, complex at times to the point of impenetrability, possibly radical, and bound to pre-conceptions of it that may not always be positive (Harvey, 2010). An issue encountered in the course of data analysis during this study thus related to how I might productively engage with it in a structured, methodical way. One answer to this dilemma may well have been Labour Process Theory (eg. Thompson, 1989; Thompson and Smith, 2000; Thompson and O'Doherty, 2011). However, I would argue that another means to engage with Marx's ideas is through Activity Theory, given its distinctively Marxist heritage and relatively systematic approach beginning with the concept of the 'object'. The following chapter thus expands on Activity Theory, discussing the theoretical frame for this study.

### 3.7. Chapter Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has aimed to understand how existing research on entrepreneurial leadership has been informed by concepts and theories from the constituent disciplines (or otherwise), and the kinds of observations we may draw from this. To achieve this aim, I have offered a narrative review underpinned by a search methodology, tabulated the relevant results and discussed the pertinent themes. There are some limitations with this search methodology, as given the criteria, articles such as conference proceedings and book chapters have been omitted from the review. Nonetheless, I have attempted to search for articles published over a wide timeframe of 30 years in a good range of high-quality journals, and based the preceding discussion upon a reasonably substantial range of search results. More broadly, the discussion in this chapter permits the argument that existing research has largely prioritized the focus on the individual, neglecting a consideration of how context may inform our understanding of entrepreneurial leadership. Particularly, we are short of knowledge on how ownership can influence the form of social relations within SME contexts. As such, this review has facilitated the development of the research question driving this study, namely;

*What are the implications of ownership for understanding the concept of entrepreneurial leadership in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises?*

As indicated previously, the chapter which follows provides an extended discussion of Activity Theory. I outline its central premises, discuss some of the main contemporary critiques levied against it, and develop and justify an alternative theoretical frame for ‘activity’ that is relevant to this study.



#### **4. Activity Theory**

This chapter provides a review of literature on Activity Theory. Particularly, it aims to outline and explain a theoretical frame used to re-contextualize the descriptive findings presented in Chapter 6. This frame was based on my understanding of the limitations with Yrjo Engestrom's work on activity systems (eg. Engestrom, 1987, 2000, 2001), derived from my reading of work by Marx, Vygotsky and Leontev, and developed after the completion of my fieldwork and during data analysis. I will re-emphasize this point in various forms throughout the chapter because I do not wish to mislead the reader into thinking the frame was developed prior to fieldwork, and precipitated a deductive strategy to data analysis.

In what follows, I first provide an overview of Activity Theory in order to introduce to the reader the central ideas associated with it. This involves (i) briefly outlining how Activity Theory has emerged and developed, and (ii) discussing the work of Yrjo Engestrom, whose contemporary theorization of activity has been the subject of discussion and critique. I then discuss the alternative theoretical frame, one that views activity as object-driven, mediated by social relations and tools, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process. Subsequently, I summarize the theoretical premises of the frame and evaluate it, in terms of its value for addressing the issue of ownership and the kinds of social relations this implicates in the study of entrepreneurial leadership.

#### 4.1. Activity Theory – An Introduction

Activity Theory (AT), far from being a recent theoretical invention, has its roots in German philosophy and Soviet psychology. Blunden (2010) has offered a historical account tracing the intellectual heritage of AT to the works of Goethe, Hegel and Marx. Marx's theoretical insights, fruitful for its focus on individuals, activity and their material conditions, were of particular influence amongst Soviet researchers. A 'troika' of researchers – Lev Vygotsky, Aleksei Leontev and Alexander Luria – thus appropriated Marx's work for the study of psychology. However, amidst the complex, fraught socio-political conditions of the Russian revolution and collapse of the Soviet Union, AT was also suppressed due to its Marxist influence. According to Roth (2004), there has been a resurgence of interest in AT within contemporary English-speaking academic circles for two reasons. Firstly, various academic conferences have been organized to draw together researchers working in the area. Second, the work of Yrjo Engestrom has been especially instrumental in spreading the word. As such, dedicated journals such as *Mind, Culture and Activity* now exist, and research institutes concerned with the study of activity have arisen. Further, AT has made inroads into different disciplines, such as education (Trowler and Knight, 2000) and management and organization studies (Adler, 2007), and sub-disciplines of the latter including knowledge management (Blackler, 1993), entrepreneurship (Holt, 2008) and leadership (Gronn, 2000; Spillane et al, 2001). Engestrom's theorizing of activity systems has provoked some critique, as I will discuss shortly, but a relatively sympathetic community has nonetheless formed to develop his ideas further. This is exemplified by a recent edited collection of articles, in which Engestrom's work is "used as a springboard to reflect on the question of the use, appropriation and further development" of AT (Sannino et al., 2009: p.xiii).

Engestrom has thus been influential, and apart from the dialogue his work has inspired, his influence is apparent in his attempts to formulate a certain historical trajectory that accounts for the development of AT. As Engestrom (1987, 2009) has argued, the study of activity has undergone three phases, or generations. The first generation is associated with the work of Lev Vygotsky in the field of psychology. Vygotsky (1978), in his studies of child development, sought to address the physical and social relations between humans and their environment. In doing so, Vygotsky critiqued the behaviourist ideal that assumes a direct, unproblematic relation between stimuli and responses, and argued instead that psychological activity is mediated by signs and tools. However, Vygotsky's work was regarded as problematic, because, for some of his students and other psychologists, it neglected practical activity (Lektorsky, 2009) and, according to Engestrom (2001), remained individually focused. Aleksei Leontev, a student of Vygotsky, was one individual who sought to redress these problems.

To do so, Leontev (1978) proposed a structure for 'activity' in terms of three levels – collective activity, individual actions and operations. As he argued, collective activity is always oriented towards an object (ie, a motive, or a need to be satisfied), and this is underpinned by individual actions that aim to achieve specific results or goals. Individual actions are further dependent upon the kinds of conditions or processes (ie. operations) that are necessary for the achievement of goals. Further, Leontev (1978) argued that practical activity (as 'doing') was external to individuals, but "unlocks the circle of internal mental processes, that opens it up to the objective world" (p.5). Leontev, however, never graphically represented these ideas. This endeavour was taken up by Engeström (1987) in his text *Learning by Expanding*. Through this text, the second generation of AT, premised upon Engestrom's model of the 'activity system', emerged as a means for studying activity (See Figure 1, on page 91). Further to this, a third generation of AT has been developed. Engestrom (2001) has advocated expanding the basic model of second

generation AT to understand “dialogue, multiple perspectives and networks of interacting activity systems” (p.135). The third generation of AT thus involves the study of multiple interacting activity systems in which the object of activity is shared and/or jointly constructed.

Having provided an account of its emergence and development, some discussion of the concepts and ideas associated with AT is necessary to introduce it more fully. To start with, there is the concept of ‘activity’ itself, for which multiple interpretations have been offered (Bakhurst, 2009). For many (eg. Engestrom and Miettinen, 1999; Adler, 2005; Blunden, 2010), the roots of this concept are attributable to Marx. According to Leontev (1978), Marx conceived of activity in a materialist sense, in terms of how people encounter objects in their external worlds, acting upon and transforming these objects whilst acknowledging their objective properties. Amongst contemporary researchers, ‘activity’ variously refers to “an evolving, complex structure of mediated and collective human agency” (Roth and Lee, 2007: p.198); the creation and transformation of objects that are “generators and foci of attention, motivation, effort, and meaning” (Engestrom, 2009: p.304); or the “specific form of the societal existence of humans consisting of purposeful changing of natural and social reality” (Davydov, 1999: p.39). A neat definition is therefore difficult to surmise from the literature, but at the very least, this array of views draws attention to some of the central principles underlying the concept of activity, such as its object-oriented, mediated and transformative character (Nicolini, 2012). I will offer and develop the definition of activity used in this thesis in the sections that follow.

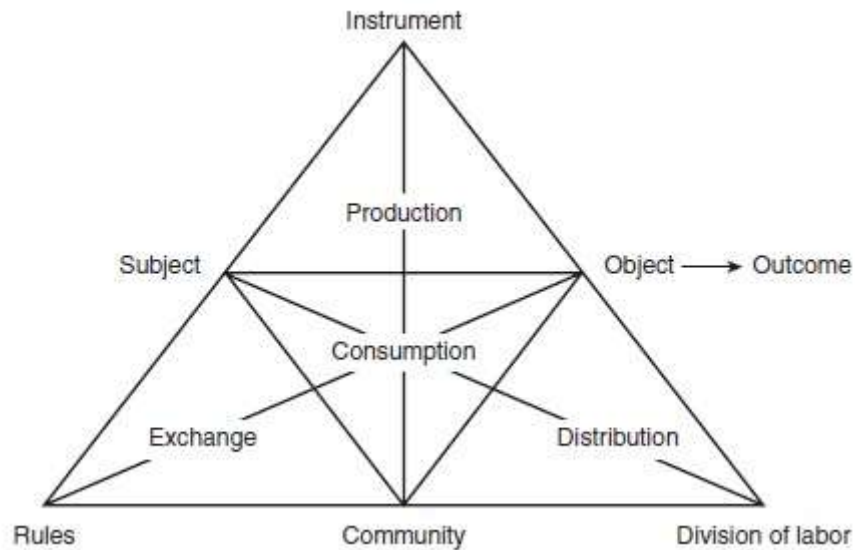


Figure 1: Engeström's (1987) Model of the Activity System

Further, Engeström's model of the activity system ('second generation' AT) has been the subject of much discussion, and for this, a reasonably coherent theoretical core has emerged anchored by six main concepts (See Figure 1). These six concepts refer to the subject, object, tools, community, rules and division of labour. Holt and Morris (1993) have valuably discussed and provided definitions for most of these. As these researchers indicate, the notion of the 'subject' may refer to an individual or group of individuals who aspire to fulfil goals through some sort of activity. 'Tools' refer to the instruments that mediate activity, such as "concepts, theories, physical apparatuses, [or] logical reasoning" (p.98). 'Community' refers to the group of individuals within an activity system that share social meanings to some extent, whilst 'rules' and 'division of labour' respectively refer to "inherently incomplete guides for action or activity" (p.98) and task specialization amongst individuals.

However, the concept of the 'object' is relatively more complex. This may potentially be attributed to the fact that it can accommodate both sociological and/or psychological interpretations (Kaptelinin and Miettinen, 2005), or indeed, even psychoanalytical interpretations (eg. Jones and Spicer, 2005). For instance, according to Leontev (1978: p.98),

the object is central to any activity, constitutes its “true motive”, and is “either present in perception or exclusively in the imagination or in thought”. In contrast, some contemporary researchers have appeared to take a more definitive stance in relation to this. Roth and Lee (2007) have argued that the object exists “first as a material entity in the world and second as a vision or an image, both in its present state and how people envisage it in the future” (p.198). Yet, such a perspective concerning the status of the object in the first instance is further problematized where we consider Marx’s (1867/1976: p.284) remarks on the labour process. As he argues, the object of labour in every labour process always exists first for the worker in an ideational form, and second, materially. It is through the labour process that the worker thus “realizes... his own purpose”, one that “determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law”. For Marx, it would thus appear that it is this – our ability to conceive of the object of our work in our minds, before making it ‘real’ in some way – that makes us human and distinguishes us from animals (Harvey, 2010).

This complexity underpinning the concept is also apparent in other contemporary interpretations of it. According to Kaptelinin (2005: p.5), for instance, the object may be viewed in terms of the “ultimate reason” underpinning human behaviour, or as “powerful sense-makers” for different actors within an activity. This interpretation is similar to that offered by Engestrom and Keruoso (2007), for whom the object embodies “the meaning, motive and purpose” (p.337) of activity, but also the ‘raw material’ that subjects act on and transform. Elsewhere, Blackler (2009) has also highlighted the complexity of the ‘object’, in the sense that it is “simultaneously given, socially constructed, contested and emergent” (p.27). Nicolini (2012) has elaborated on this further. As he notes, the object is ‘emergent’ as, to some extent, it prefigures how individuals organize themselves, the division of labour between them, and the rules and tools of the activity. Yet, the object is also ‘given’, as it is defined somewhat

by the interests of those who form the community involved in the activity. Further, objects are socially constructed “through the negotiation, alignment, or ignoring, of the different motives, interests, and aspirations represented in the community” (p.112). These foregoing views additionally highlight the notion that the object is something that evolves in the course of activity. This is indeed foregrounded by Foot (2002), who conceptualizes the object as the ‘organizing principle’ of an activity, evolving over time, and conceived and enacted by actors in different ways. In recent work, Engestrom (2009: p.304) has pushed the evolutionary character of the object further, arguing for the need to understand ‘runaway objects’. As he writes, such objects are “rarely under anybody’s control and have far reaching, unexpected effects”. Further, these kinds of objects are “often monsters... [with] a life of their own that threatens our security and safety in many ways”.

Finally for this section, Engestrom (2001) has outlined a number of principles that underpin his formulation of AT. As he argues, the ‘activity system’, seen in its totality of the six concepts outlined above, is to be taken as the unit of analysis when studying activity. Activity systems are ‘multi-voiced’ in that the division of labour within a community implicates different points of views, interpretations or social constructions of the activity. Additionally, activity systems are subject to ‘historicity’ as they form and transform over time. However, perhaps the most central principle of all relates to the notion of contradictions. As Engestrom (2001) argues, contradictions are inherent within activity systems, serving as a source of change, development and “expansive transformations” (p.137). As a theoretical framework, AT thus provides the means through which researchers may identify and remedy contradictions, or design “concrete collective actions to remove them” (Roth, 2004: p.6). Consequently, Engestrom (1987) has proposed that activity theorists investigate four types of contradictions that may be inherent within activity systems – namely, primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary contradictions.

Primary contradictions reside within each component of the activity system, in terms of “the conflict between use and exchange value” (p.70), whilst secondary contradictions appear between components. According to Engestrom (1987), tertiary contradictions can manifest when the central activity is superseded by another in a “more culturally advanced form” (p.70). It would appear from Engestrom’s work that quaternary contradictions refer to those arising in the context of multiple activity systems with a partially shared object (‘third generation’ AT), given that such contradictions “emerge between the central activity and the neighbouring activity in their interaction” (p.72).

#### 4.2. Critiques of Engestrom’s Theorizing of Activity Systems

As indicated previously, Engestrom’s theorizing of activity systems has provoked some debate and critique. For example, Nicolini (2012) has observed that the way in which Engestrom has modelled activity systems and the terminology used to describe it may lead to the “risk of a functionalist misunderstanding” (p.119). This indeed appears plausible where we consider Engestrom’s (1987) insistence on taking the activity system as the unit of analysis, or representing the system as a model to investigate the structure of activity and the relations between the components within that system. In a paper demonstrating the application of his ideas, valuable in itself for outlining the spatio-temporality of activity, Engestrom (2000) does indeed appear to merely map empirical phenomena onto his model. In turn, the terminology, model and its apparent explanatory powers do raise the question of whether Engestrom’s theorizing accords human activity an objective status in the external world, and the researcher a passive role in merely accounting for it in terms of available concepts (ie. Subject, object, tools, etc.).



Other issues may be identified in the notion of contradictions and their role in activity systems. To outline this, Engestrom (1987) invokes Marxist concepts, such as the commodity and its dual form of use and exchange values. As he argues, the contradictory relation between use and exchange values underpins all components of the activity system, including subject and community, because “labour force is itself a special kind of commodity” (p.69). According to Engestrom (2001), contradictions within activity systems are sources of disturbances, but can equally lead to “innovative attempts to change the activity” (p.137). The identification and remediation of contradictions thus appear as centrally important to Engestrom (2000), and involves “collaborative analysis and modelling.... for the creation of a shared vision for their expansive solution” (p.966). It does seem, however, that Engestrom’s insights can be difficult to square with Marxist theorizing.

For instance, we may consider that this notion of a contradictory relation between use and exchange value is not actually discussed by Marx in the opening chapter of *Capital: Volume I* (1867/1976), where he elaborates on the commodity form. According to Harvey (2014), the relation between use and exchange values can be contradictory, but his choice of language in describing this is notably restrained. As he indicates (p.15), the “difference between the two forms of value is significant. To the degree they are often at odds with each other they constitute a contradiction, which can, on occasion give rise to a crisis”. There is, therefore, an argument to be made about how Engestrom treats the notion of use and exchange value contradictions as a foregone conclusion or an *a priori* assertion in his theorization of activity. Such an assertion does the analyst no favours, as it forces one to look for contradictions within activity when they are possibly yet to emerge, or worse, do not exist. Moreover, Warmington (2008) has argued that Engestrom’s theorizing tends to blur the distinction between logical and dialectical contradictions, confusing the “lack-of-fit in local work practices” (p.5) with the potentially

contradictory form of the commodity in capitalism. Warrington (2008) himself does not fully elaborate on what he means by either form of contradiction, but draws attention to a far more important point – that it is not abundantly clear how the contradictory relation between use and exchange values manifests itself in all the components of an activity system as Engestrom argues. Indeed, a question may be raised as to how this contradiction arises through the division of labour, for example, when some have argued that for Marx, the central contradiction arising from this is alienation (Harvey, 2014). That alienation arises out of the division of labour at all is suggested by Marx’s statements (with Engels) from *The German Ideology*;

*“The division of labour offers us the first example of how, as long as... activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man’s own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape.”*  
(Marx and Engels, 1932/1968: p.45)

Further, the emphasis on identifying and remedying contradictions, as suggested by Engestrom (2000), can be somewhat problematic, where we consider the question of whether contradictions may be remedied at all. Harvey (2014), for example, has drawn attention to a raft of contradictions that are inherent within capitalism. As he observes, contradictions may indeed be a source of positive change or innovation, but nonetheless “have the nasty habit of not being resolved but merely moved around” (p.4). Aside from this, some have also noted Engestrom’s apparent reluctance to draw attention to antagonistic social relations (Avis, 2007; Warrington, 2008), the sort that exist between individuals involved in productive activity under capitalism (Giddens, 1973). Thus, what Harvey (2014) refers to as a ‘foundational

contradiction' between *capital* and *labour* – construed here in working terms as the relation between those who own the means of production, and those who do not and have no alternative but to sell their labour-power as a commodity (Adler et al, 2008) – appears to be neglected in Engestrom's theorizing. For Avis (2007), what this amounts to is a "Marxist veneer" through which Engestrom's theorizing is rendered as nothing more "than a form of consultancy aiming to improve work practice" (p.169). For some readers, such aims may of course be unproblematic. However, the parallels between Engestrom's version of AT and Taylor's scientific management are apparent, in so far as both may potentially be construed as forms of knowledge that press labour into the service of capital (Marx, 1867/1976; Braverman, 1998; Warmington, 2008).

The preceding discussion suggests that Engestrom's theorizing cannot simply be appropriated without question for application in a research study. Indeed, Bakhurst (2009) has noted this point. Questioning the utility of the model for activity systems, he notes it may be more amenable to contexts wherein the accompanying concepts (eg. object, subjects, tools, etc.) are readily identifiable, going so far as to argue the model itself may represent a "universal, but generally vacuous schema" (p.207). In light of this, and the preceding discussion of Engestrom's model, the following section develops an alternative theoretical frame for the study of mediated activity. The notion of 'mediation' refers to the means by which activity is made possible through "a range of ideational and material apparatuses, devices, and 'utensils'" (Nicolini, 2012: p.106). This notion runs through the work of the primary theorists associated with AT, namely Marx, Vygotsky and Leontev, and as such the following discussion draws on their work.

### 4.3. Theorizing Mediated Activity

In this section, I outline and explain a theoretical frame for studying mediated activity (see Figure 2 on the next page), derived from my reading of work by Marx, Vygotsky and Leontev, and developed after the completion of my fieldwork and during data analysis. Informed by these readings, I initially discuss three propositions concerning mediation - *First*, that it is the labour process which mediates the relation between individuals and nature. *Second*, that within the labour process, physical and/or social tools mediate the relation between individuals and the object. *Third*, that within the labour process, social relations mediate the relation between individuals and the object. In doing so, ‘activity’ is viewed in this thesis as being object-driven, mediated by tools and social relations, and contextualized within the labour process. I elaborate further on these concepts, before summarizing and evaluating my theoretical frame to conclude the chapter.

### 4.3.1. Mediation in Activity

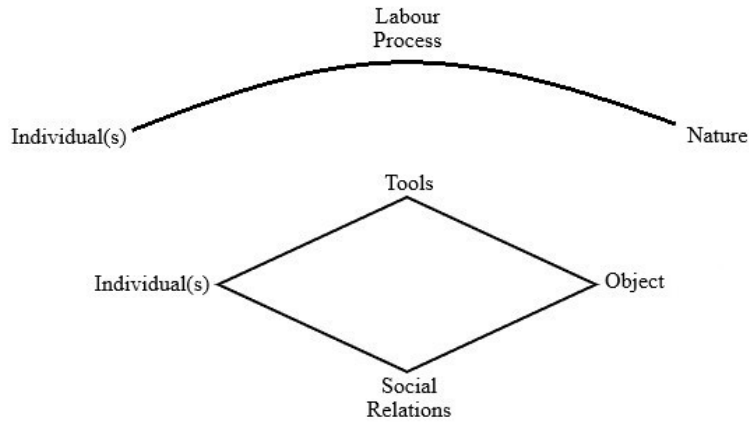


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework Generated Through This Study

Figure 2 schematizes the theoretical frame that is discussed in the remainder of this chapter. To start with, I first discuss three propositions concerning mediation in activity, as these situate further discussions of the concepts of the ‘object’, ‘social relations’ and ‘tools’. In exploring the notion of mediation, my starting point was the work of Marx (1867/1976) in *Capital: Volume 1*. In this text, Marx formulated the relation between the individual and nature as one that is mediated by the labour process, which he initially considered independently of any social formation such as feudalism or capitalism. In these more general terms, Marx (p.283) thus argued that the labour process is one “between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature”. In doing so, man “sets in motion that natural forces which belong to his own body... [and] through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature”. As Harvey (2010) has observed, Marx’s statements draw attention to how individuals are active agents in relation to the world around them, and

how the labour process is transformative of self and society. The first implication to be derived, therefore, is that the labour process mediates the relation between individuals and nature.

As Marx (1867/1976) observed, the ‘labour process’ is comprised of three elements – (i) purposeful activity, (ii) the object that is laboured upon, or on which work is performed, and (iii) the instruments or tools of that work. Expanding on this, Marx (p.285) argued that a tool “is a thing, or a complex of things, which the worker interposes between himself and the object of his labour” and which “serves as a conductor, directing his activity onto that object”. Similar ideas resonate through the work of Vygotsky and Leontev. For example, Vygotsky (1978), in his studies of psychological activity and contra the behaviourist ideal, argued that signs mediate the relation between stimulus and response “in a manner analogous to the role of the tool in labour” (p.52). Leontev (1981/2009) was similarly influenced by Marx, but argued tools could be physical and/or social in form. As he saw it, a tool in its social form “is the product of social practice and of social labour experience” (p.193), and “has a certain mode of use developed socially in the course of collective labour and reinforced by the same” (p.192). In sum, the preceding discussion foregrounds a second implication concerning mediation in activity – namely, that within the labour process, tools that are physical and/or social in form mediate the relation between individuals and the object.

As the preceding discussion highlights, both Vygotsky and Leontev were influenced by Marx in a number of ways. Particularly, Leontev (1978, 1981/2009) accepted Marx’s theses concerning the labour process as the mediating link between the individual and nature, and that the use and creation of tools is characteristic of human activity. Crucially for the present discussion, however, Leontev (1981/2009) also explicitly recognized the mediating role of social relations within the labour process. As he argued, it is “only through a relation with other

people does man relate to nature itself, which means that labour appears from the very beginning as a process mediated by tools.... and at the same time mediated socially” (p.185). This is definitively a position taken by Marx, who asserted that “in order to produce... [Individuals] enter into definite connections and relations to one another, and only within these social connections and relations... does production take place” (1849/1999: p.25). This, in turn, draws attention to the third implication concerning mediation in activity – namely, that within the labour process, social relations mediate the relation between individuals and the object. Having outlined the three foregoing propositions concerning mediation in activity, the following discussion turns towards elaborating on the three main concepts – the ‘object’, ‘social relations’ and ‘tools’ – within the theoretical frame illustrated in Figure 2.

#### 4.3.2. The Object

As indicated in Section 4.1, contemporary researchers have offered various definitions and interpretations of the ‘object’ (Leontev, 1978; Roth and Lee, 2007; Blackler, 2009; Engestrom and Keruoso, 2005; See also Holt and Morris, 1993; Kaptelinin, 2005). These interpretations should certainly be considered for theoretical analyses in this thesis, but given the focus on the labour process within the theoretical frame developed here, it is necessary to foreground the ideas of Marx. To begin his analysis of the capitalist mode of production, Marx (1867/1976) saw fit to argue that it is the commodity – fundamentally, the economic cell form of capitalism – which is “first of all, an external object” (p.125). Indeed, some contemporary researchers have, to various degrees, adopted this way of thinking about the object. For instance, Engestrom and Blackler (2005: p.322) at least implicitly suggest this, noting that “the life of the object is also the life of value” and that in production, “the object takes its shape and

acquires its value by virtue of being transformed by human labour”. Elsewhere, Adler (2005: p.405) is relatively more explicit with his position, arguing “the object of work in a capitalist firm is a commodity” which embodies the contradictory goals of creating use and exchange values.

Thus, where we are concerned with the labour process, the ‘object’ can certainly be defined in terms of the commodity, which according to Marx (1867/1976) has a dual form. On the one hand, every commodity has a use value, or is useful as “a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind”, although “the nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach, or the imagination, makes no difference” (p.125). On the other hand, each commodity has an exchange value, in that it may be exchanged in the market for other forms of commodities. As Harvey (2010) observes, Marx’s decision to begin his analysis with the concept of the commodity is useful and relatable. In contemporary life, commodities are omnipresent and we constantly encounter them – from money, to housing, to the products lining shelves in supermarkets, to the latest electronic gadgetry, and even to higher education and the academic labour-power that at least partly comprises it.

Further, it is helpful to foreground two implications that stem from this dual form of the commodity. First, some would argue that the use value and exchange value of every commodity stand in a particular, contradictory, relationship to each other. To illustrate this argument, Harvey (2014) has provided the example of housing provision in the context of the late-noughties sub-prime crisis, outlining the contradiction in terms of how it is impossible to fully realize either use or exchange value without surrendering one or the other in some way. In organization studies, Adler’s (2005) research represents one instance in which the contradiction between use and exchange values has been applied. Here, Adler (2005) explored the issue of



software development in the context of a large professional services Information Technology firm that implemented a specific process improvement approach, one that offers recommendations for elaborating the standardization of work, the ways in which work is managed, the division of labour and organizational structure. Consequently, through the analysis of interviews with employees, Adler (2005) identifies a range of contradictions stemming from developers' object of producing use value (eg. software code that is useful for customers) and exchange value (eg. revenue and profits accrued through sales of software). For instance, Adler (2005) describes how increasing standardization brought about by the process improvement approach, contradictorily, impinges upon work, compromises the quality of products and leaves employees with fewer opportunities to explore internal process improvements. Additionally, although the process improvement approach led to greater inter-departmental collaboration and coordination, it equally presented more competition and rivalry between departments. Further, the approach itself required high degrees of workforce engagement and participation, but the increasing levels of hierarchical structuring entailed greater risks of producing coercive relations between managers and workers.

The second implication to be considered stems from the notion of exchange value, that commodities can be exchanged in the market for other commodities. This act of exchange thus implies a principle of commensurability or some basis of comparison between commodities – namely, this basis of comparison is that all commodities are products of *human labour* (Harvey, 2010). However, as Marx (1867/1976) argues, this fact that commodities are products of human labour is routinely concealed. Commodities are instead imbued with a life of their own, such that the social relations between producers appear as “material relations between persons and social relations between things” (p.165). Commodities are thus mystified and fetishized, and it would seem this occurs in at least two inter-related ways. First, as Marx (1867/1976) argues,

fetishism occurs *in production*, as it “attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities” (p.165). Second, it may be observed that fetishism can occur *in exchange*. According to Foley (1986), fetishism occurs because the act of exchange has an illusory effect of forcing individuals to construe ‘things as people, and people as things’, despite the fact commodity production is a social endeavour premised upon cooperation, the division of labour and the interdependence of individuals. Elsewhere, it is noteworthy - given similar ideas in some literature for leadership (see Section 2.1.3 of this thesis) - that fetishism has been described as the mis-attribution of causality (Dunne, 2011). Overall, it is evident that the concept of fetishism is central to understanding capitalist society and the ‘hidden abode of production’, and as such, we ought to give it due consideration in the study of activity.

Given the preceding discussions, how then can the ‘object’ be conceptualized for this thesis? It would appear there are at least two answers to this question. First, AT seems to remind us that the object is something that evolves through human activity in the labour process. The object can therefore be viewed in terms of the meaning, motive or purpose driving activity, and in so doing, satisfies a need or set of needs that are collectively held by those involved. It can represent the raw material that individuals act upon, raw material that “undergoes some alteration by the means of labour” (Marx, 1867/1976: p.285), and is transformed into a commodity. The object thus begins its transformative journey in an ideational form, gradually taking on some material basis as a commodity consisting of use and exchange values. However, in practical terms, this conceptualization presents methodological and analytical implications or challenges, such as those relating to the collection and analysis of longitudinal data.

Thus, an alternative conceptualization of the ‘object’ is necessary for this thesis. To develop this, we may first consider the argument that is implicit to Marx’s notion of fetishism – particularly, that appearances and reality are rarely, if ever, perfectly aligned and completely synonymous, and so we must venture beneath the surface of things to understand them further (Harvey, 2014; Callinicos, 1983). Informed by this, we may firstly conceptualize the object in the form of appearances, in terms of the meaning, motive or purpose that satisfies needs, perhaps representing the raw materials individuals transform, or as being “simultaneously given, socially constructed, contested and emergent” (Blackler, 2009: p.27). Equally, in the form of appearances, the object may be regarded as a commodity, consisting of use and exchange values that *may* stand in a contradictory relationship to each other. In this form of appearances, however, it is plausible to argue that the object and commodity are *both* fetishized, such that the social relations underpinning their transformation or production are concealed and mystified.

To explain this, the foregoing discussion has indeed highlighted the centrality of commodity fetishism within capitalist society. In contemporary theorizing about activity as well, it is notable that ‘objects’ sometimes tend to be accorded strange, mystical powers of guiding human actions. The argument is indeed sometimes made by activity theorists that objects are ‘constructed’ or ‘transformed’ by people, but this leaves unanswered questions concerning the roles or identities of those individuals, the contexts or conditions under which that construction/transformation occurs, and especially, the kinds of inequalities that may be inherent to such processes. Particularly in Engestrom’s theorizing of activity systems, the forms of social relations unique to the capitalist mode of production have been neglected in favour of other analytic resources such as ‘community’. However, an analysis of such social relations is valuable for this thesis, as I will discuss next, as it could potentially expand our understanding

of entrepreneurial leadership, and particularly, for addressing the issue of ownership and the kinds of social relations this implicates. As such, I would argue that the foregoing conceptualization offers a novel, intriguing and powerful way of interrogating the ‘object’ of the activity of entrepreneurial leadership.

#### 4.3.3. Social Relations

As Leontev (1981/2009) observed, human labour is “social activity... based on the cooperation of individuals, assuming a technical division, even though rudimentary, of labour functions” (p.186). Leontev’s statement is useful as it provides some basis for perhaps understanding how Engestrom draws out the concepts of ‘Community’ and ‘Division of Labour’ in theorizing activity systems (See Figure 1). However, and more crucially for this discussion, it foregrounds two concepts in Marx’s work – cooperation, and the division of labour – that may facilitate analysis of the “definite set of social relationships existing between individuals involved in the productive process” (Giddens, 1973, p.35). In *Capital: Volume I*, Marx (1867/1976) elaborates on these two concepts over the course of three rich but complex and challenging chapters, exploring the development of the capitalist mode of production, its impact on the labour process, and the individuals and relations constituting the latter (Foley, 1986; Morrison, 1995; Grint, 2005b). There are potentially numerous implications arising from Marx’s analyses in these chapters. For present purposes, however, the following discussion draws attention to the relation between capital and labour – particularly how, through the division of labour, the cooperative power of labour is made to appear as a power of capital over labour.

To start with, Marx (1867/1976) defines ‘cooperation’ as a “form of labour” wherein “numerous workers work together side by side, in accordance with a plan, whether in the same process, or in different but connected processes” (p.443). For Marx, cooperation is fundamental to the capitalist mode of production, representing its starting point, and can have a number of effects. For instance, Marx argued that cooperation may result in an increase in the productive powers of the individual, but also the “creation of a new productive power, which is intrinsically a collective one” (p.443). Additionally, cooperation begets competition amongst workers, in terms of a “rivalry and a stimulation of the ‘animal spirits’”, which influences individual efficiency. Cooperation also facilitates spatio-temporal advantages, as work may be carried out over a larger area and commodities can be produced faster. In these senses, Marx thus regarded cooperation in positive terms, as it allows for productivity and efficiencies to be realized in the labour process (Harvey, 2010). Particularly, the positive aspects of cooperation are endorsed by Marx where he argues it gives rise to the “social productive power of labour” through which the worker “strips off the fetters of his individuality and develops the capabilities of his species” (p.447). In this latter sense, Marx drew attention to how cooperation is an inherently human characteristic, a power of workers that is entirely their own (Harvey, 2010; Leontev, 1978; Elster, 1985). In other words, Marx seems to argue that as humans, it is well within our nature, and indeed, powers, rights and abilities, to self-organize and engage in cooperative or collaborative modes of work and production.

Marx (1867/1976), however, goes on to problematize this uniquely human characteristic to cooperate by considering the capitalist’s role in the labour process. As he argues, and as “a general rule” (p.447) within the capitalist mode of production, workers cannot cooperate unless they are simultaneously employed by the capitalist who purchases their potential or capacity to work (ie. Labour power). Through cooperation, the capitalist’s command over the labour

process thus emerges as a “real condition of production” (p.448). As such, cooperation between workers appears as a “*plan drawn up by the capitalist*, and in practice, as his authority, as the powerful will of a being outside them, who subjects their activity to his purpose” (p.450: emphasis added). The fact that an individual is “at all events a social animal” (p.444) is thus undermined, since the cooperative power of labour is appropriated to *appear* as a power of capital over labour (Harvey, 2010). Marx draws attention to this, arguing that the “socially productive power of labour develops as a free gift to capital... and it is capital which places them under these conditions. Because this power costs capital nothing... it appears as a power which capital possesses by its nature – a productive power inherent in capital” (p.451).

This apparent power of capital over labour is rendered as such through a division of labour, suggested by the capitalist’s designation of a *plan* under which workers cooperate. Marx alludes to this division of labour in terms of “a process of separation”, through which the worker is “brought face to face with the intellectual potentialities... of the material process of production as the property of another and as a power which rules over him” (1867/1976: p.482). As he goes on to argue, this process of separation “starts in cooperation... is developed in manufacturing... [and] is completed in large scale industry, which makes science a potentiality for production which is distinct from labour and presses it into the service of capital” (p.482). For Marx then, the division of interest is that between intellectual and manual labour (Harvey, 2010), although what these categories actually constitute need clarification for present purposes. To clarify, the division between intellectual and manual labour does not connote a division between mental and bodily functions, as either form of labour necessarily involves both (Brighton Labour Process Group, 1977). According to Braverman (1998), the division between intellectual and manual labour, or the separation of conception from execution, implicates a situation wherein the “science of work” (p.79) is solely the remit of management

rather than workers. Within the labour process, the important division is therefore between “those who produce or apply scientific and technical knowledge in the design of production systems... and those whose relationship with the production system is calculated, standardized and specified in advance” by the former (Brighton Labour Process Group, 1977: p.17).

Informed by Marx’s insights on cooperation and the division of labour within the labour process, the preceding discussion thus draws attention to the kinds of social relations that mediate the relation between individuals and the ‘object’. Marx’s insights do point towards the capital-labour relation as being pertinent. However, the categories of ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ are not without problem. What these signify and their joint constitution as a social relation thus requires further analysis and justification. Further, the preceding discussion draws attention to how relations of domination are inscribed within these social relations. However, these power relations are naturalized, and made to appear as given - the cooperative power of labour is appropriated and made to appear as a power of capital over labour. My reading of Marx and the secondary literature suggests this naturalization occurs through the division of labour, by which a minority grouping takes responsibility, both for the design of production systems and how the mass of producers relate to those systems.

An issue therefore arises concerning how asymmetrical power relations are further ‘sedimented’, once naturalized and made to appear as self-evident. In the following subsection, I discuss the concept of ‘tools’ within the theoretical frame illustrated in Figure 2. I elaborate on how ‘tools’ may be construed as management practices that serve contradictory ends. On the one hand, I do not discount arguments that such practices can confer benefits upon individuals and/or organizations, and as such, recognize that the practices themselves can be enabling. On the other hand, however, management practices may be construed as constraining,

in so far as these are “never politically neutral... [and] reproduce structures in which there is differential access to valued material and symbolic goods” (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: p.12). It may be argued that management practices are thus the means by which relations of domination are further entrenched, and in the context of the labour process, these practices extend the “scope and penetration of management control” (Willmott, 1993: p.522).

#### 4.3.4. Tools

As discussed in Section 4.3.1, the notion of ‘tools’ has been elaborated in various ways by Marx, Vygotsky and Leontev. For Vygotsky, ‘tools’ are discussed in the context of psychological activity as ‘signs’ that mediate the relation between stimuli and responses. For Marx and Leontev, however, ‘tools’ are situated in the context of the labour process, mediating the relation between individuals and the object of labour. Expanding on Marx’s work, Leontev (2009) recognized tools were not just physical but could be social in form or “the product of social practice and of social labour experience” (p.193). Relatively more recently, Adler (2007) has discussed some of the shortcomings of Labour Process Theory. Buried away in the depths of this article is his discussion and development of a version of AT which Adler (2007) argues offers a “more fine-grained account of the production process” (p.1321). I will shortly discuss Adler’s version of AT given its similarities to the theoretical frame discussed here. For now, however, it is worth highlighting Adler’s (2007: p.1321) interpretation of the ‘tools’ of activity as the “techniques of work organization (such as the principles of bureaucracy, Taylorism or lean production)” that represent “a step towards more rational, conscious planning and management of large-scale, interdependent operations”.



For Marx (1867/1976), it would appear that bureaucracy *per se* is not a feature of the capitalist mode of production. Rather, it is hierarchy. Marx (1867/1976) thus argues that as the scale of cooperation increases, the capitalist “hands over the work of direct and constant supervision of individual workers and groups of workers to a special kind of wage labourer” (p.450). A management structure or hierarchy thus emerges through which managers and supervisors “command during the labour process in the name of capital” (p.450). At the apex of this structure or hierarchy is the capitalist, whose work in ‘directing, superintending and adjusting’ renders him or her a “leader of industry” (p.450). It is perhaps because of these statements that some have consequently argued that hierarchy and the degree of control it permits is an “immanent law” (p.16) or a basic structural feature of the capitalist labour process (Brighton Labour Process Group, 1977). For these researchers, hierarchy is ‘immanent’ as it suppresses the antagonistic relation between capital and labour, and allows for discipline over workers and the work they perform. However, Thompson (2010) has more recently refuted such claims of ‘laws’ within the labour process, on grounds that these are “empirically inaccurate and conceptually confused” (p.9). Hierarchy, as he argues, does structure ownership relations more generally, but is not necessary for control in more detailed terms, as the latter can be achieved through principles of team-working and “normative self-discipline” (p.9).

Thus, hierarchy can be construed as a ‘tool’. The argument that it may be viewed as a management practice more generally obtains relevance where we consider the work of Henri Fayol (Linstead et al, 2009). In outlining his ‘principles of management’, Fayol developed the notion of the ‘scalar chain’. Central to this is the practice of hierarchical organization, which supplies the basis for organizational layering, reporting lines and the designation of authority to facilitate coordination and communications within organizations. In this sense, hierarchy, as a ‘tool’ and a management practice, may be enabling, as it functions as an “integrating

organizing principle intended to enhance the benefits of collective effort through providing control and coordination”, or provides individuals with a sense of belonging (Child, 2011: p.502). However, and as it has been outlined, Marx and labour process theorists have highlighted the constraining effects of hierarchy as it may be construed as a means of control. As limited and/or partial as they may appear in some instances, hierarchies are thus for “control and distinction, about allowing the few to decide for the many, whether what they decide are the detailed rules... or the core values of the culture” (Linstead et al, 2009: p.225-226). In sum, the preceding discussion draws attention to a third point of interest for this study concerning the kinds of ‘tools’, hierarchy or otherwise, that are enabling and constraining within activity – ‘tools’ that mediate the relation between individuals and the ‘object’.

#### 4.3.5. Summary and Evaluation

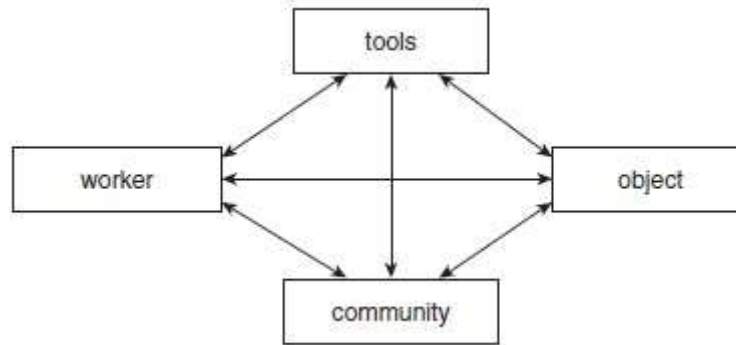
In summary, a theoretical framework for studying mediated activity was discussed in the preceding sections. Informed by these readings, I initially discussed three propositions concerning mediation - *First*, that the labour process mediates the relation between individuals and nature. *Second*, that within the labour process, physical and/or social tools mediate the relation between individuals and the ‘object’. *Third*, that within the labour process, social relations mediate the relation between individuals and the ‘object’. Further, the three central components of the proposed theoretical frame were discussed. Briefly, the ‘object’ may firstly be regarded in the form of appearances, in terms of the meaning, motive or purpose that satisfies needs, perhaps representing the raw materials that individuals transform, or as being “simultaneously given, socially constructed, contested and emergent” (Blackler, 2009: p. 27). Additionally, in the form of appearances, the ‘object’ is a commodity, consisting of use and

exchange values that may stand in a contradictory relation to each other. In this form of appearances, however, the ‘object’ and commodity are both fetishized, such that the social relations inherent to their transformation or production are concealed and mystified. These social relations, I have argued, may be analysed through Marx’s insights on cooperation and the division of labour. As such, I have outlined how, through the division of labour, the cooperative power of labour is made to appear as a power of capital over labour. This draws attention to the capital-labour social relation as being pertinent, but also how ensuing relations of domination are naturalized and made to appear as given. I have further argued, that ‘tools’ – construed in this study as management practices – may serve contradictory ends. Tools may be enabling, to the extent that they confer benefits upon individuals and organizations, but may equally be constraining, by acting as a means of control through which domination is entrenched.

More broadly, what emerges from this discussion is therefore a theoretical framework for studying activity, which is viewed in this thesis as being object-driven, mediated by tools and social relations and contextualized within the labour process. Some evaluation of this framework is necessary, firstly in relation to how it is valuable for addressing existing research gaps in the study of entrepreneurial leadership. As discussed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.6), existing research on entrepreneurial leadership has prioritized a focus on the individual, neglecting how context can inform our understanding of the concept. Particularly, we are short of knowledge on how ownership can influence the form of social relations within SME contexts. The frame discussed is especially valuable for this study as it provides a means to theoretically investigate the kinds of roles and relationships individuals occupy and are a part of, given their ownership of the means of production (or lack thereof). Further, these are roles and relationships associated with commodity production, but potentially remain concealed and

unrecognized to producers themselves. Additionally, these roles and relationships are power-laden, as far as they implicate groupings of individuals through which one is subordinate to another.

Some further evaluation of the frame is perhaps necessary in relation to work by Engestrom (1987) and Adler (2007). First, there are some similarities between Engestrom's theorizing of activity systems (see Figure 1, this chapter) and my proposed theoretical frame. As discussed in Section 4.3.1, my proposed frame certainly endorses the notion of mediation as his does. However, my proposed frame contextualizes mediation within the labour process and raises empirical questions about the kinds of tools and social relations that mediate commodity production, and the nature of the commodity itself. Further, I have found it difficult to acknowledge his concepts of 'rules' and 'community' in my proposed frame. In my readings of Engestrom's (1987) work, I have found the rationale for his inclusion of these concepts to be somewhat unclear. There is perhaps a theoretical case to be made for how rules mediate the relation between individuals and the communities they work within, but my reading of Marx, Vygotsky and Leontev did not surface arguments in relation to this. In a way, the concept of 'social relations' replaces that of 'community' in my proposed frame. This in itself is valuable, as it permits analysis of the kinds of social relations we may associate with 'leadership' or others. As discussed in Section 4.3.3, my proposed frame allows for an analysis of the relation between capital and labour that some argue Engestrom has notably neglected or suppressed in his work (Avis, 2007; Warmington, 2008).



*Figure 3: Adler's (2007) Conceptualization of Activity*

Second, there is a particular need to draw attention to Adler's (2007) proposed frame for activity (see Figure 3) given its conceptual similarities to mine. For instance, Adler (2007) does acknowledge the role of tools in mediating activity, particularly in terms of the relation between the individual (worker) and the object. My conceptualization of 'tools' in activity is informed by this. In my proposed frame, I have discussed that activity is contextualized within the labour process, seen as the mediating link between individuals and nature (Marx, 1867/1976). Adler (2007) does acknowledge this as well. For Adler (2007), however, the second element of mediated activity is the 'community' that individuals work within. He draws on Leontev's (1978) work and notes, "the subject's relation to the object is mediated not only by tools but also by community" (1330). My reading of Leontev (1978), and indeed Marx (1867/1976), indicates that it is not just community, but social relations in particular that mediate the relation between individuals and the object. Individuals thus do not simply become a part of communities in commodity production under capitalism, but enter into a relatively more specific set of relations engendered by their ownership of the means of production (Giddens, 1973).

#### 4.4. Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed Activity Theory as the central theoretical frame for re-contextualizing the descriptive findings from this study discussed in Chapter 6. Doing so has involved reviewing the existing literature and dominant conceptualization of activity (Engestrom's work), recognizing the limitations of this, and proposing an alternative theoretical frame for activity. This alternative frame was derived from my reading of work by Marx, Vygotsky and Leontev, and developed after the completion of my fieldwork and during data analysis. I have further evaluated this frame with reference to how it is valuable for addressing gaps in the research on entrepreneurial leadership, Engestrom's theorizing of activity systems (1987) and Adler's (2007) similar proposals.

As discussed in this chapter, 'activity' is to be viewed in this thesis as being object-driven, mediated by tools and social relations, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process. Another way to express this is that for this thesis, 'activity' refers to the capitalist labour process. It is orientated towards the production of an object/commodity, and made possible by (i) the physical and/or social instruments of work; and (ii) the social relationships people enter into at work. Further, understanding entrepreneurial leadership as an activity in the foregoing sense would be valuable for this thesis, as it may potentially illustrate the kinds of social relations implicated by ownership and expand our understanding of the significance of leadership in the context of owner-managed SMEs. The following chapter marks the beginning of Part II of this thesis, outlining and discussing the methodological framework underpinning the research.

## Part II – Methodology, Findings and Discussion

*“We may say that it is our daily work which forms our minds,  
and that it is our location within the productive process which  
determines our outlook on things – or the sides of things we see –  
and the social elbowroom at the command of each of us.”*

Schumpeter (1942/1976: p.12)

## 5. Methodology

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological framework that underpins the research. Broadly, the present study adopts a qualitative approach, the philosophical position of critical realism, the comparative case study research method, and semi-structured interviewing technique. Each of these choices are explained and justified further, along with the issues of sampling, access, ethics and data analysis procedures.

### 5.1. A Qualitative Approach

Broadly, empirical work on entrepreneurial leadership can perhaps be seen as somewhat dichotomized in terms of approaches and methods. As noted in Chapter 3 (See Table 2 - 'Empirical Articles Reviewed'), a number of researchers have employed quantitative approaches and surveys (Gupta et al, 2004; Renko et al. 2015; Chen, 2007; Jensen and Luthans, 2006; Ensley et al, 2006; Huang et al, 2014; Zaech and Baldegger, 2017; Miao et al, 2018; Nicholson, 1998; Bamiatzi et al, 2015). Others have utilized qualitative approaches and interview techniques (Jones and Crompton, 2009; Wang et al, 2012; Swiercz and Lydon, 2002; Bagheri and Pihie, 2013; Harrison et al, 2016; Kansikas et al, 2012; Kempster and Cope, 2010; Leitch et al, 2013; Patterson et al, 2012b; McGowan et al, 2015; Lewis, 2015; Dean and Ford, 2017). One study has employed a mixed method approach (McCarthy et al, 2010).

This study adopts a qualitative approach, which as some have noted, bears a number of distinctive features. As Cresswell (2007) indicates, for example, the researcher is typically the 'key instrument', collecting data on their own rather than through questionnaires that have been



developed by others. The researcher is thus able to expand their understanding of the subject matter by communicating, summarizing the data obtained or cross-checking with research participants on the accuracy of material (Merriam, 2009). Further, design flexibility underpins qualitative approaches, as unforeseen circumstances may dictate the need for changes to an initial plan, however sound or thorough it may be. Particularly, qualitative research is underpinned by a focus of meaning and understanding. As Cresswell (2007) indicates, qualitative researchers place a strong emphasis on the discovery of meaning from the participant perspective. In doing so, the researcher is able to query, understand, probe further and problematize the meanings that participants attribute towards their lived experiences (Bryman, 2004a; 2004b).

The justification for a qualitative approach in this study is supported, for instance, by the need to understand how participants attribute meaning to various facets of their organizational contexts and lives, the ways in which they interpret their rights to lead, and they ways in which they perceive they lead others, or indeed, are led by others. Inquiring into such issues would arguably support the development of more contextual and relational understandings of leadership in SME contexts, which as many have argued, is highly relevant for advancing research on entrepreneurial leadership (eg. Cope et al, 2011; Leitch et al, 2013; Harrison et al, 2015; Leitch and Volery, 2017; Sklaveniti, 2017). Further, the aforementioned insights from research participants will facilitate descriptive analyses of recurrent phenomena and theoretical analyses of those phenomena using the framework outlined in Chapter 4. As such, a qualitative approach in this study is justifiable.

## 5.2. Research Philosophy – Critical Realism

In the following section, I explain and justify the choice of a critical realist philosophical position for this study. To do so, the discussion begins with an overview of the extant literature on entrepreneurial leadership, in terms of the epistemological and ontological assumptions that may possibly be inferred from empirical work in the topic area (again with reference to Table 2, Chapter 2). Subsequently, I situate critical realism in this study by describing its central features, along with a discussion of how it informs my ontological and epistemological commitments. I conclude the section with a justification for the critical realist position.

### 5.2.1. Epistemology and Ontology in Entrepreneurial Leadership

On the one hand, it might be suggested that quantitative work in the area of entrepreneurial leadership tends to be unified by the adoption of a positivist epistemology. As some have argued, positivism assumes that knowledge about the social world can be obtained via sense experience (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000), and methods associated with the natural sciences may be employed to seek out regularities and causal relationships between discrete phenomena as a means for providing explanations, predictions and generalizations (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Easterby Smith et al, 2002). Amongst quantitative work on entrepreneurial leadership, perhaps the clearest indication of such assumptions is suggested from the prevalent use of surveys as research methods. For example, based on an eight-item scale that measures the perceptions of those directly influence by leaders, Renko et al (2013) claim to have shown how “founders receive higher scores in entrepreneurial leadership when rated by the employees than non-founders” (p.16). Elsewhere, Gupta et al (2004) note that based upon similar methods

utilized in their empirical work, “entrepreneurial leadership appears to be universal construct relevant for outstanding results at the organization and society levels” (p.254). Hence, the adoption of such methods by quantitative researchers tends to encourage some degree of generalizations related to the efficacy of entrepreneurial leadership as a phenomenon of interest.

On the other hand, qualitative work on entrepreneurial leadership is more broadly unified by anti-positivist epistemologies. Rather than to seek out law-like generalizations and predictions, advocates of this epistemological position seek to understand phenomena from the points of view of individuals who are engaged in the activities of interest (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Of prominence amongst qualitative work on the topic is the interpretivist approach, which seeks to understand the complexity of human behaviour and capture the meanings that individuals ascribe to phenomena via rich, thick descriptions (Leitch et al, 2010). As examples, Leitch et al (2012) have drawn on the interpretivist approach to explore the development of entrepreneurial leadership, focusing on “practitioners being immersed in, coping with and adapting to emerging situations” (p.7) in the context of a leadership development program. Utilizing a similar approach, Kempster and Cope (2010) have sought to account for the “naturalistic mechanisms” within entrepreneurial contexts and provide insight into how entrepreneurs identify with leadership.

Identifying ontological assumptions in work on entrepreneurial leadership is a more precarious endeavour, as these are not made explicit in most cases. With regards to quantitative work in the field, one might suggest that authors have tended to endorse an empirical realist ontology – ‘empirical’, because knowledge about the objects of inquiry are confined to what is available via sense experience, and ‘realist’ because those objects are thought to exist independently of

one's identification of them (Fleetwood, 2001). This may potentially be the ontological assumption adopted by quantitative work, as authors have sought to propose models that objectify the phenomenon of interest and test hypotheses (eg. Renko et al, 2013; Chen, 2007; Jensen and Luthans, 2006; Ensley et al, 2006; Gupta et al, 2004; Nicholson, 1998).

Further caution is necessary when identifying the ontological commitments of researchers employing qualitative approaches, and particularly, the interpretivist position. For instance, some researchers in working in the field of entrepreneurial leadership argue that interpretivism is based on a "life-world ontology" (Leitch et al, 2010: p.69) that rejects wholesale objectivist modes of understanding. However, authors of methodological literature have contrastingly argued how the interpretivist position assumes that individuals create their social worlds in an ongoing process through a network of assumptions and inter-subjectively shared meanings (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). More broadly, however, the preceding discussion does serve to highlight at least two competing philosophical positions – positivist and interpretivist epistemologies – within the literature on entrepreneurial leadership.

### 5.2.2. Situating Critical Realism

Critical realism is a philosophy of science originally based on the work of Roy Bhaskar (1978, 1998). In some quarters, the value of critical realism has perhaps been subject to some hyperbole. Gorski (2013), for example, has observed that Bhaskar's work seems "enormously prescient" (p.659) in the present day, due to the apparent shortcomings of positivism, empiricism, interpretivism and constructionism. Indeed, stronger forms of constructionism such as postmodernism have been subjected to intense scrutiny by critical realists (Fleetwood,

2005; Sayer, 2000). Such critiques against these prominent ‘others’ have been levelled, despite Bhaskar (2014) himself recently observing it is a ‘scandal’ that texts on applied critical realism are few and far between. Nonetheless, critical realism has received some attention in the social sciences more broadly (Sayer, 1992, 2000; Danermark et al, 2002), and in the field of management studies as well (Mingers, 2000; Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000, 2004; Fleetwood, 2005, 2014; Fairclough, 2005; Hesketh and Fleetwood, 2006; Kempster, 2006; Easton, 2010; Kempster and Parry, 2011; Edwards et al, 2014).

A number of concepts are associated with critical realism. For example, objects are thought to be part of structures of relations. Those relations may be viewed to be substantial, internal and symmetrically necessary, if it is assumed there are real connections between the objects in question and each mutually conditions the other (Sayer, 2000; Danermark et al, 2002). Calling on structure then implicates the question of agency, which may be defined “as anything which is capable of bringing about a change in something (including itself)” (Bhaskar, 1978: p.109). When applied to individuals, Bhaskar (1998) notes that the concept of agency includes the capacity to reason. A key concept in critical realist thinking is the ‘generative mechanism’, for which there are various interpretations. Fleetwood (2001: p.211), for example, refers to mechanisms as an “ensemble of structures, powers and relations”, whilst Danermark et al (2002: p.55) have argued that a mechanism can take different forms and “cause[s] something in the world to happen”. For Bhaskar (1978), a mechanism is defined as “a way of acting of a thing” (p.51), and identifiable within ordinary language, particularly in terms of transitive verbs. Finally, agency, structure and mechanisms are seen as having tendencies and powers. As Bhaskar (1978) notes, ‘tendency’ is the primary concept, and attributing tendencies only indicates something “is predisposed or oriented towards” (p.230) the exercise of power.

I would argue that above all, the central feature of critical realism is its prioritization of ontology over epistemology. Fleetwood (2014) alludes to this, noting that one's claims regarding the nature of reality influences a "chain of meta-theoretical concepts" (p.182), such as causality, epistemology, research techniques and modes of inference. Critical realism thus posits a stratified or layered ontology (Sayer, 2000; Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000, Danermark et al, 2002; Bhaskar, 1978). Distinctions are typically drawn between three domains of reality - the *empirical*, or what we directly or indirectly experience; the *actual* events that occur; and the *real*, or generative mechanisms that may be physical or social objects with certain causal powers to produce the actual events in the world. A useful analogy for this is given by the example of a theatre. The domain of the *empirical* can refer to the individual's experience of the drama unfolding on stage. The *actual* refers to the events on stage, whilst the *real* may consist of the generative mechanisms – scripts, lighting or sound design – that give rise to the actual. Mechanisms such as these may or may not elicit responses from actors on stage, and in turn, these responses may elicit others from the audience. Where the latter occurs, questions may be raised about how the actual is interpreted, and the range of meanings attributable to the events experienced. This highlights the overarching ontological perspective offered by critical realism - that there is one objective reality but potentially multiple differentiated interpretations of it (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014).

Whilst so, this prioritization is a double-edged sword, as it tends to simultaneously involve a subordination of epistemology to ontology. This may perhaps be inferred from the work of certain authors. For example, the work of Danermark et al (2002) represents one of few texts that detail how critical realism may usefully inform an empirical project. Glancing at the index of this, however, the term 'epistemology' is relegated to just two entries, one of which is a mere definition within a glossary. Reed (1997) has advocated a critical realist perspective for

investigating the agency-structure ‘problem’ in organization studies. Here, epistemological issues take a backseat, as he foregrounds just the “ontological, analytical and methodological dilemmas” (p.22) that predicate an assessment of the issues of interest. The defence for this subordination is a heightened awareness against what is perceived to be the ultimate sin in critical realism, the epistemic fallacy. Arguments are thus made against collapsing assumptions about the nature of reality into those relating to how we might inquire about it (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). I discuss the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning this study next.

### 5.2.3. Ontological Assumptions of this Study

In this study, I adopt the ontological position that there is a contradiction between reality in the form that it is theorized (*the real*) and how it otherwise appears (*the actual*) – appearances that are made intelligible to me as a researcher through the methodological techniques I use to describe research participants’ accounts of their organizational lives (*the empirical*). This is my interpretation of how the critical realist stratified ontology can be operationalized for this study, and requires unpacking. To elaborate, my focus on the interpretive accounts of participants’ organizational lives is clear from the preceding discussion on the qualitative approach taken in this study. Further, attempts to render these multiple accounts as intelligible – described thematically in the form of a coherent narrative presented in the ‘Findings’ chapter of this thesis (see Chapter 6) – depend on the various methodological techniques I employ during data collection and analysis (I discuss these more in the following sections). My explanation up to this point reflects the critical realist argument that the study of the social world involves a ‘double hermeneutic’. Research is conducted with interested participants, who partake in their

own worlds and the production of knowledge initiated by the researcher. Participants have already allocated meaning to their worlds and continuously re-interpret them. The researcher thus (re)interprets these meanings in the research process, construing rather than constructing phenomena (Sayer, 2000: p.11).

However, appearances can be deceiving, and my ontological position offers a crucial reminder of this – that these findings may only be appearances of a reality that we are yet to apprehend more fully, and through theoretical abstraction, the features of that reality may (sometimes diametrically) oppose the way in which it originally appeared to us. This aspect of my ontological position – the contradiction between reality and appearances – is influenced by Harvey (2014), who argues for the need to “unmask what is truly happening underneath a welter of often mystifying surface appearances” (p.5). Hence, what participants describe as effective, inspiring, morale-building leadership, may very well be theoretically interpreted as control relations that seek to generate commitment. Alternatively, what participants account for as activities and goals associated with organizational growth, may well be construed as commodity production in capitalism. This draws attention to the kinds of theories we use to understand the world, and again critical realism has something to offer here. As critical realists have argued, our understanding of the world is mediated by the theories and concepts that we use to make sense of it (Fleetwood, 2005; Sayer, 2000). In this thesis, my understanding of the ‘real’ is facilitated by the theoretical frame discussed in Chapter 4. As discussed previously, activity is viewed in this thesis as object-driven and mediated by tools and social relations. As such, the ‘real’ is constituted in this study by (i) the object, (ii) tools, and (iii) social relations of activity. It is theorizing about activity, which thus enables an understanding of the ‘real’.



One other comment is necessary here to explain the foregoing ontological position. As Johnson and Duberley (2000) note, the critical realist project is centrally committed towards an understanding of causation, or the “abstract identification of the structures and mechanisms which, although not directly observable, underlie and govern the events of experience and hence explain why regularities occur” (p.155). To be clear, theorizing about activity – in terms of the object, tools and social relations – does not only offer an understanding of the ‘real’. As outlined in Chapter 4, these components of activity are located in a relatively specific labour process – that of capitalism, which may be defined as a system of commodity production premised upon a relatively enduring and distinct set of social relations between producers (Giddens, 1973). As such, theorizing about activity in this thesis, and therefore, the ‘real’, facilitates an understanding of how capitalism influences the “social activities which agents skilfully sustain through those intentionally motivated activities yet which remain opaque to individuals involved” (Johnson and Duberley, 2000: p.166).

#### 5.2.4. Epistemological Assumptions of this Study

Stemming from the foregoing discussion is the epistemological question of how I can be certain that my theorizing about the activity of entrepreneurial leadership constitutes reliable knowledge. This is especially complicated by the theatre analogy I provided in Section 5.2.2 – If there are indeed potentially differentiated interpretations of activity, there is the equally important need to consider which of these interpretations offers the line of best fit. In critical realism, the epistemological question of what constitutes or warrants reliable scientific knowledge is partly addressed by the forms of relativism that are simultaneously accepted and rejected (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). As Sayer (2000) indicates, critical realism accepts

‘epistemic relativism’, or the argument that the social world can only be known in terms of available descriptions. However, ‘judgement relativism’ is rejected, or the view that one cannot judge between these descriptions to decide on which is best. One can, and therefore should, adjudicate between rival explanations when conceptualizing and/or theorizing from phenomena of interest in a research study (Sayer, 2000; Fairclough, 2005; Fleetwood, 2014).

In the context of this thesis, there is therefore a need to explicitly (i) discuss multiple interpretations of the object, tools and social relations in the activity of entrepreneurial leadership, and (ii) consider which of these interpretations are most tenable. I submit this is an analytical issue, and it is thus discussed more in the section on data analysis (See Section 5.6). However, I should also acknowledge that knowledge derived through this research about the activity of entrepreneurial leadership would nonetheless be provisional. This important point is informed by the critical realist admission concerning the fallibility of knowledge about reality (Danermark et al, 2002). As Sayer (2000) indicates, it is the prospect of being mistaken that provides the critical realist understanding that there is some kind of objective reality existing independently of us as researchers. To sum up then, addressing the question of what constitutes reliable knowledge in this study would require generating rival interpretations for the concepts under study, and adjudicating between these interpretations to decide which is most tenable, whilst nonetheless recognizing final interpretations are provisional and subject to debate and/or revision.

### 5.2.5. Justifying a Critical Realist Position

I was drawn to critical realist thinking in the early stages of my research, after exploring other philosophical positions such as social constructionism and interpretivism. In the document submitted for my upgrade panel in my second year of studies, I offered a somewhat complicated discussion of critical realism and attempted to articulate some rationale for its relevance to my work. At the time, the rationale was largely underpinned by the research questions, which were markedly different from those articulated in this document. My choice of adopting, and indeed defence of, critical realism at the time was sharply challenged by the upgrade panellists for various reasons. Notions such as ‘generative mechanisms’ and causation were seen to be problematic, and I was asked to re-think the relevance of critical realism for my research. I agreed with this then, but upon commencing fieldwork and data collection, my focus was on developing access for interviews, collecting a robust set of data, thinking about how I was analysing my data as I analysed it, and generating an interesting set of findings. I was absorbed in data collection and analysis, research philosophy was outside of my concerns during these stages of the research process, and it was only after developing the theoretical findings of this study that I was able to make sense of how critical realism is relevant to this study.

I would argue that critical realism is justifiable in this study given the research process that was undertaken – particularly, the kinds of descriptive findings generated through data collection and analysis, and the kinds of issues uncovered through theoretical abstraction of these findings. Through my initial analyses, I discovered five relatively common themes that cut across the cases. These themes referred to my interpretations of what was going on in the organizations, based on participant accounts in response to my interview questions. The theoretical frame discussed in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.3) was developed and applied to these

findings only after I had a reasonably coherent set of data structures. In doing so, I realised that the study was not just interpretive - or concerning the re-interpretations of research participants' interpretations (Bryman and Bell, 2003) - but that my interpretations could be plausibly explained with reference to the structures and patterns associated with the capitalist labour process. This led to my development of the ontological assumption stated previously. Purists may argue that I have taken some creative liberty in stating this assumption, and perhaps not used critical realist concepts in the conventional way. However, my engagement with critical realist literature and thinking over the course of PhD studies suggests one is not obliged to use all the concepts associated with critical realism, and further, some interpretation is required in operationalizing the idea of a stratified ontology. This latter point is especially clear in the work of Sayer (2010: p.12), who has attempted to explain the critical realist notion of stratification through Marx's concepts of labour power and labour. As he argues, for example, "the former (the capacity to work) and the physical and mental structures from which it derives, is equivalent to the level of the real, while labour (working) as the exercise of this power, and its effects, belong to the domain of the actual".

Further justification is required for the way in which critical realism has been applied in this study. Particularly, it is worth stating here that critical realism has been deployed in this study as a philosophical position within a methodological framework, rather than as a meta-theoretical framework anchored by critical realist concepts outlined in Section 5.2.2. The rationale for adopting the former approach is that the latter would potentially have created substantial conceptual and empirical confusion. Take, for instance, the concept of the 'object'. In critical realism, 'objects' are thought of as being part of structures of relations (Danermark et al, 2002), whereas in Activity Theory, the concept of the 'object' can accommodate both sociological and/or psychological interpretations (Kaptelinin and Miettinen, 2005; See Section

4.1 for a fuller discussion of this, and Section 4.3.2 for a discussion of how the ‘object’ is conceptualized for this thesis). As such, and given these differences, it is plausible to argue that the application of critical realism as a meta-theoretical framework accompanied by its attendant concepts, used in conjunction with the theoretical frame discussed in Chapter 4, would potentially have substantially cluttered the analysis, description and discussion of data. Thus, and to reiterate, critical realism, and particularly, an interpretation of the notion of a stratified ontology, substantiates the philosophical position within this study’s methodological framework.

### 5.3. Research Method – Comparative Case Study

This study adopts a comparative case study research method. First, the case study method itself is regarded in this thesis as a form of qualitative research that involves an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (Merriam, 2009). This is worth clarifying in itself, as the term ‘case study’ is subject to some ambiguity. As Blaikie (2000) notes, the case study has been regarded in different ways – as a research design, as a method for selecting data sources, or involving the use of typically qualitative research methods. Merriam (2009) has drawn attention to how the procedures involved in conducting a case study is at times conflated with both the unit of analysis and the end-product of this form of investigation. Such conflation is perhaps captured by Cresswell (2007) to some extent, who claims it may be viewed as “a methodology, a type of design in qualitative research, or an object of study, as well as a product of inquiry” (p.73).

Second, the comparative case study method involves collecting data from several individuals (ie. sub-cases) situated within multiple organizations (ie. cases) in order to draw out similarities and differences that facilitate further descriptive and theoretical analyses. This may be regarded as similar to a design variant of case studies proposed by Yin (2009) – the multiple-case embedded design. However, this terminology is avoided here, namely given its positivistic connotations and deference towards objectivity in the research process. As Yin (2009) indicates, the rationale for employing this variant of the case study may be attributed to “replication logic” (p.54). Each case is carefully selected to predict similar or contrasting results, and provide “compelling support for the initial set of propositions” (p.54).

Third, the adoption of this method raises the question of case definition and the number of cases and sub-cases to be investigated. Some have noted that case definition, or delimiting the object of study, is the most challenging aspect of the case study method (Merriam, 2009; Cresswell, 2007). However, Stake (2006) has provided some useful guidance on this. He draws attention to the unique nature of ‘the case’, highlighting that it typically has some substantial form and is rarely comprised of functions or general activities that lack organic character. In the present study, the case is thus defined as the organization form in question, and serves as the arena that bounds the phenomena of interest (Stake, 2006). Sub-cases are further defined in terms of the individuals who own, manage and work within these organization forms. The parameters of interest in further specifying cases and sub-cases are discussed further in the next section, wherein I also elaborate on the number of cases and sub-cases investigated for this study.

Some justification of this methodological choice – the comparative case study method – is thus necessary having identified and described it. Here as well, the justification for the method is

supplied by the identified research gaps in Chapter 3. The comparative case study method is supported by the need to understand different aspects of respondents’ organizations, how respondents describe these, and how context, particularly ownership, may influence the ways in which leadership is construed. According to Stake (2006), the method is most useful when the researcher requires an understanding of how phenomena are characterized within contexts or differently across multiple contexts by individuals. The method is also useful for facilitating an in-depth understanding of contexts, in terms of how individuals describe them. Further, the method is also suitable for being able to provide “empirical foundation... to sort out contingent differences in order to arrive at the common and more universal” (Danermark et al, 2002; p.105).

#### 5.4. Sampling, Ethics and Access

<b>SME Definition</b>		
<i>Enterprise Category</i>	<i>Ceilings</i>	
	<i>Staff Headcount</i>	<i>Turnover</i>
Micro	<10	≤ €2 million
Small	<50	≤ €10 million
Medium	<250	≤ €50 million

*Table 4: SME Definition by Headcount and Turnover*

At the initial stages of this study, my intention was to adopt a purposive sampling technique to recruit research participants. As some have indicated (Cresswell, 2007; Bryman, 2004b), this involves selecting cases and/or sub-cases on the basis that they may purposefully provide an understanding of the phenomena of interest, and are relevant to the research questions posed. Before embarking on fieldwork, I therefore identified certain criteria of interest relevant to the

study aims. Broadly, and at the case-level, I was interested in investigating three micro-businesses, the smallest category of SMEs as per official definitions (See Table 4; EU Commission, 2015). At the sub-case level, I was intent on engaging with one owner-manager and two full-time employees, where the former is defined in terms of majority shareholding and is actively involved in the organization on a daily basis. However, adhering to such rigid criteria may have led to a potentially limited data set. I became cognizant of this as I progressed through my fieldwork, and consequently, was more open towards interviewing a wider range of individuals from a wider range of SMEs. Thus, the sampling technique adopted as I embarked on my fieldwork may be perhaps more accurately described as one of convenience. I was keen to take what I could get, as long as it fit within the general remit of the criteria I initially had in mind.

The research project was approved by the university's Research Ethics Committee, prior to participant recruitment. Two main documents were prepared to ensure informed consent from participants. Firstly, an information sheet with detail on the study was prepared. This indicated the general aim of the study and the kinds of themes to be explored during interviews; assurances on confidentiality and anonymity; how data would be used, how long it would be retained for, and what would happen to it after; and contact details for the research supervisors and myself. Additionally, the information sheet contained a declaration that the research project was partly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the United Kingdom. Two versions of the information sheet were prepared – one for owner-managers (see Appendix 1), and another for employees (see Appendix 2). Particularly, this was done after a suggestion from the university's Research Ethics Committee to emphasize employees were not obliged to participate even if the owner-manager had agreed to. Secondly, and aside from the information



sheet, a consent form was prepared (see Appendix 3). This form requested participants' understanding of the information sheet, and their signed informed consent for participation.

Armed with these documents, I began developing access into organizations. My first ports of call were the various departments within Lancaster University Management School (LUMS) that host programmes and support services for SMEs. For example, I identified the Wave2Growth Hub and Entrepreneurs-in-Residence (EIR) programmes in LUMS as potential avenues for access. The former took priority, at the time, given its activities and engagement work with SMEs and scope of national coverage. I thus resolved to contact the programme manager, until discovering at my PhD upgrade panel that the programme itself had reached the end of its cycle. I (repeatedly) contacted the EIR programme manager to enquire about interviewing owner-manager delegates on the programme, thinking this could lead to further opportunities for interviews with employees in their organizations. However, my emails to the programme manager did not receive any responses. I also called on the Careers department in LUMS to enquire about any contacts they may have with SMEs in the local area, but this did not present any leads to follow up on. Subsequently, I found that the Lancaster Environment Centre (LEC) and the Infolab provide office space and support services to a significant number of SMEs, or resident companies. I thus contacted the business partnerships managers at both LEC and the Infolab, who graciously agreed to circulate a cover letter to the resident companies. This cover letter appeared to have been circulated to about forty organizations, but again, I did not receive any responses or expressions of interest in participation.

At this point, feeling like I had exhausted possibilities in LUMS and the university more generally, my attention turned outwards from the school and particularly at the local area. Initially, I emailed the regional office of the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), but did not

receive a reply. I also accessed the FAME database via the university's library website, a tool that specializes in indexing the financial data of private companies. I trimmed the search criteria to include SMEs with up to 50 employees, trading actively in the Lancaster area, which generated a sizeable number of companies. As I was trying to decide how to act upon this information, it occurred to me that I might consider investigating the business parks in the local area for potential leads. Subsequently, I went online to look at the tenant directories of two local business parks. This provided further links to the websites of tenants, and I compiled a list of potential organizations to contact. I proceeded to 'cold-email' these organizations and received expressions of interest in participation from the Managing Directors of two micro-businesses - *CommsInc* and *SecurityInc*. After a few further emails concerning details of the study, these Managing Directors agreed to be interviewed on specified dates. The Managing Director of *CommsInc* agreed to facilitate email introductions to employees at the end of my interview with her. I then followed up with these employees via email, providing the information sheet and asking if they would participate. All four employees whom I spoke to agreed and interview dates with them were diarized. With *SecurityInc*, on the day of my first interview, the Managing Director invited me to his office for brief introductions to his management team prior to our interview. After this, the director facilitated further email contact with his team. I then provided the relevant information sheet and asked for each individual's participation separately via email. In this instance, one individual, a minority shareholder, declined participation, despite persistent emails from me to him about the study, although the three other members of the management team agreed. Interview dates with the management team of *SecurityInc* were thus arranged.

Access to *BuildInc* was developed through an acquaintance, whom I met through rather fortuitous circumstances. A friend, also undertaking PhD studies in the university, introduced

me to her. Together with a business partner, she had been involved in the design and delivery of leadership development programme for SMEs in the local area. Upon learning about my research interests, and after many further meetings with her and emails on my part, she agreed to facilitate access. She thus arranged for me to speak to the Managing Director of *BuildInc* over the phone. After a brief conversation, and having read the information sheet that I sent to him, the Managing Director agreed to meet me for an interview at his office. Following this, he facilitated email introductions to four others in the organization, one of whom is a Commercial Director and shareholder of the organization. Interviews with all these individuals, except the Commercial Director, were organized. This individual, despite my persistent emails, never responded for an interview. I did also attempt to organize interviews with three other managers in the organization, emailing them to ascertain their interest, but none responded. At this point, I was concerned that the data set for this particular case was potentially thin given the relative size of the organization, and therefore problematic. It occurred to me that my initial contact who set me up for access into *BuildInc* might have been well positioned through her work to provide useful insights about the organization. I thus emailed her and her business partner about the prospects of being interviewed for my study. Both agreed to, and so were included in the study as well.

I continued to develop access into more organizations, despite my initial plans to conduct interviews with the members of just three. Following my engagement with *BuildInc*, I had some data – Seventeen interviews from three organizations – but felt that more interviews would provide a stronger basis for comparisons across cases, developing clearer themes and a more robust data set overall. LinkedIn was my port of call on this occasion, and I went online to search and review user profiles. I trimmed the search criteria to look for the profiles of SME owner-managers in the local area and emailed a few individuals whose organizations I believed

would be suitable. One of these individuals, the owner-manager of *DigitalInc* responded agreeing to an initial meeting. When we met to discuss the study, he asked that I introduce myself to his team and ask for their participation. I did, the team members present that day in the office agreed, and interview dates were diarized. Approximately a year later, having completed rough analyses and developed tentative findings, I once again set out to collect more data for the reasons set out above. As such, I resolved to contact more organizations, again via LinkedIn. In this instance, the Managing Director of *TechInc* responded, inviting me for an initial meeting at his office with the Operations Director of his organization. Prior to this meeting, I forwarded on the participant information sheets. At the meeting, we discussed the study in further detail and I was asked how many interviews I wanted to conduct. Given the size of the organization, I indicated I hoped to interview all the members of the management team and some of these individuals' direct reports. In this instance, the directors agreed to facilitate introductions and arrange interviews on my behalf. Fifteen interviews were conducted in total, with members of the management team and other employees, the most of any of the cases. Appendix 4 provides an overall summary of the organizations and participants who contributed to this study.

Throughout this entire process of developing access, I was keen to enhance the appeal of participation and ensure that participants would receive something in return for their involvement in the research. As such, in my initial advances via email, I emphasised that I would reciprocate by providing participants with a Key Findings Report. I indicated the report would strive to provide some illustration of the quality and complexity of leadership relationships in participant organizations, thereby offering scope for professional and organizational development. In some instances, I framed the potential content of the report differently, noting it might illustrate the influence of leadership relationships on business

maintenance, growth and/or performance. As I went along, the potential content was framed differently partly because of the themes and findings generated during the ongoing data analysis, and partly because I was keen to try different things to enhance the appeal of participation. In any case, the Key Findings Reports were submitted, approximately six months after the completion of interviews within each organization. This generated some, minimal, dialogue. With *SecurityInc*, for example, the Managing Director responded via email with some pleasantries. Somewhat amusingly, he indicated the report was “*inciteful*” and, rather tellingly perhaps, that he was working on “*empowering others to lead*”. Aside from this, however, he also asked for “*off-the-record advice*”. I did not respond to this given the anonymity and confidentiality I had guaranteed all participants. With *DigitalInc*, the Managing Director asked for a short meeting and debrief, during which we discussed some of ideas in the report in some detail.

### 5.5. Data Collection

Some documentary evidence (such as organization handbooks and structure charts) were obtained from participants during the fieldwork, but semi-structured interviews represented the primary means of collecting data. As Bryman (2004b) has observed, this technique typically utilizes a flexible interview schedule that the researcher may deviate from to explore new avenues that come up or recur during interviews. Interview questions are formulated and may be refined as the research progresses, and the technique fundamentally facilitates obtaining in-depth answers about how participants understand or interpret phenomena. It may be contrasted against structured or unstructured interviews. The former may be regarded as an “oral form of a written survey” (p.89), wherein the order and wording of questions are pre-formulated (Merriam, 2009), whilst the latter is very open and consists mostly of a set of prompts dealing

with a certain range of topics (Bryman, 2004b). In this study, the technique was seen to be generally suitable, given my interest in participants' accounts and interpretations of their organizational lives, contexts and experiences with leadership. I also had to recognize that my interview schedule would evolve during the research process, given the time spent in the field and the number of people interviewed. The flexibility of the interview technique in this regard thus also rendered it suitable for the study.

Samples of the interview schedules for owner-managers and employees are provided in Appendices 5 and 6. These schedules were used in the very early stages of the fieldwork and were modified, as I progressed interviewing different individuals from the five organizations. More broadly, the interview schedules used throughout the fieldwork can be discussed in terms of two main sections. Questions in the first section sought to obtain contextual information about the organizations, informed by work from Porter and McLaughlin (2006). These researchers have argued for a better understanding of organization contexts as locations within which leadership occurs, and to this end, propose a number of contextual themes others may consider. There is indeed a positivist bias in this article, as for instance, Porter and McLaughlin (2006) argue that the "organization context can be a dependent variable of leadership action as well as a variable of influence on leadership" (p.560). However, I would suggest that these researchers' ideas are nonetheless valuable in this study, as the different contextual themes they highlight provided me with a way to engage with participants and how they attribute meaning to various aspects of their respective organizations.

Participants were asked questions relating to the scale of the organizations in terms of turnover and employee numbers, business activities and demographic composition (ie. age, gender, ethnicity). They were also asked for their perceptions on organizational goals, structure, culture

and espoused values. By raising these sorts of questions and following up on responses, I sought to draw out accounts and perspectives that would enable me to develop rich descriptions of the organizations and various issues of interest. The second section of the interview schedule addressed the issue on leadership. In this regard, I was keen to ensure that the questions were phrased in very open terms and respondents could freely offer their thoughts without me leading them on. Consequently, I asked them to tell me about their experiences with leadership in their organizations, and then more specifically, to offer examples of leadership that they have experienced in their work. These questions were sufficient for purposes and I followed up on the responses accordingly.

All interviews were conducted through means and at locations convenient for participants. My preference in all instances was to conduct face-to-face interviews – only in one case (*Commsinc*) was this not entirely possible, as a few participants were based in the organization's main office in Brighton. These interviews were conducted over the telephone. Interviews for *BuildInc*, *TechInc* and *DigitalInc* were all conducted at the organizations' offices, whilst those for *SecurityInc* were conducted at a café in Lancaster. Thirty-eight interviews were conducted for this study and all were digitally recorded. The interviews generated approximately twenty-one hours of audio material. The average length of the interviews was thirty-two minutes, although some were substantially longer in duration lasting over an hour (particularly interviews with owner-managers) whilst others were somewhat shorter (those with lower-level employees). The initial handful of interviews were self-transcribed. This facilitated some degree of familiarity with emerging themes of analysis. Owing to personal and professional commitments, all other interviews were professionally transcribed. These transcripts were checked for accuracy immediately upon receipt. I was

assured audio files and transcripts in the possession of the professional transcriber would be destroyed within the month following my confirmation of their accuracy.

## 5.6. Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was a somewhat messy affair, given that this commenced as soon as I had the first transcript on hand and due to the large amount of transcribed material that was analysed. This ‘mess’ was exacerbated by the fact that I did not rely on any software for the analysis. I briefly experimented with Atlas when beginning the analysis, but ultimately chose not to use it as I felt it was getting in the way of my thinking about the data. I thus relied on software that I knew – primarily Microsoft Word and Excel – and made these work for my purposes. The process was quite convoluted, but nonetheless, I can identify the steps that I took to analyse the material – steps that were taken in a reasonably sequential manner, unfolding somewhat intuitively, but overall informed by relevant methodological literature. More broadly, the analysis can be broken down into two stages. In what follows, I discuss the steps taken to analyse the data and modes of inference used.

In the first stage and at the very outset, my analysis was guided by sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954). In the methodological literature, these are referred to as “tools for descriptions but not predictions, since their lack of empirical content permits researchers to apply them to a wide array of phenomena” (Kelle, 2007: p.148). During analysis, these concepts thus served as flexible ways of approaching and making sense of the data (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014). The use of sensitizing concepts was particularly valuable at the initial stages of analysis, as I struggled somewhat to make sense of the information presented to me in the transcripts, and



others made available from ongoing interviews. These concepts were particularly applied towards attempting to make sense of the organizational contexts of the cases. As such, some of the concepts were more factual in nature, and referred to aspects of the cases such as employee numbers, business revenue, business activities, clientele, service areas and demographic compositions. Other concepts were less factual and more interpretive, focusing on participants' interpretation of various issues, such as organizational values, vision, culture, structure, goals, reputation and decision-making processes. Thinking about and approaching the data in the foregoing terms helped immeasurably, especially when in the first instance, I was coding virtually everything and anything that looked remotely interesting.

The use of these sensitizing concepts thus allowed me to start reducing the data. My approach here was in terms of initial coding, and involved breaking down the data into smaller parts to facilitate comparisons within and across cases (Saldana, 2016). In doing so, I used three different kinds of codes (see Appendix 7 for my attributions of codes to data). First, descriptive codes were used, mainly to summarize data that was recurrent and more factual in nature. Second, I used In Vivo codes to prioritise participant voices and in some cases, highlight quotes that I found relevant but was not quite able or ready to place into the context of my emerging code list. Third, I used process codes to identify conceptual action, or things that respondents were claiming to have done or were doing in relation to the organization or other organizational members. As I coded, I also relied on the constant comparison technique, comparing “data with data, data with code, and code with code” in order to sort out similarities and differences (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014: p.158). This technique of comparing codes was particularly aided by the development of code list. I listed all the codes I had within an Excel spreadsheet, started comparing the various ideas that were standing out to me in my analysis, refining, eliminating or consolidating codes as necessary.

Following the development of code lists, I developed mind maps to make sense of how codes related together in clusters and the extent to which clusters were similar across cases. To do so, I used a mind-mapping software called FreeMind. Further, in the early stages of analysis, I wrote analytical memos for some of the cases. The initial coding that had been done, code lists and mind maps all served in this respect, and I started to develop narratives that aimed for a balance between offering descriptions and interpretations of the data. I also began to develop an idea of the pertinent themes. Coding, code listing, mind mapping, and (to a lesser extent) memo writing continued in the aforementioned ways until all the interviews had been completed. Focused coding – which involves building categories and themes out of the most recurrent codes (Saldana, 2016; Charmaz, 2014) – occurred somewhere along the lines of the aforementioned processes. It is difficult to pinpoint when exactly as I constantly moved back and forth between processes. Ultimately, the generation of categories, sub-categories and themes permitted the development of data structures (Gioia et al, 2013), all of which are fully reproduced in Appendix 7. The data structures were immeasurably valuable in a number of ways. For instance, these provided me with a visual representation of how I analysed the data to develop categories and themes, and the basis to develop an account of the descriptive findings for this study (Chapter 6). What I have discussed thus far generally accounts for the first stage of data analysis.

The second stage of analysis roughly began when I had the data structures on hand, somewhat bewildered about what to do with these. On hindsight, it does seem that I kicked the data structures around for a few months, contemplating my next steps whilst making a few false starts. At some point, I started exploring theoretical ideas and perspectives I could use to discuss the findings. I considered some ideas in the existing literature on organizational behaviour (eg. Kunda, 1992) and critical management studies (eg. Willmott, 1993), but this did

not get me very far. One theme that stood out to me in the findings was the issue of ownership, and as such, I started to explore theoretical perspectives that could account for this. I began to read into Labour Process Theory (eg. Thompson, 1989), but what particularly stood out to me in this body of work were the ideas of Karl Marx. I thus began reading *Capital: Volume 1* and some of the secondary literature around this. My attempts to make sense of this text were particularly aided by David Harvey's (2010) work and his series of online lectures on this. However, I left *Capital* aside after having read the first ten chapters or so, unsure of how to operationalize the ideas and some bewilderment persisted.

The turning point came at a PhD workshop I attended in November 2017, focusing particularly on Activity Theory. The concepts and theoretical ideas associated with this resonated with me for some reason, but I could not place my finger on it. I resolved to explore this a couple of weeks later, and when I did, then discovered the Marxist influence. It occurred to me that Activity Theory was indeed a potential theoretical framework to draw on, as it had the potential to account for the issue of ownership. December 2017 marked the start of a reasonably deep dive into the work of Yrjo Engestrom, alongside discussions and critiques of it. To make sense of the literature, I went back into the work of Vygotsky and Leontev as well. Informed by all this work, and some prior understanding of Marx's ideas, I began to develop initial drafts of Chapter 4 of this thesis. Developing the theoretical frame described in Section 4.3 was a tricky affair. Developing the three propositions concerning mediation (Section 4.3.1) led to an identification of the three main concepts within the frame. However, developing the narrative around those three concepts was much harder. The most challenging aspect of this was possibly the discussion on social relations (Section 4.3.3), particularly working out Marx's insights on cooperation and the division of labour, alongside multiple secondary interpretations of these. Developing the conceptual narratives and the frame with my descriptive findings in the back

of my mind only compounded this difficulty. For instance, I did think that conceptualizing growth as the object of activity was an intriguing idea, but equally, had to consider the plausibility of different interpretations and how I might substantiate my claims. Similarly, the idea of social relations between capital and labour appeared relevant, but required analysis and justification. What I want to acknowledge here, therefore, is that there generally was some interplay between the generation of the frame and the theoretical analyses, all the while anchored by my understanding of the data in the descriptive analyses.

What I have described thus far is, to my mind, the way in which the process of data analysis unfolded over the course of the research. I think it is helpful to consider the different modes of reasoning or inference that underpinned my analytical strategy as a whole (Reichert, 2007, 2014; Danermark et al, 2002). First, it is fair to say some aspect of the analytical process was inductive, as I did seek to draw out features in the data that were relatively universal across all the cases. However, my interest was not just in seeking out common features, as the comparative case study method foregrounded the need to consider cross-case differences within each theme (for example, with the issue of empowerment, or superordinate-subordinate relations). Particularly, the inductive analysis of the data was not purely data-driven and empiricist – I had, after all, read extensively about the subjects of entrepreneurship, leadership and entrepreneurial leadership whilst reviewing literature for this study, and did approach the data under the influence of associated concepts, theories and perspectives (not including Activity Theory during the first stage of analysis). For example, critical approaches to leadership foregrounding the issue of power relations were perhaps especially at the back of my mind, and in some instances, my coding was informed by ideas from Weber (1922/1978) and Geertz (1973).

Given this latter point, it is fair to say that some aspect of the analytical process was abductive as well. My analytical approach did involve re-interpreting the data within different (implicit) frames, even as I was analysing the data inductively. Abduction was especially relevant over the second stage of analysis as I sought to re-contextualize the descriptive findings within a different theoretical frame in order to generate fresh insights about issue(s) being studied. As per my discussion on epistemology (Section 5.2.4), such re-contextualization also involved considering multiple interpretations of the descriptive findings in relation to the concepts of the object, social relations and tools. Further, re-contextualization involved considering which of these interpretations offered the most tenable solutions for resolving some understanding of entrepreneurial leadership as an activity. However, even thinking abductively about the data still involved some degree of induction, as I had to ‘universalize’ my interpretations across the cases to develop the theoretical analyses. To summarize and be concise, I think it is reasonable to say that the analytical strategy involved both induction and abduction, and particularly, a relatively constant interplay between both modes of inference. Overall, the data analysis procedures described in this section allowed the development of a robust set of descriptive findings, and further, the re-contextualization of these to develop the theoretical findings and contributions of this study.

## 5.7. Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, for this chapter, I have discussed the methodological framework underpinning the research, aiming to do so as transparently as possible. As I have discussed, the study adopts a qualitative approach focusing on understanding how participants attribute meaning to the various facets of their organizational lives. Further, I have discussed the critical realist position adopted in the research, outlined my ontological and epistemological assumptions, and justified the relevance of critical realism for this study. I also discussed my use of and justification for the comparative case study research method and semi-structured interviewing technique, along with the issues of sampling, ethics and access. The last section of this chapter offered a discussion of how data was analysed, focusing on processes, modes of inference and the overall approach. The following chapter turns to the descriptive analyses generated through the first stage of data analysis.

## **6. Descriptive Findings**

This chapter offers a discussion of the descriptive findings for this study. It is organized into six parts. In the initial section, I provide an overview of the organizations or cases (see Table 5 for a summary), discussing these in terms of employee numbers and turnover, ownership structures, main business activities, clientele and service areas. This is followed by a discussion of five main themes. First, I discuss the theme of hierarchy, elaborating on how it is present and enacted in all cases. Second, I discuss the theme of empowerment, and how in all except one case, the data tends to suggest that staff experience autonomy in their work, free from constraint, but within boundaries prescribed by MDs of the respective organizations. Third, I discuss my interpretations of the culture of each organization, and fourth, how the data suggests that staff respondents are deeply committed to their work. Finally, I discuss the theme of ownership, which is principally suggested from the data by two forms of social relations – Superordinate-subordinate relations, and relations of production. This latter form of relations implies a loose division of labour, which is particularly accentuated in one case.

## 6.1. Case Profiles

Org. Pseudonym	Year Founded	Business Activity	Total Headcount	Turnover	SME Category	No. of Respondents
CommsInc	2011	Public relations & Communications	8	£500,000	Micro-business	5 (1 Managing Director; 4 Employees)
DigitalInc	2011	Digital marketing	8	£360,000	Micro-business	6 (1 Managing Director; 5 Employees)
TechInc	2003	Reverse IT asset management	85	£4.8 million	Small Enterprise	15 (1 Managing Director; 7 Directors; 7 Employees)
SecurityInc	2003	Security provision	150	£3.6 million	Small Enterprise	4 (1 Managing Director; 3 Employees)
BuildInc	1999	Building & refurbishment	125	£10.5 million	Medium Enterprise	6 (1 Managing Director; 3 Employees; 2 External Consultants)

Table 5: Summary of Cases

I will first provide an overview of the cases in order to set the scene for the rest of this chapter. To start with, *CommsInc* is a micro-business, with a total reported staff headcount of eight and turnover of £500,000 for the 2015/2016 financial year. The Managing Director (MD), following an extensive career as a journalist, founded the organization with a partner and shared ownership of it. The partner played an advisory role in the first year of incorporation, but as the MD indicated during our interview, “*gradually over time the need for that lessened*”. In late 2014, the MD bought out her partner’s shares in return for full ownership of the business. *CommsInc* engages with a broad mix of clientele ranging in scale from a variety of industries and in locations such as the United Kingdom, Middle East, Australia, Canada and the United States. Its main business activity is in public relations and communications. About 80% of this



involves media relations, or “*getting clients into the press in the most positive way possible*” (CI\_MD). Alongside this, the organization provides services in content marketing and crisis communications. *CommsInc* had two offices at the time of the interviews. The MD, along with two other employee respondents (CI\_SAMB and CI\_OM), worked out of the head office in Brighton. The remaining two employee respondents (CI\_SAML and CI\_AE), were based in Lancaster, working at a hot-desking suite within a local business park. However, this arrangement changed in January 2017 - the Lancaster office closed down and the two staff based there were made redundant.

*DigitalInc* is also a micro-business, with a total reported staff headcount of eight and turnover of £360,000 for the 2015/2016 financial year. During the interviews, the MD recounted, at length, his experiences leading up to the founding of the organization, starting from his early teenage years. He could self-identify “*traits of being an entrepreneur*”, as he “*found being a teenager rather difficult*” and was somewhat “*bored and distracted at school*”. He worked at various jobs, some overseas, before starting a business. To do so, he applied to go to university, even though he did not want to, knowing he would be given the “*maximum grants, the maximum bursary and the maximum loans*”. Having completed just a year of university, he incorporated *DigitalInc* in 2011 with full ownership of the company using those funds. The organization, described by the MD as a “*data-driven digital marketing company*”, provides services in search engine optimization, conversion rate optimization, pay-per-click management and email marketing. Clients are predominantly the kinds of businesses that have revenues in excess of £1 million, and are located within a two-hour traveling distance from *DigitalInc*'s office in Lancaster. According to the MD, the first of these parameters allows *DigitalInc* to work with businesses with some scale and experience in their respective industries. The second facilitates face-to-face meetings with clients, which are regarded as

“*somewhat compulsory*” since “*people buy from people*” (DI\_MD). At their office in Lancaster, employees sit together in a small but open-styled room, each at their own desk, whilst the MD occupies the adjacent office. Access to either office is through a common corridor. According to the MD, this arrangement is to create space and the “*thinking time*” for himself. “*There has to be that divide.*” (DI\_MD).

*TechInc* is a small enterprise, with a total reported staff headcount of 85 and turnover of £4.8 million for the 2015/2016 financial year. The MD also recounted his work experiences prior to founding the organization at some length. Notably, however, he did not “*class [himself] as an entrepreneur*” having run only one business. An entrepreneur, to his mind, was “*somebody who, you know, spins a lot of plates at the same time.*” *TechInc* was founded under a different name by the MD and a business partner in 2003. In late 2016, it underwent some changes following the partner’s exit from the business. One change relates to the ownership structure – the MD, with sole ownership of the company, decided to distribute 10% of shares to the seven functional directors, leaving himself with 90%. During the interviews, the functional directors were not inclined to share details on their actual shareholdings. The other change, or set of changes, arose through a rebranding exercise. This exercise initiated a number of changes within the business, including a new name, corporate logo and website, branded office stationery and attire for staff such as polo shirts, and a clearer positioning statement regarding its core business activities. Its core business activity can be described as Information Technology (IT) asset management. *TechInc* buys in unwanted IT products that are near the end of their life cycles, audits and then disposes of these, “*whatever the best economic ways are*” (TI\_MD). In some instances, the products are broken down into their components to be disposed in environmentally sound ways. Products, however, may also be resold on the market, in which instances a percentage of profits are returned to clients. The organization has a large

clientele base – to be specific, 1461, according to the MD. All clients are in the United Kingdom, predominantly in London, but also in cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Since 2011, *TechInc* has occupied a large warehouse in Morecambe. The management team and their support staff occupy the offices in the mezzanine floor of the building, whilst those responsible for warehousing and distribution occupy the ‘shop floor’ on the lower level.

*SecurityInc* is a small enterprise, with a reported turnover of about £3.6 million for the financial year 2014/2015. The organization employs a fairly substantial number of people, about 150, many of whom are casual and part-time workers due to the nature of its business. The MD, who self-identified as an entrepreneur during the interview, co-founded the organization with two other partners, prior to starting his university studies in 2002. Both these partners left for different reasons soon after, whilst the Business Director was brought into the fold. At the time of interviews, there were two main shareholders – The MD with a majority shareholding of 62.5%, and the Business Director holding the remaining interest. *SecurityInc* provides security services in “three main sectors” (SI\_MD). The first of these is venue security, and the organization supplies door supervisors to venues such as pubs and nightclubs. Second, the organization supplies security guards for large-scale events, such as Manchester Pride, Festival Number 6, Kendal Calling and Glastonbury. Third and last, the organization supplies security guards and mobile patrols for public sector organizations and industrial, logistics and business parks. Venue security, event security and security guarding contribute roughly equally to the bulk of the organization’s income. Annually, the organization provides its services to about 200 different customers, although the MD also noted that “80-20 rule” applies, given that 20% of their customers contribute towards 80% of their turnover. The organization mainly operates in the Northwest of the United Kingdom, in areas such as Barrow-in-Furness, Kendal,

Ulverston, Grange-Over-Sands, Lancaster and Manchester. Its main office is in Lancaster, where the Senior Management Team (SMT) base themselves.

Finally, *BuildInc* is a medium enterprise, with a total reported staff headcount of 125 and turnover of £10.5 million for the 2015/2016 financial year. Its current Chairman initially founded the organization in the 1970s under a different name. He operated as a sole trader and sub-contractor providing painting services in the construction industry. Over the years, despite encountering struggles with partners and generating income, the organization grew and was eventually incorporated under its current name in 1999. Today, *BuildInc* is a family-owned business, with ownership divided between the Chairman, his wife and their son. The Chairman is currently semi-retired, whilst his wife acts as an inactive partner. Their son, the organization's Commercial Director, joined the business in the mid-noughties with aspirations to “*get into more main contracting to be in control of his own destiny*” (BI\_MD). The principal business activity of *BuildInc* is in the social housing sector. To this end, it provides maintenance and refurbishment services, and on occasion, engages in new build contracts. Services are predominantly offered in the Northwest of England, with the organization working mainly with “*7 or 8 key customers, and... about 25 on the periphery*” (BI\_MD). *BuildInc*'s management team and office are located in Wigan.

Some broader comments about these cases are perhaps due, prior to the report of findings. Particularly, the five organizations have all experienced considerable success and developed positive reputations in their respective industries. Most respondents indicated this, and the various awards that the organizations and directors have received confirm this success. *SecurityInc* and *DigitalInc*, for example, have received honors at the Red Rose Business Awards over the years, whilst the former has received recognition at the Security Excellence

Awards. Its local Chamber of Commerce has in recent years recognized *BuildInc* as ‘SME of the Year’, whilst *CommsInc* has received an award in recognition for its work in the Professional Services sector. I could not obtain information about awards and the like for *TechInc*, but a news article I chanced upon sometime after interviews were completed is indicative of its success. It transpired that *TechInc* was bought out in a multi-million pound deal by a larger organization headquartered in Asia. It appears all employees retained their jobs following this acquisition, and the MD began serving in a new role as Managing Director of European operations.

## 6.2. Hierarchy

In all cases, findings suggest the presence and enactment of hierarchies. The presence of hierarchies is immediately evident in *CommsInc*, *BuildInc* and *TechInc* from documentary materials that outline the respective organizational structures, and suggested in the interview data obtained from respondents at *SecurityInc* and *DigitalInc*. Further, these hierarchies are primarily enacted in two ways across all the cases – Firstly, in how the organizations’ growth orientations are prescribed by the respective MDs, and secondly, in how these individuals claim the responsibility for developing organizational culture. Aside from these, the data suggests how hierarchies have been enacted through an organizational rebranding exercise at *TechInc*, a restructuring exercise at *DigitalInc*, and decision-making processes at *CommsInc* and *SecurityInc*.

To start with, the presence of hierarchies is immediately evident in *CommsInc*, *BuildInc* and *TechInc* from documentary materials outlining the respective organizational structures (See

Appendix 8). At *CommsInc*, there are three hierarchical layers, with the MD at the top. The Office Manager and Senior Account Managers all report in to the MD, with the Account Executive reporting in to one of the latter managers. At *BuildInc*, employee respondents report in to the Managing Director, who shares control of the organization with the Commercial Director. A similar structuring arrangement is apparent in the case of *TechInc*, as the seven functional directors report to the MD. Each functional director has further reports, with some responsible for larger teams of employees (eg. the Commercial and Warehouse Directors). At *SecurityInc* and *DigitalInc*, the presence of hierarchies is suggested in the interview data. At *SecurityInc*, an organizational hierarchy is suggested from respondents' job titles (ie. Managing Director, Senior Managers) and reporting lines between them. All Senior Managers report in to the MD, including the Business Director who declined interview participation. Of the Senior Managers, two have two further direct reports each. At *DigitalInc*, the data suggests the presence of at least three hierarchical layers, with the MD at the top and the operations manager reporting in to him. Two account managers report in to the latter, and “*delegate [work] out to implementers or to junior developers*” (DI\_MD).

The enactment of these hierarchies is primarily suggested in two ways – First, in how the organization's growth orientations are prescribed by the respective MDs. Here, it is worth first emphasizing that all the cases are or have been oriented towards growth, and for the most part, have developed explicit targets. In the contexts of *DigitalInc* and *SecurityInc*, for example, revenue targets have been established. At *TechInc*, the interviews revealed that the EBITDA measurement (‘Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortization’) is favoured, over and above a revenue target which has also been devised. Particularly, the former metric is regarded as more representative when accounting for the organization's performance and functions as a “*benchmark figure that... lots and lots of people talk about and are familiar*

with” (TI\_MD). At *CommsInc*, growth targets had not been established at the time of interviews. The MD was working with a business coach on a “*growth accelerator program*” to “*set up some goals for the next couple of years where [the organization] will reach a million turnover*” (CI\_MD). At *BuildInc*, interviews revealed that the organization had already experienced “*a period of quite substantial growth*” (BI\_MD). This had resulted in “*an increase in staff, an increase in supply chain*” (BI\_BDL) and operational strain more broadly, with staff “*under a massive amount of pressure*” (BI\_CL). Consequently, business maintenance, rather than further growth, was the main objective of the organization, as suggested in the following quote;

*“The key for us is to just maintain as much as we can and try and keep around the 15-20 million, understand what our overhead is and what we need to run the business, and then just make sure that we continuously deliver what we say we would” (BI\_MD)*

In all cases, organizational growth is prescribed from the top-down, given that the desire to grow stems from the respective MDs in most cases. To elaborate, the interviews with MDs revealed how they attribute the growth orientation of their respective organizations to themselves. For example, this was suggested by the MD of *TechInc* when indicating his ultimate responsibility was for organizational performance, or to “*make this business... the best it can be on a daily, weekly, monthly basis*”. At *DigitalInc*, the “*phenomenal growth*” experienced by the organization in the past was attributed by the MD to himself, as he “*repositioned [himself] to work on the business, not in it*” and “*strategically look at what everybody’s doing*”. Such self-attributions were similarly apparent in the contexts of *CommsInc* and *SecurityInc*, as indicated in the data structures. Additionally, interviews with

some employee respondents at *CommsInc*, *SecurityInc* and *TechInc* confirm how the desire to grow the organization stems from the respective MDs. The exception, however, is perhaps the case of *BuildInc*, wherein the growth orientation may be attributed to individuals at the apex of its hierarchy. In this context, the MD tended to suggest that he was acting on a mandate to grow the organization, issued by the Chairman and his son, the Commercial Director;

*"[Chairman] and [Commercial Director] who own the business came to me and said, "we want to grow our business, this is what we want to do, can you do it for us?" and we had a bit of a discussion, and that's why I'm here. I'm here three and a half years later, we've gone from 40 employees to about 130, turnover's gone from 3 million to 15 million. So going in the right direction, but it's all about the people as far as I'm concerned, and you know, knowledge and experience, so that's what we're here to do..." (BI\_MD)*

In one case, the pervasive focus on growth and performance throughout the organization is clear. At *TechInc*, several employees discussed how the focus on 'numbers' and a performance orientation occupy their work lives, perhaps to a disturbingly calculative extent in some instances;

*"We're very driven by numbers... like in my room you can't go home on 99 phone calls, right, you're just not allowed. You have to do a hundred... It can [also] be for the smaller things. We might have a week where we have an incentive of whoever books the most, I don't know, deals in Scotland or it can be anything. But it's all for the greater good of the number really."*  
*(TI\_ComD)*



*“We’re massively focused on numbers. Massively focused on the EBITDA figure and getting that up. I mean, I suppose that’s it. The bottom line is always the numbers, isn’t it? Without the numbers, we wouldn’t be here...”*  
(TI\_OD)

*“My target is £10,000. So, I need to bring £10,000 of profit to [TechInc]... To get my commission on top of my wage. Um, in order for me to make £10,000 worth of profit, I would probably need to bring in, in a combination of invoices and IT equipment mobile phones, probably need to bring in about £20,000 because from the overall figure you’ve got to pay the couriers. You’ve got to pay the processing department, you know, for the processing of all the equipment. So, any costs, you cover your own wage out of there as well. So, the only stressful bit is worrying whether you’re going to bring in enough to hit your target, because you wanna hit your target.”* (TI\_AM)

Across the cases, the enactment of hierarchies is secondarily suggested by the development of organizational culture. The central role that Managing Directors believe they assume in developing culture was suggested during interviews, in trying to “*create an environment where we are hard-working but we also have lots of fun*” (CI\_MD) or “*starting this company and for creating these futures for the team*” (DI\_MD). This was also suggested by other MDs in the following interview extracts;

*“I get to write my own future, you know, and dictate how things are going to run, you know and I see the company as setting up a movement that I’m shaping everyday... Try and make it quite a fun place, but a fun place with*

*discipline, you know it comes back to that integrity for instance, we do have to be professional, we have to look parts, we have to present the organization well" (SI\_MD)*

*"I think I've built a great culture here. At which I'm slightly reserved in saying because it sounds quite arrogant to say that, but it's what I believe. I believe that I've built a company where people feel comfortable, secure. Um, you know, we don't have any zero-hour contracts here... Everybody here is either full or part-time employed...Everybody here is employed by this business, employed by me. And, um, everybody's on a set wage, monthly wage as in, you know, there's no variance in that. Apart from the fact that we then offer advances on your basic. We offer bonus schemes. We offer incentives. We offer, we do some mad stuff, you know, where we buy breakfast for everyone on the last day of the month and you know, small things like that. But things that make people understand that they actually are a lot more than an employee and a number. Um, you know, I think I could go on and on saying that, you know, I think we've, I'm not saying we've got it 100% right, I'm sure we could improve, but I think we've got, we've got it nearly right. Um, and I think that is proved if you look at the people that work here. The vast majority of them have worked here a long time." (TI\_MD)*

*"What I've tried to do here is, we try to speak to people as we'd want to be spoken to. We're all here to do a job at the end of the day, but we want to empower people to be passionate about what they do, not just, "I'm a number and if I didn't turn in tomorrow, not that it will make any difference", and*

*it's just a different way of thinking about it and I think it gives everybody that little bit of a lift." (BI\_MD)*

Aside from growth orientations and the development of organizational culture, the findings highlight other ways in which hierarchies are enacted. For example, at *TechInc*, the MD and staff discussed the rebranding initiative that had taken place in the organization. For the MD, this initiative was a “*demonstration of leadership*” for the organization to “*push on and go to the next level*”. As such, he made initial decisions on changes to the organization’s corporate name, logo and colour scheme, prior to involving staff in his plans. Some employee respondents indicated how they were initially concerned about the rebranding initiative, primarily fearing that external stakeholders such as clients and customers would think “*you’ve gone out of business*” (TI\_ComD) or “*[the organization’s] gone bust and the company’s no longer and there’s some agenda behind your name change*” (TI\_AM). However, employees claimed such fears were put to rest following the rebrand. Some acknowledged how the rebrand demonstrated the MD’s ability in making strategic decisions (TI\_CompD). Alternatively, others regarded it as necessary for the MD to separate himself from the business partnership arrangement he was in previously, and perhaps carve out his own identity;

*“[TI\_MD] and his business partner split up and [TI\_MD] needed his own identity. You know, it’s okay carrying on a business enterprise that you and your partner created, your other director. But once one director’s gone, you need to, right, this is mine. This is my baby, I need to own it. And he did. And I think it was the best thing to do. I think it was definitely the best thing to do.” (TI\_BS)*

At *DigitalInc*, the enactment of its hierarchy was additionally suggested in a restructuring initiative that the MD discussed during our interview. In this instance, the MD discussed how the organization was in the process of recruiting staff to expand its teams. Claims of his influence and authority in determining how this restructuring would play out tended to be suggested in the following quote;

*“We’re restructuring at the moment to create teams. So that’s why we’re recruiting at the moment to create two teams – a team A and a team 1. Not a team A and a team B. Because that would create - or not a 1 and a 2 - because that would create a distinct subdivision of those two. We’re creating an A and a 1, so that they’re equal. They want us to have names but I thought they can still have names if they want to, I don’t mind. And I think if they created the identity themselves, I like the idea of that. But the team leaders of those teams would then report into me.” (DI\_MD)*

At *CommsInc* and *SecurityInc*, decision-making processes provide more suggestions of how organizational hierarchies are enacted. At *CommsInc*, for example, some respondents attributed decision-making authority to the MD. To this end, the Senior Account Manager based in Lancaster related an example of her promotion from Account Manager during the course of her employment, when she was just *“told it was going to happen and that’s how we kind of ran with it”*. This was similarly the case for her colleague in Lancaster, who indicated that decision-making authority rests with the MD, *“because it’s her company, it takes her direction”*. Despite this, however, the data tends to suggest how the MD and her staff engage in mutual discussion and consultative dialogue over business-related issues such as staff recruitment or business development.

At *SecurityInc*, all respondents attributed decision-making authority to the MD. One Senior Manager described these processes as a “*Captain Picard model*“, wherein the MD asks for suggestions and makes decisions, whilst another noted that these processes “*will eventually become almost like a committee rather than dictatorship*“. Further, the data suggests that these decision-making processes are conflict-laden, with the MD describing them as “*scientific, democratic, blazing row debates*“. He related an incident of this where an argument broke out at a management meeting between him and the Business Director over the feasibility of purchasing electric vehicles for the company. The data suggests this was a heated exchange, wherein the MD demanded a financial analysis of the options in terms of purchase costs, depreciation and resale values. According to a Senior Manager, the MD eventually relented and made a decision, “*held his hand up and said ‘Actually, yeah, you’re right, let’s just stick to what we use currently and then we’ll do something different’.*”

### 6.3. Empowerment

In all cases, findings indicate that staff respondents experience a strong degree of empowerment in their work, as they are able to work relatively autonomously, free from constraint, but within boundaries prescribed by the MDs. In the contexts of *TechInc* and *BuildInc*, these boundaries are represented by the individual’s role and responsibilities, and employees have the autonomy to make decisions within this remit. The case of *BuildInc* additionally draws attention to how this remit is developed jointly between the MD and a member of staff, which in itself can perhaps be regarded as an example of empowerment. The interview data from *CommsInc* similarly suggests how employees work autonomously and within the boundaries of their organizational roles. In *DigitalInc*, employee empowerment is

prescribed within the boundaries of innovative behaviour. Outside of these boundaries, the data tends to suggest employees experience limited autonomy. *SecurityInc* is exceptional in regards to the theme of empowerment, as the data tends to suggest how staff respondents are subjected to micro-management and experience very little empowerment in their work.

To elaborate on the above, the findings suggest how staff at *TechInc* are empowered by the MD, who wants “*everybody to be, feel that whatever it is that their role is, that they should own it and they should make as many decisions as they can on their own.*” From the data, it appears that boundary in this instance is the individual’s ‘remit’, or prescribed role and responsibilities within the organization;

*“I was only discussing this morning a member of staff on there who never ever, ever does anything but gets on with it themselves, yeah. And they understand what their boundaries are. They understand what they can and can’t do. We obviously have lots of internal protocols that mean that you can’t have somebody... overstep the mark or make decisions that are not in their remit.” (TI\_MD)*

All functional directors indeed suggested a sense of empowerment in their respective roles, particularly with respect to making decisions in their own areas of responsibility. Staff are encouraged “*to make the right decision every time, but if you make the wrong decision, you’re not gonna get lynched for it, it’ll just be brought up amongst everyone else and everyone else will try and help you sort it out.*” (TI\_CompD). Others noted there was freedom to “*make decisions on different things all the time*”, although acknowledging advice would be sought where necessary (TI\_OD). Empowerment, in terms of decision-making, further appears to filter

downwards through the organization. For example, the Commercial Director who leads a team of eighteen individuals noted how she “*was all for... ownership, empowerment, responsibility*” as it “*grows you in your career*”. Indeed, one of her reports equally recognized how she was free to make decisions on the job, about “*whether something’s gonna be worth doing or not worth doing*” (TI\_AM). The autonomy to make decisions within the individual’s scope of work, and empowerment more broadly, was further suggested by another employee;

*"TI\_WTM: Um, there’s been a few jobs that have come in which are quite delicate on what we need to do with each individual item. Whether it’s gonna be scrap. If it’s gonna be kept to be wiped or destroyed. Whatever instructions you’re given, I’ve been told it’s my decision to make. Don’t listen to anybody else, it’s your decision.*

*Interviewer: Told by whom?*

*TI\_WTM: By [TI\_MD] Um, because I’m, I’ve got a wealth of ideas on what to do and experience because I’ve been in there a long time, I know what unit is what. Straight away by looking at something, I know where it’s gonna go. So, it means for me to split it before it comes into my department, which will make the job easier, I have to make that decision on what needs to be scrapped and what needs to be kept and come into the room for processing. Then I will deal with the scrap..."*

In the context of *BuildInc*, respondents similarly suggested how empowerment is deeply valued within the organization. Particularly, the MD noted how “*it’s very important that everybody is empowered to deliver what we want them to*”, rationalizing this on the need for the organization “*to be known for being a leadership-based business*”. As he indicated, such an organization

was to be viewed favourably in contrast to a “*management organization*” that is inflexible and void of any “*intention to ever develop any of their staff*”. Here as well, the data suggests how staff are empowered to make decisions within their respective roles and responsibilities. This was suggested by the Business Development Leader, who discussed the autonomy she has to formulate her own work plan bi-annually prior to discussing it with the MD. Additionally, she is able to propose projects to the MD and Commercial Director for work outside of her remit to address the immediate, but unmet, needs of the organization. The empowerment of staff with regards to decision-making was further suggested in the following quote from the MD, as he discussed how he encourages independent thinking amongst staff;

*"Sometimes they'll come to me and they'll say, I'm not sure he's the right man to do this job... Rather than just coming to me with a concern and saying 'I'm not quite', well what is that based on, what is the theory behind it, why have you got that thought, what can we do to sort of, does he need additional training, does he need... it's trying to talk through that information, so when they go away, rather than me solving the problem for them, they've solved it themselves but in a different route really... It's trying to get them thinking in a vein where they're thinking for themselves, and they come with a solution and say, 'I've got this problem, I'm too labour short, but I've done this, done that, are you happy?'" (BI\_MD)*

However, an especially interesting aspect of the data from this case is the suggestion of how the boundary itself, or the individual remit, is developed. This may be identified in the interviews with the MD and the Customer Leader, both of whom discussed how the scope of



the latter's role was developed jointly, which in itself can perhaps be seen as a means of empowerment;

*"When [BI\_CL] first came in... it was a case of saying, 'I've got a rough idea of what I want you to do, and I can provide you with a rough job spec, but over the next 12 months, I want you to try and define what that's going to be. This is what I want to deliver, I'm not quite sure. Because I brought you in, you are more specialized than I am in that area, so you tell me what we need, and if you need support, then you need to come to me and say, I want to do this... it is your skillset in running that customer department that I'm after, that's what I brought you here for..." (BI\_MD)*

*"When I very first met with [Commercial Director] and [BI\_MD], they were looking for a liaison officer... and they asked me, "What do you do, what have you been doing? Tell us about yourself". And I went through the range of things that I'd been doing from first leaving school to that point. And they sat and said to me, "You're more than a liaison officer, we need to do some thinking about how we make this work within our organisation". They were looking for somebody that was just going to be based on site doing a liaison officer's job, but I was offering them a bigger package. So, at the very start, when they came to me and they said, "Right, we've got the offer for you, but it's quite vague what your role will be and we'll build it together based on what you want to be doing and what you don't want to be doing. What we need, what we don't need. So, it will stay fluid for a period of however long is needed until we define just what your role is" (BI\_CL)*

At *CommsInc*, the MD recognized the value of empowerment, observing, “*people respond well to being trusted and empowered to get on with stuff*”. In this case, however, the interview data appeared somewhat incomplete as analysis did not yield a full interpretation of what boundaries might be prescribed in empowering staff. The interview with the MD does suggest that professional competence and confidence are attributes minimally required on the part of employees before full autonomy can be extended to them. Otherwise, and similar to the cases of *TechInc* and *BuildInc*, the organizational role may perhaps be interpreted as the boundary, as employees are able to independently make decisions within the remit of this. This tended to be suggested by the Senior Account Manager based in Lancaster who indicated experiencing “*a lot of autonomy*” in her role, which partly involved business development. However, this business development role was assumed at the behest of the MD, who “*wanted [her] to take on more clients... and wanted [her] to start looking at growing the business in the North*”.

At *DigitalInc*, the boundary within which staff are able to act autonomously relates to the issue of innovation, “*one of the big ethos*” (DI\_AM2) for the organization. The MD foregrounded the importance of this, indicating “*we want to always be thinking of new ways of thinking, and asking why, you know, why are we doing things this way?... Let’s change that.*” Innovation is fostered in the organization “*both by prodding people to have ideas about things and just naturally trying to recruit people who are interested in being better*”, or “*putting an emphasis on the fact that we want people to be able to ask ‘why’*” (DI\_OM). Employees discussed how they are empowered to be innovative as they are encouraged to “*come up with our own ideas... [and] ways of implementing them*”, or encouraged “*to question [DI\_MD]’s ideas on the hope that the net idea that comes out at the end of that will be stronger for it*” (DI\_CW). For one of the Account Managers at *DigitalInc*, the experience of being empowered to innovate was suggested in the MD’s willingness to entertain novel ideas;

*“He’s always willing to take on stuff. If we come up with some crazy batshit idea and just kind of go, “Hey, [DI\_MD], let’s do this!” He normally doesn’t just shoot it down, he’ll normally think about it and give us some way of achieving it.” (DI\_AM1)*

Outside of this organizational imperative to innovate, however, findings suggest some limitations to autonomy. Indeed, some employees noted how the MD tends to “*get involved in accounts particularly, if there’s a certain client... having a particularly big problem or they’re in a particularly bad mood*” (DI\_AM1). For others, autonomy “*varies depending on the situation*” and is “*informed by whatever [DI\_MD]’s working on at the moment and whatever the team is working on*” (DI\_OM), or “*within specific areas according to the client and according to the current job*” (DI\_OM). Such limitations to autonomy are particularly reinforced in the following extract from the interview with the MD, who suggested some degree of micro-management in over-seeing how employees perform their work;

*“They send me their lists for the week. They tell me what they’re doing. That’s it. That’s great. I check it and I go, “Well, you’re missing this, you’ve not got enough client communication in here. Or, you need to send your reports before this date because that’s what the client would like, and if I was the client”. Generally it’s me teaching them to perceive receiving the service” (DI\_MD)*

Finally, *SecurityInc* represents the exceptional case with regards to empowerment. A common issue raised by Senior Managers during the interviews was the issue of micro-management. One Senior Manager raised this as he discussed the inconsistency of the MD’s behaviour in

some detail. According to him, the MD would micro-manage “*if he’s dealing with something he considers himself to be smarter than you on*”, or leave the manager to his own devices if “*he recognizes that you know more about [the issue] than he does*” (SI\_SMOM). Another Senior Manager observed how “*it’s made out like... I’m trusted to sort of go out and make decisions*”, but that the MD “*likes a degree of control and still likes to micro-manage*” (SI\_SMM). For the third Senior Manager, it appeared micro-management was a thing of the past, as the MD “*would come in with his size nines... and sort it*” (SI\_SMM). In a follow-up to this comment, however, it does appear that micro-management persists, but the MD is able to frame his intervention in diplomatic terms;

*“in the past [SI\_MD] would come in with his size nines, as we’d say, and sort it, and now he isn’t because he’s come in and said, ‘Actually, you guys have done a real good job, there’s not much we can do about this, but I’m going to take the burden off you and sit with the director or the owner of that business and we’ll formulate a plan and we’ll run it through you’.”*  
(SI\_SMOM)

Hence, the findings suggest that staff respondents experience limited empowerment or autonomy, and instead are micro-managed by the MD. An email exchange between the MD and myself is perhaps somewhat telling in this regard. When responding to the Key Findings Report which I sent through to him, the MD indicated the report was “*really inciteful [sic], especially empowering others to lead – something I am working on!*”

#### 6.4. Culture/Social Structure

From my analysis, findings suggest how an organizational culture of teamwork is central in the cases of *CommsInc*, *DigitalInc* and *BuildInc*. The organizational culture in the context of *TechInc* may be described as one that is professional but family-oriented, whilst that of *SecurityInc* may be interpreted as being somewhat militarized or even patriarchal. Further, the findings suggest that organizational members experience community relationships amongst each other, in that the “orientation of social action... is based on the subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together” (Weber, 1922/1978: p.40). These community relationships provide a sense of the social structure in each case, or “the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations”, such that culture and community relationships are viewed here as “different abstractions of the same phenomena” (Geertz, 1973: p.145). I elaborate on these arguments in this section.

At *CommsInc*, a culture of teamwork is particularly suggested by the emphasis on building camaraderie, as organizational members travelled between the Lancaster and Brighton offices on a quarterly basis to engage in ‘off-work’ activities such as barista training or wine tasting. Such activities have been received positively by all staff, with one respondent describing them as “*almost sort of detoxing*“ (CI\_AE). However, the Office Manager who organizes these team days offered more insight into their purposes. Apart from just “*sharing good practice*“, team days appear to facilitate the management of social and physical distances. The latter would be necessary, given the geographical business separation between organizational members in Brighton and Lancaster (at the time of interviews). Further, team days are a means for transacting on individual well-being, as the Office Manager noted “*people feel like they’re wellbeing is invested in therefore they want to invest into the business as well*“. Also, the team

days seem to be about exposing the individual and humanizing the individual, in order to “see people’s strengths... and their weaknesses and where they need support” and “make us a whole human being rather than a computer“ (CI\_OM).

A culture of teamwork is also of central importance at *DigitalInc*. Staff respondents suggested this, indicating “everyone who can help will leap in to help” (DI\_AM1) when mistakes are made at work, or that “everybody’s there to hear when someone needs to vent” (DI\_CW). According to the MD of the organization, however, two principles underpin this culture of teamwork – egalitarianism, on the one hand, and the emphasis on ‘first amongst equals’ on the other;

*"Team - we are a team. We're on a level playing field, just like a football team or a rugby team, or a sports team. You know, there is a captain. There is somebody in charge, but everybody has to play the game. And play equally. Sometimes you have to pass to somebody else. And sometimes you have to be the playmaker" (DI\_MD)*

A culture of teamwork is also relevant at *BuildInc*, primarily as respondents drew attention to the ways in which job responsibilities are shared amongst them. The MD, for example, discussed how he shares responsibilities with the Commercial Director as “job descriptions are a little fluid [and] we cross over at some stages”. This is further reinforced by the MD’s observations that “one of the pluses of the business is the ability of people to move around very, very quickly to jump in and help each other as a team”. Other respondents equally drew attention to how job responsibilities are shared between functions, and “some blurring of the lines”;

*"There's some blurred lines between customer care and operational. Each contract has a site manager, or a couple of site managers, and a liaison officer, or a couple of liaison officers. So, the site manager is reporting to the contracts managers; the liaison officers report into me. But on site, what goes on, on site, is that the liaison officer and site manager work really closely together and share a lot of their duties, they'll both do a little bit for each other. And you find the site team will come to either me or the contracts manager, depending on who's there. If I turn up on site and there's an operational issue, they'll ask me and I'll either be able to answer or defer to one of the contracts managers. So, there's some crossover, some blurring of the lines. Not a true divide, this is your box and you're in it." (BI\_CL)*

Additionally, a sense of collegiality underpins this culture of teamwork, as staff are *"very well-thought of, they're not just a number, they have a position within the organization, and they're all looking, and they have our best interests at heart"* (BI\_MD). Collegiality was suggested by the Customer Leader, for example, who indicated she was never made to feel *"like the new girl"* when joining the organization. She elaborated on how she was *"never made to feel excluded from that little circle... [or] feel like an outsider"*, despite some *"very close knit relationships"* already existing amongst staff.

Findings from *TechInc* suggest a remarkable consistency with respondents generally describing the organizational culture as one that is professional, but family oriented. This professionalism is suggested in how the organization is a *"corporate by way of there are rules, you know, surrounding, just surrounding things - lateness, holidays, sickness, those type of things... they apply to everybody right the way through the business."* (TI\_OD). Assertions that the

organization is a “*family business*” (TI\_MD; TI\_ComD), has a “*family based feeling*” (TI\_SaD) or “*family atmosphere*” (TI\_WD) recurred during interviews, and these are perhaps made possible by the kinds of relationships staff have with one another. Some staff are married to each other, and in parts of the organization, “*there’s brothers, there’s father and sons. There’s all manner of, as I say, we’ve got three generations of some people*” (TI\_CompD). The family orientation is perhaps also supported by employees’ length of service. Most respondents have been with the organization for at least seven years and staff are frequently rewarded for their length of service. This professional, family oriented culture, alternatively referred to by one respondent as a “*strange mix of corporate and small business*” (TI\_OD), is further described by the MD;

*"I think it's, um, I think it's fair. I think it knows it's fair. I think it's fun. I think we try and make it fun... this is a commercial business and it's here to make profit and that's a serious business, but it doesn't have to be to the point where nobody's walking round and smiling and enjoying what they're doing... Our trainer always says this is the only company that she's ever seen that's run like a corporate in that all the best bits of a corporate, the professionalism, you know, the dynamics of it, the structure of it, all the good things that a corporate has, we have. And yet, we also somehow manage to have all the benefits of a family type company. And I think it is run like a family business. Although a big one." (TI\_MD)*

An interpretation of *SecurityInc*'s organizational culture is harder to pin down as it may be described in two ways. First, given the organization's espoused vision and values, the organizational culture may be described as being somewhat militarized. To elaborate, the



slogan ‘Quality People in Quality Places’ encapsulates its espoused vision. This is an “*overriding mantra*“ (SI\_MD), and serves different purposes. On the one hand, it serves as a means for differentiating the organization from its competitors, whether it is to take on “*only the best candidates, giving them the best package to keep them happy in their work*“, or “*the best customers... who are growing, customers whose brand we like to put up the side of our brand*“ (SI\_MD). On the other hand, the espoused vision is a means for stimulating staff commitment towards the organization, as “*it makes the staff feel like they’re part of something*“ (SI\_MD). The organization’s espoused values are namely pride, friendliness, teamwork and integrity. The data suggests that these values serve two purposes, and firstly, as a means for behavioral conditioning;

*“When someone’s in for a disciplinary, rather than looking down the code of conduct or the contract, what have they breached, why are they in there for a disciplinary, it’s far better to say which of the values have they breached and the values can be more over-arching in that respect, you know it’s something for the staff to say, ‘Am I acting within the four values when I make this decision?’” (SI\_MD)*

Second, and as implied from the foregoing quote, the data suggests these values serve as disciplinary mechanisms, wherein non-conformance results in punitive measures. The MD suggested this where discussing an incident about complaints over the behaviors of a particular door supervision team. Upon reviewing CCTV footage and intervening to some extent, the recalcitrant individuals were fired, as “*people who don’t fit in with the values have no got no place in the organization*“.

Informed by these interpretations of the organization's espoused values and vision, it thus appears that the organizational culture can be described as being somewhat militarized. Indeed, the MD himself had served for a period in the Royal Marines, an experience that informed the development of the organizational vision. Values tend to support this notion of a militarized culture as well, with one staff respondent noting that the MD associates 'pride' with the standard of staff turnout;

*“Pride, he talks about valuing the job that you do, but he tends to link it in with uniform standards. So, have you had a shave? Are you wearing your best kit? Did you polish your boots before you came in? But also, do you value the job that you do? ” (SI\_SMHR)*

Alternatively, however, the organizational culture may be described as patriarchal. To elaborate, some respondents described the organization as a family business, with the MD noting it is *“the sort of business that I run, almost family-orientated in some respects“*. A patriarchal culture was further suggested by a Senior Manager in the following quote;

*“It must be, the way I'd liken it to probably it's like a family where you've got your children, the teenagers and sort of like, they're ready to go out on their own and stuff like that but you're still kind of like want to be mum and dad for them basically, I think That's probably the stage where [the MD] and [the BD] are at the minute. I think they know, that if god forbid if anything happened to them, we could probably run that company now, and run it quite well to be honest with you, and just as good...” (SI\_SMM)*

Further, the data suggests strong masculine identities amongst the all-male senior management team, which would support the notion of a patriarchal culture. Indeed, one Senior Manager described the office environment as being “*very sort of like A1, alpha-male driven*” and “*very, very boisterous*“, with “*very strong, powerful alpha-males who are throwing [inaudible] a lot of the time as well to sort of get their viewpoints across*“. Masculinity was particularly emphasized by the MD, as he discussed his experiences with the Royal Marines and how he has benefited from these;

*“So it’s been just over a year since I was last in the field... I mean, sleeping out, doing what a Marine typically does, weapons training and things like that, it’s been great. It’s got me qualified as an advanced powerboat operator, so I can drive very fast boats... arctic warfare, so I’ve been up to Norway surviving in the cold for three weeks... general purpose machine gunner, so I can fire a machine gun and I know how to set up a machine gun onto a target from a map, even if it’s dark and if we’ve got an obstruction. It could be buildings or it could be a hill, I could fire a machine gun round a hill, over a hill at a distance of up to two miles away from the target and lay sustained fire down on the enemy if need be [laughs]” (SI\_MD)*

## 6.5. Commitment

In all cases, the findings suggest that staff respondents are deeply committed to their work, although in the case of *SecurityInc*, some expressed a certain cynicism towards the MD for various reasons. I elaborate on this further as follows. At *CommsInc*, commitment was suggested where staff respondents indicated how they wanted the MD “*to have a successful business [and] contribute to her success*” (CI\_SAML) or expressed their dedication towards wanting to be “*part of the team that is creating this company*” (CI\_AE). For others, the mutual respect between MD and staff was cited as a reason for wanting to “*work well*” or do “*good work*” the MD (CI\_OM). For the Senior Account Manager based in Brighton, different elements in the work setting, such as the flexibility, autonomy, interesting clients, and “*work hard play hard element*”, contributed to how “*working [at CommsInc] is basically a joy*”. Similar expressions of commitment towards work were suggested in the interviews with staff respondents at *DigitallInc*. In this case, expressions of commitment tended to be grounded in the camaraderie amongst staff, particularly given the culture of teamwork and community relationships amongst them. In the context of *BuildInc*, staff respondents similarly expressed their commitment to work, with one particularly describing work as a “*labour of love*”;

*“I love it, absolutely love it. I enjoy getting up every morning and coming to work. I’m happy to give the extra hours that are sometimes needed, where – Sunday, I sat there working for six hours. Sunday afternoon till somebody shouted me tea’s ready. And I don’t mind it. I just, I want the best for the whole team, So, if I can do any extra to help, I don’t begrudge it. Where in previous companies I’ve sat there at night working away thinking why am I doing this? I hate this. I hate where I work, I don’t want to be doing it. But,*

*you know, it's got to be, it was a duty. And this is more a labour of love. I love it.” (BI\_CL)*

In the context of *TechInc*, the commitment to work is perhaps best suggested by the performance orientation of staff (See Section 6.2 and data structure), as they strive to hit targets, generate revenue and profits for the organization with an eye on costs, and in some cases, earn a commission for themselves on top of basic wages. As I discussed in an earlier section, this performance orientation tends to be pervasive throughout the organization, largely driven by the MD, as a focus on ‘numbers’ occupies the work lives of staff. Staff respondents from *SecurityInc* similarly expressed commitment to their work, in terms of how they “*love working for the company*” (SI\_SMOM) and “*gain a sense of achievement from it*” (SI\_SMM), or described the organization as “*a really enjoyable place to work*” which is “*going places in a way it hasn't before*” (SI\_SMHR). Whilst so, however, staff respondents from *SecurityInc* did also tend to express some degree of cynicism. In the following interview extract, cynicism was, for example, directed at the MD’s excessive positivity and optimism;

*SI\_SMOM: I think one of our issues is we think that we are better than we actually are sometimes.... We're not always the best at everything that we do, but we have a belief, which does come from [SI\_MD] saying, you know, “We're world class and we're brilliant” but actually we're not that great at that.*

*Interviewer: How does he do that? How does he communicate that to you guys?*

*SI\_SMOM: (laughs) Well, usually through a sort of never ending, almost, positivity about certain things. Which is quite inspiring in some ways.*

*Sometimes it feels a little bit disingenuous and a bit, sort of, he doesn't really know what's going on here (laughs). It's like, we are relying on the guys on the ground who sometimes are restricted by operational problems... And sometimes, you know, we're only as good as the guys we put on the ground. We're no better than that.*

In another instance, some degree of cynicism was expressed towards the MD's decision to give all senior managers the same job title, *even though "they've all got their own areas of specialism and responsibility" (SI\_MD)*;

*"Everybody has got job specialisation but [SI\_MD] took away all of our titles and called us all 'senior manager'. And the idea was everybody should know everyone else's role, everyone should be able to a certain extent step into somebody else's role. And I don't know whether it was originally to breakdown a few barriers but, to be honest, I'd be happier calling a spade a spade. You know, I'm quite clearly a HR manager, so call me that! (Laughs). The operations managers are all quite clearly operations managers, so them that. Especially as we've got a farcical situation now where we've got five senior managers and no managers, so we've got no one to be senior too! So, why doesn't he just give us back our old titles? And we'll see whether that actually happens."* (SI\_SMHR)

## 6.6. Ownership

In Section 6.1, I provided overviews of the cases with some detail on the ownership structures of the organizations. To reiterate, *CommsInc* and *DigitalInc* are both owned fully by the respective Managing Directors. In the case of *TechInc*, the MD owns 90% of the business, and the remaining shares are held by the functional directors. The actual distribution of the remaining shares is unclear, as the functional directors were not inclined to divulge this during interviews. At *SecurityInc*, the MD owns 62.5% of the organization, whilst the Business Director of the firm who declined participation in the study holds the remaining shares. In the context of *BuildInc*, it would appear from the interviews that the MD does not hold any shares in the business – ownership is distributed amongst the Chairman, his wife, and their son, the Commercial Director of the organization. Ownership, in the sense thus described, provides a quantitative indication of how legal rights and responsibilities for the organization as private property are distributed amongst individuals given their financial investment in it. Additionally, however, the data tends to suggest how the notion of ‘ownership’ may be viewed in terms of different forms of social relations between respondents. The first of these relations - what I refer to as superordinate-subordinate relations – may indeed be inferred from the discussion of top-down control in Section 6.2. However, superordinate-subordinate relations are also suggested, in a number of instances, from respondents’ views on and experiences with leadership within their respective organizations.

At *CommsInc*, for example, the data tends to suggest how the MD assumes a superordinate position relative to her staff given her ownership of the business. As she indicated, she is “*the only leader*”, having “*set the business up... and been around since the beginning*”. In acknowledging her ownership of the business and decision-making authority over it, she further

tended to make a strong claim for sole leadership of the organization as “*there’s nobody else really*” who could be regarded as a leader within it. Relative to her, staff respondents tended to suggest how they adopt a subordinate position. For one respondent, the Account Executive, this was suggested by an attitude of compliance. As he indicated, he valued being “*part of building... [CI\_MD’s] company*” and wished to “*help support whichever direction it goes in*”, but did not have any opinions on the future of the business and did not mind “*whether it’s going left or right or wherever*”. For the Office Manager based in Brighton, the leader role was attributable to the MD, who “*bases a lot of her leadership... on trusting people and on expecting the best of people, expecting them to want to work hard and to do that*”. Compliance and subordination also tended to be suggested by this respondent, as such expectations from the MD were “*inspiring in itself because you’re not being micro-managed, you feel a sense of freedom*”. Equally, the data suggests how senior staff respondents assume a subordinate position relative to the MD, and particularly, how one of these individuals is “*quite happy*” to abdicate her responsibility for leadership despite her seniority in the organization;

*Interviewer: Ok, so tell me more about your experiences with leadership in the company, and how often have you taken on a leadership role?*

*CI\_SAML: Mmm... [pause, 17 secs] ... probably not much [laughs] ... yeah I guess I act as the senior management but not necessarily in a leadership role, and I don’t know that business development either are particularly sort of classed as a leadership role. For me leadership means the sort of drive and direction of the business, and I haven’t really done that...*

*Interviewer: Ok so how do you feel about that, how do you feel about not taking on a leadership role?*

*CI\_SAML: I’m quite happy with that, yeah [laughs] ...*



*Interviewer: So you would prefer it if the MD takes on that role...*

*CI\_SAML: Yeah...*

In the context of *DigitalInc*, the suggestion that the MD assumes a superordinate position relative to his staff tended to recur through the data. This was suggested during his interview, for example, where a “*captain... [or] somebody in charge*” was required despite the espoused culture of teamwork within the organization. In other instances, his assumption of a superordinate position was suggested in his views of leadership, which variously entailed “*giving people a sense of purpose*”, “*giving people direction and making people feel that they’re cared for and looked after*”, or “*coping well and keeping your cool, and being a rock*”. Such statements also tend to suggest how leadership, as a superordinate role for the MD, also serves a protective function, which is further implied in the following quote;

*"sometimes I fear that they're laughing a little bit too much, but at the same time if I'm stressed and working hard, and they're having fun, I don't mind. Because I would rather carry the burden. Because I want them to enjoy their time here. And I, I love what I do. Even if I have that stress and that burden, I can carry it. I'm the driving force here. I can carry a lot more burden than I would want them to carry..." (DI\_MD)*

Relative to the MD, staff respondents at *DigitalInc* tended to suggest how they assume a subordinate position. Indeed, for one Account Manager, the MD was “*an admirable guy [and] a good boss*” who listens and shows concern for staff, and competent to the extent that he could “*exert authority without being obnoxious about it*” (DI\_AM1). For another, the MD was demonstrably a “*very good leader of the team*”, and equally adept at providing positive

feedback or constructive criticism (DI\_AM2). In this context, however, there was some suggestion of how one respondent, the Operations Manager, tended to assume both superordinate and subordinate positions, given her reporting lines between the MD and the rest of the staff. According to her, she had “*definitely taken on a leadership role within a certain remit*” during her employment, with respect to the team of staff in the organization. Additionally, however, she tended to suggest how she assumes a subordinate position, but in doing so, facilitates the MD in adopting a leader or superordinate role in the organization;

*"I tend to help [DI\_MD] refine his ideas and add my own twist on things at the end. Most of the time. There's few, relatively few initiatives that have been mine alone. I like letting [DI\_MD] lead from the top, rather than coming in and undercutting him. Because I think that's just a healthier way to do things. I don't like the team seeing that we've had a disagreement about something, so we try and keep that to ourselves and only present an idea when we're both in agreement with it. I try and be quietly supportive or quietly critical, and then let [DI\_MD] do the sort of showy, dramatic presentation type thing." (DI\_OM)*

Superordinate-subordinate relations are also suggested in the contexts of *TechInc* and *SecurityInc*. In the case of the former, for example, the MD's role as a superordinate relative to staff is suggested by how he has the legitimate right as the principal shareholder to share information about the organization's turnover, profit and debt figures with all employees. In doing so, the MD noted during the interview how this demonstrates transparency on his part. According to a staff respondent, such transparency has been “*really, really welcomed*”, and countered a perception amongst employees that the MD “*was driving off with a load of money*

*in the back of his truck*” or is a “*Scrooge McDuck type character that’s running away with all the money*” (TI\_CompD). Aside from such transparency, this respondent also noted how the MD’s role in making strategic decisions for the organization is respected as staff “*follow behind him and make sure that... if we work hard enough hopefully we’ll make it work*”. Other staff respondents indicated how EBITDA targets would not be achieved if not for the MD’s “*strong leadership*” (TI\_OD), how leadership is “*all top-down... [and staff] take a lot of their cues from [TI\_MD], his style on doing things*”, and how the MD demonstrates competence in his role by “*letting the different departments have autonomy in their own department*”. Superordinate-subordinate relations implied by ownership are perhaps especially suggested in the following quote;

*"Um, an example that would demonstrate his leadership? I suppose him taking everybody out as a company. That would be a sign. Only he could do that, can't he? Um, that shows he is the leader, isn't he. If you hit this target, you can go out and do this. So, that would be an example of his." (TI\_AM)*

In the context of *SecurityInc*, one staff respondent indicated how the MD, “*on his good day*“, is an individual he would be “*very happy to follow*” (SI\_SMHR), whilst another tended to suggest how he is somewhat obliged to subordinate himself to the MD;

*"I can't just be left to function in a vacuum basically, and sort of like left to sort of do my job, basically you need to go past [the MD], because he's going to find a problem with it. So we rather he finds a problem with it before we released it, rather than sort of like release it and then have to try and sort of claw it back in or try and modify it..." (SI\_SMM)*

In this case, the MD's superordinate role may perhaps be grounded in his belief that the organization is his "*baby, and blood, sweat and tears have went into it over the years*". This, along with his claim for a leadership position and the aforementioned staff respondents' views, tends to draw attention to superordinate-subordinate relations in *SecurityInc*;

*"Other people emulate and they see me as a role model, and they will mirror the way I act. And I like, I definitely like to think that because I treat my senior management team well, they will treat their management and supervisor team well, and if they treat their supervision team well, their supervisors will treat their frontline staff well. You know people emulate what people higher up the organization to do, so you know it's... I don't like to get big-headed about the term leader or anything, so that's my reluctance sometimes to say 'I'm the leader', but I can't get away from the fact that that's what I am, and why I am where I am, and that people do follow what I do" (SI\_MD)*

Hence, the preceding discussion has served to establish how superordinate-subordinate relations characterize the theme of ownership. In addition to this, findings suggest how ownership may be viewed in terms of relations of production, or the "social relations, and therefore the social position of the agents of production in relation to each other" (Marx, 1867/1976: p.1065). Such relations are suggested primarily by the contrasting accounts of job responsibilities between MDs and staff respondents, where the former are broadly interpreted to be working 'on the business' whilst the latter work within it. The notion of MDs working on the business is suggested by the breadth (and sometimes, the ambiguity) underlying self-reports of their job responsibilities. At TechInc, for example, the MD indicated how his "*ultimate remit is to make sure that this business is doing the best it possibly can*". To this end, he discussed

how he is “*not involved in the day-to-day*”, has “*stepped back*” and will only “*step in from an observational point*” to provide advice. This, along with the organizational structure, provides him with the space to “*strategize how we can either improve what we’re doing or what we should be doing next... And get there before anybody else. And be better than anybody else.*” In the context of *DigitalInc*, it would appear that to some extent, the MD’s role involves the management of meaning (Smircich and Morgan, 1982), as he focuses primarily on the organization’s “*growth strategy, direction and structure*”;

*"Structure is making sure that everybody knows what they're doing. Because what I've found throughout the years of running this company is the number one concern is never people not wanting to work, it is people not knowing what they have to do. So, being given a job, being given a task isn't enough. It's knowing how that task fits into the jigsaw. What are the pieces closest to that task? What do the other pieces of the jigsaw look like with relation to that piece of the jigsaw they're working on? They don't always need to see the full jigsaw. They need to have an idea of what that will look like. But they need to know what the pieces are surrounding that, so that they know where it fits." (DI\_MD)*

In the context of *DigitalInc*, there is indeed some suggestion of how the MD engages in work ‘within’ the business, primarily sales. Otherwise, staff respondents discussed how their main job responsibilities are in the area of operations management, client relationship management, development work and copy writing. At *CommsInc*, staff respondents indicated fairly concisely that their responsibilities were in the areas of client management, business development and administration, whilst those at *SecurityInc* discussed their roles in operations management,

human resource management and marketing. At *TechInc*, the fourteen staff respondents similarly discussed their job responsibilities in relatively specific ways and with respect to the functional areas that their roles are allocated to.

It is this contrast – the accounts of MDs’ job responsibilities that are broad, relative to those of employees’ – which provides the basis for viewing relations of production as key to understanding the theme of ownership in the four cases outlined thus far. Additionally, it may be observed that these relations perhaps imply a loose division of labour amongst respondents in each case. In the context of *TechInc*, the data tends to suggest a somewhat stronger degree of job specialization compared to the other cases. This is perhaps suggested from the organizational structure, as respondents have allocated roles within functional areas. Some respondents alluded to the issue of job specialization as well, noting that roles and responsibilities are relatively fixed or defined and “*everybody fits in a box*” (TI\_ComD), or how staff are not “*under any disillusion of what their role is within the organization*” (TI\_CompD). Whilst the data does indeed suggest some emphasis on collaborative working, the issue of job specialization and its importance within the organization is particularly foregrounded by the MD in the following quote;

*"There's not much that falls between the gaps. I think if you throw a problem in the air, one of them would instantly grab it because they'd know it was theirs. And I think that's really important... I mean, you find operations and systems working together a lot. There's probably some overlap there. I've seen them help each other out. There's certain things that [OD] can do better than [SyD] that maybe you would argue is a systems function, but [OD] will do it because tomorrow she'll want some help with something that maybe*

*isn't. They don't, they never, I never hear them say, "Well, actually, that's not my role. I'm systems. It's an operational role." I do actually encourage that because although I like fluid - fluid is good - there has to be ownership. So, you can't say, "Well, you do a bit and I do a bit". And nobody, then nobody - everybody has to own it. Because if nobody owns it, it doesn't get done the way it should get done. So, whilst there is a little bit of fluid across them lines, there has to be ownership. And the person, whilst you might help, you either own it or you don't. And if you don't, then you're not expected to do anything, but it's nice that they do." (TI\_MD)*

Throughout this section, the case of *BuildInc* is yet to be mentioned. This is for good reason, as the data does not fully suggest either form of relations discussed thus far. Indeed, the data is limited with regards to this case as shareholders or owners were not interviewed. Repeated emails to the Commercial Director asking for an interview went without response. As such, superordinate-subordinate relations were not suggested in the data for this case. Respondent discussions of leadership tended to emphasize the issue of empowerment (BI\_MD; BI\_CL; BI\_BDL), whilst others discussed how the organization is “*not seen as a hierarchy and everyone else is down the ladder*” (BI\_OM). In terms of relations of production, the data tends to suggest how all the respondents have fairly specific job responsibilities, and are not broad (or ambiguous) like those of MDs in the other cases. Staff respondents in *BuildInc* thus discussed how their roles involve client management, customer support, people management and business planning. The MD indicated he engages in client management and new contract tenders, whilst also delivering on the mandate issued by the Chairman and Commercial Director to grow the business.

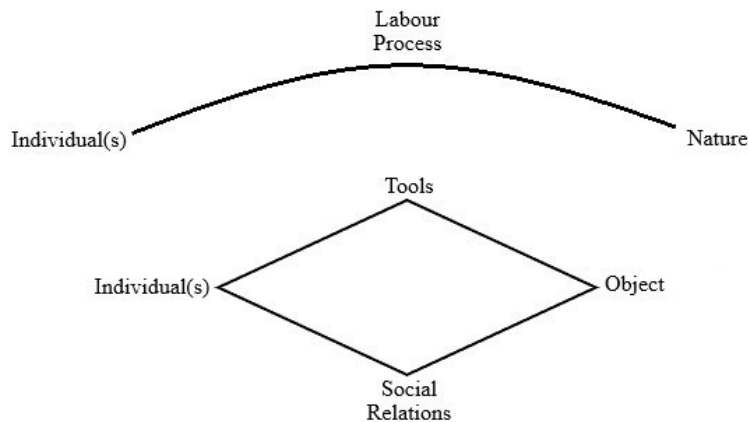
To summarize, I have argued in this section that the data tends to draw attention to two forms of social relations that characterize the theme of ownership. First, I have drawn attention to the issue of superordinate-subordinate relations between MDs and staff respondents, which in a number of instances, is apparent from respondent views on and experiences with leadership in their respective organizations. Second, I have discussed how the contrasting accounts of job responsibilities between MDs and staff respondents tend to foreground the relations of production between parties. Further, relations of production imply a loose division of labour in most cases, which is particularly accentuated in the context of *TechInc*.



## 6.7. Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, I have offered a discussion of the descriptive findings generated from my fieldwork and initial analyses in this chapter. In doing so, I discussed five main themes – hierarchy, empowerment, culture or social structure, commitment and ownership – that are more or less common across the cases. The discussion of these themes, for the most part, certainly may suggest the organizations are successful. They appear to be organized effectively, run well, or even perhaps led well by hard-working, committed, competent and inspiring figures, supported by a cadre of committed employees. Organizational members certainly appear to work well together, enjoy relatively harmonious relationships with one another, and are committed towards their work and the achievement of shared organizational goals. Indeed, one may possibly have to look quite hard to consider recommendations for practice. However, I would argue that we should look deeper, past these “mystifying surface appearances” (Harvey, 2014: p.5). To do so, the next chapter interrogates these descriptive findings via the theoretical frame articulated in Chapter 4.

## 7. Discussion – The Activity of Entrepreneurial Leadership



*Figure 4: Theoretical Framework Generated Through This Study*

In this penultimate chapter of the thesis, the preceding descriptive findings are re-contextualized within the theoretical frame discussed in Chapter 4 (displayed again above, Figure 4). This allows for an articulation of entrepreneurial leadership as an activity that is object-driven, mediated by social relations and tools, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process. As discussed in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.2.4), the epistemological grounds of this study require discussion of rival interpretations for the three main concepts of interest here (ie. Object, social relations, and tools), and adjudication between interpretations to identify the most tenable. The following narrative attempts to achieve these ends.

Each of the following three sections begins with summaries of the conceptual narratives from Chapter 4 (Sections 4.3.2 to 4.3.4) that anchor my interpretations. In the first section, I discuss the possibility of viewing either organizational services or the organizational form itself as the object, but ultimately argue that the notion of organization growth offers the most plausible interpretation. Second, and informed by Marx's (1867/1976) insights on cooperation and the

division of labour, I discuss various forms of social relations that may be interpreted with reference to the descriptive findings. Particularly, this section draws attention to the tension between transformational leadership and the capitalist-worker social relation, thereby highlighting a primary contribution of this thesis. Third and finally, I discuss how the themes of hierarchy and empowerment from the descriptive findings can offer a means for understanding the concept of ‘tools’ in activity. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main arguments developed within it.

## 7.1. The Object of Activity

In Chapter 4, a conceptualization of the ‘object’ was outlined for this thesis, informed by a discussion of interpretations for it offered by activity theorists and contemporary researchers (Leontev, 1978; Foot, 2002; Adler, 2005; Roth and Lee, 2007; Kaptelinin, 2005; Blackler, 2009; Engestrom, 2009) and Marx’s (1867/1976) arguments concerning the commodity form in the capitalist mode of production. To summarize this conceptualization, I argued that the ‘object’ may firstly be regarded in a form of appearances, in terms of the meaning, motive or purpose that satisfies needs, perhaps representing the raw materials that individuals transform, or as being “simultaneously given, socially constructed, contested and emergent” (Blackler, 2009: p. 27). Equally, in the form of appearances, the object is a commodity, consisting of use and exchange values that *may* stand in a contradictory relation to each other. In this form of appearances, however, the object and commodity are both fetishized, such that the social relations inherent to their transformation or production are concealed and mystified. Underpinning this conceptualization is the argument implicit to Marx’s notion of fetishism – that appearances and reality are rarely, if ever, perfectly aligned or synonymous and so we must venture beneath the surface of things to understand them further (Harvey, 2014; Callinicos, 1983). With this in mind, we can consider and adjudicate between different plausible interpretations of the object of the activity of entrepreneurial leadership.

A first plausible interpretation to consider is whether the different services offered by each organization is the ‘object’ of activity, whether these services are in the areas of public relations (*CommsInc*), digital marketing (*DigitalInc*), reverse IT asset Management (*TechInc*), security provision (*SecurityInc*) or building and refurbishment (*BuildInc*). There are certainly reasons to think these services could represent the ‘object’, where the commodity form, its use and

exchange values are considered. For instance, services such as these provide an indication of the kind of business or work that the organization partakes in, who its target market is, and/or the niche that it occupies in its industry. To these ends, it may be argued that an organization's services do have a use value, as these contribute towards defining the 'concept of the company' (Timmons and Spinelli, 2007). Further, it may be observed that such services do also have an exchange value, as through their provision, they may be exchanged for a certain form of commodity, namely, money. Money is a commodity as it has a use value – it is a store of value and a means of payment – and an exchange value, as it may be exchanged for other commodities (Harvey, 2010, 2014). In the context of organizations, income or revenue that is generated through the provision of services could, for example, be used to purchase tangible assets, such as equipment and buildings, or intangible assets, such as patents, trademarks and copyrights.

Hence, given that the services provided by each organization can be construed as commodities, these may also be viewed as the 'object' of activity. However, it is difficult to sustain this argument considering other interpretations of what the object is. For example, it is difficult to argue that services represent the object, in an ideational form as a vision or image (Roth and Lee, 2007) or that these services embody the meaning or motive of activity (Engestrom and Keruoso, 2007). Indeed, when asked about the kinds of goals they and their organizations were aspiring towards, most, if not all, respondents indicated growth. As such, explicit targets and objectives relating to growing the organization had been formulated, in terms of revenue, employee numbers, or EBITDA. The growth of their respective organizations is therefore what respondents collectively appear to be aspiring and striving towards. Services, in comparison, merely appear as the kinds of work that the organizations and their members engage in within

the respective industries and sectors, and as such, it is difficult to view these as the ‘object’ of activity.

A second plausible interpretation to consider is whether the ‘object’ of activity is in each case the organization itself. Doing so in this instance could also involve exploring the argument that the organization is itself a commodity, and to its members, is a bearer of both use and exchange values. To staff respondents, for instance, their respective organizations may be useful to them as they represent a means for securing employment. Additionally, the organizations may be useful as spaces within which they work, and experience subjective feelings of camaraderie or collegiality as indicated by the kinds of community relationships within each case. To Managing Directors (MDs), the use value of the organization appears to be relatively more differentiated across the cases, as suggested by the reasons for starting their respective businesses. For the MDs of *CommsInc* and *TechInc*, the organizations are useful as a means through which perceived weaknesses or gaps in the industry may be addressed. For the MD of *DigitalInc*, the organization is a means for expressing his personal agency, as he “*loved the feeling of being responsible and then creating growth*” for his clients. For the MD of *SecurityInc*, starting the organization was initially a means for funding his undergraduate studies, whilst in the context of *BuildInc*, the Chairman started the business in the 1970s primarily to engage in new builds. Hence, the organization itself could be the ‘object’ of activity, where it is construed as a commodity with a use value to staff and directors. However, what remains to be established is whether the organization form, if it is a commodity, has an exchange value and may be traded for other commodities. Realistically, one would think that for this to happen, something needs to be demonstrated – namely, that the organization is consistently generating revenues and profits, that it is growing at a reasonably predictable rate over a fairly established timeframe, or perhaps has the intention to grow premised upon robust

objectives, plans and underpinning resources. Without demonstrating any of this, it is perhaps difficult to fathom why anyone would want to invest in a business at all.

This leads on to the third and last plausible interpretation to be considered – namely, that organization growth is the ‘object’ of the activity of entrepreneurial leadership. To explore this further, it is notable that growth is an object in some of the senses articulated by activity theorists. From the descriptive findings – in the form of appearances – growth does embody the “true motive” (Leontev, 1978: p.98) or “meaning, motive and purpose” of activity (Engestrom and Keruoso, 2007: p.337). As discussed in Section 6.2 of this thesis, respondents orientate themselves towards growth as an organizational goal, the prescription of which represents one of two ways in which hierarchies are enacted across the cases. Growth thus appears across the cases as an organizational goal, or collective purpose. For respondents, it is imbued with meaning and meaningful to them, to the extent that it motivates the work they do in their respective organizations. Further, considering Blackler’s (2009) interpretation of the ‘object’, organization growth may be viewed in terms of being simultaneously given and defined in terms of objectives such as revenue, employee numbers and EBITDA targets, but also socially constructed and emergent, as it is prescribed by owners and subject to revision in the future. In some cases, organization growth is also somewhat contested. In *CommsInc* and *BuildInc*, for instance, staff respondents discussed their reservations about the pace of growth and the personal or operational strain this created. Moreover, organization growth does appear to exist in a sense as a material entity, notably as a ‘thing’ imbued with a life of its own in terms of the aforementioned objectives. However, it also appears as a vision “both in its present state and how people envisage it in the future” (Roth and Lee, 2007: p.198), as it is an organizational goal that respondents collectively strive towards.

It is thus worth exploring this line of reasoning further to consider how the descriptive findings in Chapter 6 would allow the conceptualization of organization growth as a commodity in terms of use and exchange values. From the foregoing discussion, it would be plausible to suggest growth is useful as it embodies the meaning and purpose of activity. Its use value may therefore be construed in terms of how it serves as a motivating factor or a means for securing employees' commitment. The notion that growth motivates employees is indeed suggested in some cases. At *CommsInc*, for example, employees regarded growth as a means to become "*the go-to company*" and "*put our stamp*" on the industry (CI\_AE), or to "*become the best that we can be... even better at what we're doing... and become known and trusted as an agency*" (CI\_SAMB). At *SecurityInc*, growth is seen by some organizational members as being "*part and parcel of business*" (SI\_SMM) but also a means to "*change the industry.... To be the best in the industry*" (SI\_SMHR). At *TechInc*, employee motivation and commitment towards growth is suggested by their performance orientation as they strive to hit targets, generate revenue and profits for the organization with an eye on costs, and in some cases, earn a commission for themselves on top of their basic wages. Respondents thus indicated how they are "*driven by numbers*" (TI\_ComD), "*massively focused on the EBITDA*" (TI\_OD) or "*worrying whether you're going to bring in enough to hit your target, because you want to hit your target*" (TI\_AM).

However, for growth to be useful as a motivating factor, it appears from the findings it must be spoken of in ways that signal certain qualities, namely ambition, aggression, dominance and competition. Such qualities are apparent in respondents' statements highlighted in the foregoing paragraph, but are also evident in how the MDs discussed their intentions to grow or growth objectives for their respective organizations. At *CommsInc*, for example, the MD discussed how staff "*know that we're ambitious... that's why they joined the business*". At the



time of the interviews, the MD was working to establish targets “*where we will be on a million turnover*”. She was considering the implementation of bonus schemes and share options, “*the idea being that as we grow we will give people monetary rewards*”. Ambition and aggression tended to be suggested by the MD of *SecurityInc* in discussing the objectives that he had set for the organization over a five-year period (ie. From employing 150 staff members and generating turnover of £3.6 million in year 2015, to employee 600 staff members and generating £10 million in year 2020). In the context of *BuildInc*, similar qualities tended to be suggested where the MD discussed the substantial growth the organization had achieved over a short period of time (ie. 40 employees and £3 million, to 130 employees and £15 million over 3.5 years). At *TechInc*, the qualities of ambition, aggression, dominance and competition are all suggested in the following quote from the MD regarding business expansion;

*"The vision of the business is to improve and, but stay in the area, the arena we're in... and growing the business. You know, we want 3000 customers. We want to dominate the FTSE 350....So, um, the vision of the business is really to increase to 3000 companies, still in the UK. Um, we only deal with, the average amount of time we deal with our client base is um, about 2, 2.5, 2.7 times per annum. We want to increase that to four. And the average deal size that we do is about £600 per deal. We wanna increase that to a thousand. So, the triggers are all kind of commercial. We want 3000 clients. We wanna deal with them every quarter and we wanna do a thousand pounds deal every time we do a deal." (TI\_MD: emphasis added)*

If organization growth exists as a commodity and has a use value in the aforementioned sense, then we can equally consider the extent to which it is a bearer of exchange value. For instance, the growth of an organization may be monetized, which benefits shareholders and/or finances operations in various ways. From the data and findings, it is clear that some directors have at least entertained the possibility of this. At *CommsInc*, for example, the MD indicated as such where discussing the possibility of offering share options to staff, “*in the event that we sell or whatever, they have got an investment there but it’s not something they are going to get an income from immediately*”. Similarly, at *SecurityInc*, one staff respondent indicated his awareness that the directors “*want to get the organization to a certain point where they sell*”. At *BuildInc*, there were claims that shareholders will not sell, as “*the intention is never to sell the place*” (BI\_MD). It is, however, difficult to assess the validity of such claims in the case of *BuildInc*, without having interviewed shareholders themselves. As such, it would appear that organization growth as a commodity does indeed have an exchange value, as it may potentially be monetized.

It is necessary to recap the arguments made at this point, in order to consolidate an interpretation of the ‘object’. Thus far, I have argued it is plausible to interpret organization growth as the ‘object’ of the activity of entrepreneurial leadership. In the form of appearances, organization growth embodies the true motive, or meaning and purpose of this activity, and to some extent is simultaneously given, socially constructed, contested and emergent. Additionally, as the object, organization growth may be construed in terms of a commodity with a dual form. Growth has a use value – it embodies the meaning, motive or purpose of activity, and motivates or secures the commitment of employees. For it to be useful as such, it must be spoken of in ways that signal certain qualities such as ambition, aggression, dominance and competition. It could thus be argued, therefore, that the use value of growth is premised

upon rhetorical appeals – ways of persuading or influencing – that motivate or secure the commitment of organizational members. Additionally, growth has an exchange value, as it may be monetized for the benefit of shareholders and/or to finance business operations. Further, it is possible to argue that there is a relation between these use and exchange values - That is to say, without such rhetorical appeals that secure commitment, exchange cannot occur. If one does not appeal to another in certain ways, one cannot extract commitment or effort from the other, and it is consequently difficult to realize the exchange value of growth by monetizing it.

Some comments are due on this interpretation of the object of the activity of entrepreneurial leadership, particularly concerning the relation between the use and exchange values of growth. More broadly, some activity theorists have foregrounded the use/exchange value contradiction inherent within the object, relying on this for theoretical and analytic purposes in their research (eg. Engestrom, 1987; Adler, 2005). Outside of Activity Theory, however, some Marxist theorizing has adopted a more moderate stance towards this issue, suggesting that within the capitalist mode of production, such contradictions can gradually reveal themselves and may occasionally give way to crises (Harvey, 2014). In the context of this study, the foregoing expression of the relation between the use and exchange values of growth is not contradictory. On the one hand, this may be attributed to limitations of the empirical material, and additional data could have been or will be valuable for exploring this idea further. Alternatively, it may be that the use/exchange value contradiction is yet to emerge, and longitudinal research could have been or will be valuable for exploring this further. Either way, it would seem that the concept of the commodity form, its associated forms of value and the potential contradiction between these forms of value represent an intriguing way to inquire into the topic of organization growth, in the topical contexts of entrepreneurial leadership, entrepreneurship or

leadership. This is discussed further in the final chapter, as a recommendation for further research.

Despite this, however, as an object and commodity, it appears from the descriptive findings that organization growth does not appear as a product of human labour to participants, or in terms of the social relations between them as producers. Rather, growth appears in terms of the different objectives relating to revenue, employee numbers, EBITDA and social impact targets that respondents collectively strive towards. This, for example, is especially evident at *TechInc*, where a performance orientation and focus on numbers considerably occupies the work lives of organizational members. However, growth is indeed a product of human labour, as its realization requires concerted effort on the part of organizational members. As a product of human labour, it does indeed take the form of social relations between producers – social relations that are asymmetrical. This was highlighted in Section 6.2, in the discussion of how organization growth is prescribed by the MDs and recognized by employees as a goal or imperative to be laboured towards and achieved. The form(s) of these social relations is discussed further in the next section. For now, it has been discussed in this section that organization growth, rather than services or the organization form itself, may be most reasonably construed as the object of the activity of entrepreneurial leadership. As an object, growth is also a commodity, expressed in a dual form consisting of use and exchange values. In the course of its production, growth appears as a ‘thing’ to producers, rather than in the form of the social relations between them.

## 7.2. The Social Relations Mediating Activity

In Section 4.3.3 of this thesis, the discussion centred on two concepts from Marx's (1867/1976) work – cooperation, and the division of labour – that may facilitate analysis of the kinds of social relations individuals enter into within the context of the capitalist labour process. To summarize that discussion here, Marx (1867/1976) defined 'cooperation' as a "form of labour" wherein "numerous workers work together side by side, in accordance with a plan, whether in the same process, or in different but connected processes" (p.443). Marx viewed cooperation in positive terms, as it enables productivity to be realized in the labour process, but also regarded it as an inherently human characteristic, a power of workers that is entirely their own (Harvey, 2010; Leontev, 1978; Elster, 1985). In the capitalist labour process, however, Marx argued that this inherently human capability to cooperate is appropriated away from workers by another, and made to appear as "a power which capital possesses by its nature – a productive power inherent in capital" (p.451). This appropriation is made possible by a division, in Marx's (1867/1976) terms, between intellectual and manual labour. I further discussed that this division of labour may be construed in terms of the division between "those who produce or apply scientific and technical knowledge in the design of production systems... and those whose relationship with the production system is calculated, standardized and specified in advance" by the former (Brighton Labour Process Group, 1977: p.17; Also Braverman, 1998). It is these theoretical insights that facilitate further interpretations of the descriptive findings in the following discussion.

To start with, it may be argued that the notion of 'cooperation' figures across all the five cases in two ways. First, I briefly discussed how organization members across all the cases appear to experience communal relationships with one another. Staff respondents particularly indicated

positive working relations amongst themselves, a friendly and congenial rapport, familial bonds, and particularly, a collaborative atmosphere (especially in the cases of *DigitalInc*, *TechInc* and *BuildInc*). In Section 6.5, I argued that these community relationships could be regarded as “the orientation of social action... based on the subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together” (Weber, 1922/1978: p.40). Further, I argued that these community relationships provide a sense of the social structure in each case, in terms of the “already existing network of social relations” (Geertz, 1973: p.145). There is a sense, therefore, that staff respondents’ capabilities to cooperate already exists, in the form of communal relationships that facilitate collaborative work practices amongst them.

Second, cooperation figures across the cases, particularly in the form of a culture of team-working. As it was discussed in Section 6.5, this culture of team-working appears to be a central feature of organizational life to respondents, especially in the cases of *CommsInc*, *DigitalInc* and *BuildInc*. The exceptions are perhaps the remaining two cases. However, with *SecurityInc*, team-working arguably still applies as it is one of four espoused organizational values (the other three being pride, friendliness and integrity), espoused and inscribed by the MD. At *TechInc*, I described the organizational culture as being professional but family-oriented, but team-working does also apply in this case. As one staff respondent put it, the MD had “*managed to create a great ethos... where we work for each other... if we’ve got a project that we’ve not experienced before, you know, we can all sit down and people very much work for each other*” (TI\_SaD). As such, cooperation also appears in the form of a culture of team-working, but as discussed in Section 6.2, it is one way in which organizational hierarchies are enacted across the cases, as MDs claimed the responsibility for developing organizational culture.

From this, a tension thus emerges when juxtaposing culture and social structure, which for Geertz (1973) at least, are “different abstractions of the same phenomena” (p.145). On the one hand, cooperation is prefigured by social structures, already existing in terms of the kinds of communal relationships staff respondents experience amongst themselves in their respective organizations. On the other hand, however, cooperation suggested by a team working culture appears as imposed upon them by the authority of someone else. There is perhaps a question of causality here, in terms of whether social structure causes culture, or vice versa. This aside, if we take into account Marx’s theoretical insights, there is a sense that employees are already inclined to cooperate – it is a capability entirely their own, expressed within already existing social structures. However, cooperation also appears as a facet of their organizational and work lives imposed upon them by someone else – their respective MDs, who do so by claiming the responsibility for developing organizational cultures.

Across the cases, the division of labour perhaps appears most simply in terms of job specialization. This was discussed in Section 6.6 of this thesis under the theme of ‘Ownership’, drawing attention to the accounts of MDs’ job responsibilities that are broad against those of employees that are relatively more specific. As such, MDs are construed to be ‘working on the business’, suggested by the breadth (and sometimes, the ambiguity) underlying self-reports of the job responsibilities. In contrast, employees are interpreted to be ‘working in the business’, and depending on the organization’s services, work in various roles such as operations management, client relationship management, developmental work, human resource management and so on. Further, the division of labour in terms of job specialization is more pronounced in some cases rather than others due to organizational scale. This was discussed in Section 6.6, with reference to the case of *TechInc*, wherein respondents have clearly allocated and defined roles and responsibilities within the organization.

Aside from job specialization, however, the division of labour does indeed manifest itself in a different way by which a minority grouping takes responsibility, both for the design of production systems and how the mass of producers relate to those systems. The MDs of the organizations are clearly representative of this minority grouping. In all cases, for example, organizational hierarchies are the initiative of the MDs, who determine roles, responsibilities and reporting lines amongst themselves and the staff. MDs are responsible for prescribing the organizations' respective orientations towards growth, objectives related to this, organizational cultures, or espoused visions and values. The relation of employees to their respective 'production systems' are also indeed defined by MDs. An example of this is the issue of role-based decision-making responsibilities. As discussed in Section 6.3, staff respondents, particularly in the cases of *TechInc*, *BuildInc* and *CommsInc*, experience a strong degree of empowerment in their work. They have the autonomy to make decisions within the boundaries of their individual role and responsibilities, a boundary that in itself is prescribed by MDs. At *DigitalInc*, the boundary within which staff are able to act autonomously relates to the issue of innovation, and outside of this, it would seem employee respondents experience limited autonomy.

Some literature on Labour Process Theory has discussed how scientific and technical knowledge, and particularly Taylor's principles of scientific management, influence the design of production systems that workers experience (Brighton Labour Process Group, 1977; Braverman, 1998). The role of such knowledge is perhaps harder to ascertain across the given cases and descriptive findings, although the issues of 'expert' and academic knowledge certainly appear relevant. At *CommsInc*, for instance, 'expert' knowledge appears to have some bearing on the development of growth objectives that organizational members strive towards. The MD was relying on a business coach for such knowledge, in order to be "*more scientific*



*about growth, rather than scattergun”, or “a bit more disciplined about it and say, ‘right, ok, if we do X, Y, Z, we might get growth in this area, and if we target this area by doing this, we might get growth there.’”*

Academic knowledge has particular relevance in other cases. At *DigitalInc*, the MD briefly discussed his participation in a business support initiative offered within a university. As he indicated, this initiative was one reason why the organization had experienced “*phenomenal growth*”. This initiative was also a reminder “*to not feel guilty for not being in the office*” and to “*work on the business, not in it*”. As another example, the MD of *SecurityInc* indicated the development of growth objectives was informed by “*that strategy and economic environment module*” from the MBA he was completing as a part-time student during the time of interviews. The objective to hire 200 employees per business function by the year 2020 was influenced by academic knowledge from a tutor on the program. However, the arbitrariness of this figure was evident, as the number ‘200’ was a “*magic number where you’ve got an organization that things aren’t getting lost in bureaucracy*”. Culture and values were similarly developed and informed by academic knowledge (the work of Michael Porter), and decision-making processes had to be ‘scientific’. As he elaborated, this emphasis on being ‘scientific’ is akin to “*saying I want some proof if we’re going to do something that’s it’s going to work, I want a test model doing first, and you know I want to plan-do-check-act on something small before it affects the whole organization*”.

From the preceding discussion, it would appear that the theoretical insights discussed at the start of this section are relevant. The cooperative power of employees, expressed in already existing social structures, is made to appear as the power of MDs over them. MDs do so by claiming the responsibility for designating organizational cultures of teamworking. This

suggests a division of labour, between the MDs who take responsibility for designing the organization, and how employees relate to the organization. In at least three of the cases, the design of organizations is indeed informed by the production and application of scientific and/or technical knowledge, derived from business coaching services and academic programs. What remains to be addressed here is the form(s) of social relations at play in the cases, and consider different plausible interpretations of these. Marx's theoretical insights certainly warrant the discussion of specific conceptual categories, but given the topical context of this study, it is necessary to evaluate the relevance of 'leadership'.

Hence, the first interpretation of the descriptive findings to consider here is in terms of the social relation between leaders and followers. In Section 6.6, I discussed respondent views and experiences of leadership within their respective organizations, offering interpretations of these in terms of superordinate-subordinate relations. MDs, in most cases, quite actively claimed the role and responsibility for leading the respective organizations. Such claims were made, for instance, on grounds of having "*set the business up... and [being] around since the beginning*" (CI\_MD), or investing "*blood, sweat and tears*" into the business over the years (SI\_MD). For the MDs, the responsibility of leading thus variously involved "*giving people a sense of purpose*", "*making people feel that they're cared for and looked after*", or being "*the driving force*" (DI\_MD); Being nurturing, supportive, or acting as a coach and mentor to others (CI\_MD; BI\_MD); Acting as a role model, as "*people emulate what people higher up the organization do*" (SI\_MD); and "*being honest, transparent and respecting the individuals who work for them*" (TI\_MD).

Employees, on the other hand, tended to express a relatively subordinate role, expressing MD abilities to lead in mostly positive terms. This perhaps suggests that for analytical purposes

here, the ‘follower’ category could apply. Indeed, in some instances, employees did expressly use the term. At *SecurityInc*, for example, one respondent indicated how the MD, “*on his good day*“, is an individual he would be “*very happy to follow*” (SI\_SMHR). At *TechInc*, the MD’s influence over employees appears in terms of his ability to make key strategic decisions. To this end, one respondent thus indicated how staff are content to “*follow behind him and make sure that... if we work hard enough hopefully we’ll make it work*” (TI\_CompD). Otherwise, employees of the other organizations spoke of how they wished to “*help support whichever direction the organization goes in*” (CI\_AE), or being inspired “*because you’re not being micro-managed*” (CI\_OM). At *DigitalInc*, employees regarded the MD as “*an admirable guy [and] a good boss*” who listens and shows concern for staff (DI\_AM1), and equally adept at providing positive feedback or constructive criticism (DI\_AM2).

In the foregoing senses, the descriptive findings tend to suggest that the transformational leadership construct could be relevant for understanding the social relations of interest. Based on these findings, the MDs may be regarded as transformational leaders – they act as role models, inspiring, motivating and empowering employees as ‘followers’ to enhance their commitment, performance and organization performance overall (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2010). Indeed, transformational leadership is topically relevant, given that it has been deployed as a central theoretical resource by researchers in their studies of entrepreneurial leadership (See Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1). For some researchers, entrepreneurial leaders are able to “*evoke superordinate performance by appeals to the higher needs of followers*” (Gupta et al, 2004: p. 245) or “*seek new ways of working, [and] opportunities in face of risk*” (Renko et al, 2013: p.4). Transformational leadership theory has also informed the work of researchers interested in situational approaches and how context influences individual leader behaviours (Ensley et al, 2006; Wang et al, 2012; Zaech and Baldegger, 2017). As discussed in Chapter 3,

such research has tended to present dichotomized analyses, drawing attention to how leaders ‘switch’ between either transformational or transactional behaviours depending on the changes in their environments.

However, this foregoing interpretation concerning the relevance of transformational leadership may be critiqued in certain ways. For instance, and aside from the pejorative quality of the ‘follower’ category (Carsten et al, 2010), it may be difficult to sustain an argument for ‘leadership’. To elaborate, respondents may have only discussed the topic of leadership because I asked them about it. My questions to them as such were about their experiences with leadership in their respective organizations, specific examples at work that demonstrated leadership to them, and follow-up questions related to these. Such questions were undoubtedly useful to the extent that they facilitated inquiry. However, in stepping back from the data and descriptive findings, and considering the theoretical frame, there is a need to be wary of making claims that respondent accounts are demonstrative of leading, following or leadership more generally, and with the application of the ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ categories. Indeed, claims and categories such as these do have certain effects. Learmonth and Morrell (2016) have drawn attention to this in discussing problems inherent within ‘the language of leadership’. For these researchers, the ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ categories, when applied towards understanding or conceptualizing the hierarchical relations within organizations, allow “certain forms of discourse and knowledge, while disqualifying other possible ways of knowing and being in this world” (p.3). More broadly, the argument to be made here is that the conceptual language associated with ‘leadership’ may certainly facilitate discussion and dialogue in positive ways, between researchers and in interview settings for instance. However, such conceptual language can potentially also work against the interests of researchers, imposing upon us relatively

routine ways of interpreting the social world, confining our analytical perspectives and obstructing novel insights about what we seek to understand.

Additionally, and during the interviews, there is a concern of whether some of the responses to questions about leadership involved some degree of impression management. Indeed, Alvesson (2003) has conceded this point in the context of interview settings more generally. As he observes, individuals often do have an interest in portraying themselves and their organizations in positive ways, and this needs to be considered by researchers when conducting interviews. In this study, for example, the issue of impression management particularly tended to be suggested during the interviews with directors from *SecurityInc* and *DigitalInc*, as their statements and responses about leadership may be construed as being somewhat self-aggrandizing (see Data Structures, Appendix 7 of this thesis, Section 1.5). Amongst staff respondents, responses about leadership tended to be almost universally positive, with most expressing how their respective MDs were good bosses, not micro-managers, skilled and competent, strategic, visionary, and so on.

If such responses were the means for managing impressions, why this occurs is difficult to say. Talking about one's own ability to 'lead' in whatever sense might boost one's ego, or make one appear more powerful, influential or competent in the eyes of another. All respondents were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality ahead of the interviews, and this was maintained throughout the research process. Yet, staff respondent positivity about leadership in their organizations may equally suggest some lingering reservations about being brazenly truthful with a stranger conducting research into their work lives and relationships. Thus, for analytic purposes here, there needs to be some way to account for the foregoing issues without discounting the salience of respondent accounts, the descriptive findings and transformational

leadership. One means to do so would be to suggest that transformational leadership is relevant, but only in the form of appearances. It is relevant given the interpretations of respondent accounts provided in the descriptive findings, but we need to consider the underlying reality that these appearances potentially conceal.

Hence, leader-follower relations are perhaps insufficient for purposes here, and another plausible interpretation to consider is the social relations between managers and workers. The concept of ‘management’ is possibly as contested as any other, but Cunliffe (2009) has offered a suitably broad definition that is useful for baseline interpretations in this discussion. As Cunliffe (2009) writes, ‘management’ refers to some kind of activity – it is something done – but also denotes a role which relates to others within organizations. She further discusses how the emergence of management as a practice and discipline that is studied also led to the rise of a “managerialist ideology” (2009: p.17). This ideology, premised upon a number of beliefs and values, included the ideas that managers have the right to act on the behalf of owners – for making decisions, to instruct workers and deploy science in the name of efficiency. Such ideas do perhaps apply given the discussions earlier in this section, and the argument that these organizations and practices such as re-structuring, rebranding or ‘corporate culturism’ (Wilmott, 1993) are managerialist certainly could be relevant. However, the application of this ‘manager-worker’ conceptual lens is rendered problematic by its implicit separation of ownership from control. Informed by Cunliffe’s (2009) interpretation of the concept of management, the ‘manager-worker’ conceptual lens is perhaps not as suitable as others discussed in this section, given that all the cases and organizations are in fact owner-managed and controlled.

A third interpretation to consider is that capital and labour constitute the social relations of interest. This is perhaps tenable, if we consider Marx's (1867/1976) insights. To reiterate, staff respondents' power to cooperate is their own, expressed in already existing social structures, but this power is made to appear as the MDs' over them. MDs do so by claiming the responsibility for designating organizational cultures of team-working. Expressed in Marx's (1867/1976) terms, the cooperative power of labour is thus appropriated to appear as the power of capital over labour, or a "productive power inherent in capital" (p.451). The question of whether the relation between capital and labour is social in form has been addressed by some researchers. For instance, Thompson and Smith (2000; Also Thompson, 1989) are explicit in treating capital and labour as a social relation in their discussions of a theoretical core for Labour Process Theory;

*"Given the dynamics of exploitation and control, the social relations between capital and labour in the workplace are of "structured antagonism". At the same time, capital, in order to constantly revolutionize the production process, must seek some level of creativity and cooperation from labour. The result is a continuum of possible, situationally driven, and overlapping worker responses – from resistance, to accommodation, compliance, and consent" (Thompson and Smith, 2000: p.57)*

This argument for the social relation between capital and labour is tenable, until we attempt to unpack their referents, especially that of 'capital'. To start with, it would seem that these categories do jointly account for the issues of ownership and power relations. As Giddens (1973) indicates, these categories refer to a structure of class relations, denoting how certain groups of individuals stand in relation to ownership of the means of production and the subordination of one group to another. Similarly, for Bourdieu (1984), 'capital' refers to

embodied and “accumulated labour ... which, when appropriated on a private... basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour” (p.15). Marx (1867/1976), of course, also notes the exploitative quality of the capital-labour social relation, vividly arguing capital is “vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (p.342). However, as these quotes suggest, ‘capital’ is a multifarious concept. Particularly, as Harvey (2014) has indicated, capital is simultaneously both a ‘thing’ and ‘process’. As the former, capital assumes different forms such as commodities and the various means of production. However, capital can equally refer to the process by which money as a commodity circulates for the realization of profits (also, Marx, 1867/1976, Chapter 4). In sum, it would appear that the conceptual categories of ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ may be relevant, as far as these could account for social relations with respect to ownership and power relations. Beyond this, however, it is difficult to be analytically precise about what these categories constitute for theoretical purposes here.

Thus, what we are left with to consider is the social relation between ‘capitalist’ and ‘workers’. I would argue that this interpretation is tenable for two reasons. First, these conceptual categories can be construed as social roles that individuals may occupy, alongside a panoply of other roles (Harvey, 2010). As such, it is plausible to attribute these roles to individuals in productive activity. Second, these roles do jointly constitute a social relation, and to understand this, we need to consider the commodities that are exchanged between individuals given their ownership of the means of production (or lack thereof). To elaborate, one of these commodities is money, in the form of wages. The second commodity is ‘labour power’, which Marx (1867/1976: p.271) defined as “the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind”. Workers, without ownership of the



means of production, have no alternative but to sell to the capitalist their labour power – their capacity to work and produce commodities. The capitalist, on the other hand, who owns the means of production, purchases the labour power of workers and sets this to work in the labour process. This suggests that the capitalist-worker social relation is fundamentally one of exchange, and this facilitates the development of other arguments that follow.

One such argument is that the exchange of commodities between capitalists and workers – the exchange of wages for labour power – fetishizes and conceals the exploitative quality of the social relation between them. This is suggested by Himmelweit (1991: p.183), who indicates that the exploitation of workers by capitalists in the labour process occurs “behind the backs of the participants, hidden by the façade of free and equal exchange”. ‘Exploitation’ refers to capitalist appropriation of the surplus value that is produced by workers (Himmelweit, 1991). In the capitalist mode of production, this is possible because as Marx (1867/1976) argued, labour power is a commodity, but unlike others, is ‘peculiar’ in the sense that it *creates* value, such that the “socially necessary labour time” (p.129) that workers expend in the labour process is congealed or embodied within the commodities they produce. Further, labour power, as a commodity, also has a value, which Marx (1867/1976) defined as the “value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner” (p.274), or in other words, the value of the bundle of commodities required to maintain, sustain and reproduce the worker (Harvey, 2010). Labour-power is purchased by capitalists at its value in the foregoing sense, and paid for in the form of wages. However, production is organized by capitalists in a way such that workers reproduce not just the value of their labour-power, but a surplus, an “extra, unpaid-for value... [which is] the basis of profit [for capitalists]” (Choonara, 2017: p.30). The appropriation of surplus value, or exploitation, is made possible (in part) through capitalists’ efforts to extend the working day, which forces workers to labour for a duration that exceeds

what is necessary for them to reproduce the value of their labour power in the form of wages (Carchedi, 2017).

Further, exploitation is made possible through the asymmetrical power relations between capitalists and workers. The relation between them can thus be regarded as one of domination, in terms of the subordination of the mass of producers to a minority group based on relative differences between them in their ownership of the means of production. By some accounts, exploitation and domination in the capitalist mode of production are thus intertwined. For instance, Giddens (1973: p.36) suggests this where he notes that “classes emerge where the relations of production involve a differentiated division of labour which allows for the accumulation of surplus production that can be appropriated by a minority grouping, which thus stands in an exploitative relationship to the mass of producers”. The relationship between exploitation and domination is expressed more directly by Callinicos (1987: p.70), who, citing Marx’s writings in Volume 3 of *Capital*, argues that the former ‘explains’ the latter;

*“... One of Marx’s central claims is surely that exploitation explains domination, that, as he puts it in the passage from Capital volume III cited at the beginning of section 2.2, the ‘specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled’. This claim extends, not simply to political domination, but also to domination within production. That is, ‘the domination of labour’ by the exploiters occurs when it is a necessary condition for the appropriation of surplus-labour to take place.”*

The argument that domination and exploitation are intertwined in some respect at all is suggested by Marx (1867/1976: p.280) himself in the following quote prior to his discussion of the labour process:

*“When we leave this sphere of simple circulation or the exchange of commodities... a certain change takes place, or so it appears, in the physiognomy of our dramatis personae. He who was previously the money-owner now strides out in front as a capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to the market and now has nothing else to expect but a tanning.”*

Thus, and to summarize the arguments made so far, the capitalist-worker social relation is one of exchange, exploitation and domination. One other ‘quality’ of this social relation that should be highlighted here is that of ‘struggle’, and this may be explained in terms of the oppositional interests between capitalists and workers. To elaborate, the oppositional interests between both parties manifest, firstly, through the “establishment of a norm for the working day” or the “struggle over the limits of that day” (Marx, 1867/1976: p.344). Marx thus argues that on the one hand, it is in the interest of the capitalist to extend the length of the working day as much as possible, in order to “maintain his rights as a purchaser” (p.344) of labour power and reap the most benefit from its application in the labour process. Indeed, the capitalist has to do so, as he or she is “only capital personified... [and] has one sole driving force, the drive to valorize itself, to create surplus value [ie. profit]” (p.342). On the other hand, however, it is in the interests of workers as sellers of labour-power to “reduce the working day to a particular normal length” (p.344), in order to preserve their capacity to work for future applications. As such,

Marx (p.341) discusses how the ‘maximum limit’ of the working day is given not only by the “physical limits to labour power”, but also the worker’s need to “satisfy his intellectual and social requirements” that are in turn “conditioned by the general level of civilization”. Consequently, he argues (p.344), “an antinomy, of right against right” exists between capitalists and workers, and further, that “between equal rights, force decides”.

The emergence of the struggle between capitalists and workers can be expressed differently, where we consider other work in which Marx has discussed the opposing interests between both parties. In the pamphlet *Wage Labour and Capital* (1849/1999), Marx outlines how workers sell their labour power in return for a wage, as this enables them to purchase the commodities they need to maintain and reproduce themselves. In other words, without ownership of the means of production, workers have to sell their labour power “in order to live” (p.12). Labour power is sold to “another person in order to secure the necessary means of life”, and set to work in the labour process as the “active expression of the labourer’s own life”. Further, in the interest of securing their livelihoods, workers are ‘free’ in the sense that they may sell their labour power to any capitalist who requires use of it, but nonetheless constrained as they cannot abandon the sale of it and/or the ‘capitalist class’ as a whole. Marx (p.12) expresses this, noting the “labourer belongs neither to an owner [as under slavery] nor the soil [as in serfdom], but eight, 10, 12, 15 hours of his daily life belong to whomsoever buys them”. The worker may voluntarily leave the capitalist “as often as he chooses, and the capitalist discharges him as often as he sees fit”. However, the worker, “whose only source of income is the sale of his labour power, cannot leave the whole class of buyers, ie, the capitalist class, unless he gives up his own existence”.

Contrast this against the interests of the capitalist. For Marx (p.21), “capital can multiply itself only by exchanging itself for labour power... [and labour power] can exchange itself for capital only by increasing capital, by strengthening that very power whose slave it is”. Equally, capital “perishes if it does not exploit labour power, which, in order to exploit, it must buy”. The multiplication or expansion of capital that Marx refers to here – its ‘vampire-like’ quality – is indicative of the notion of accumulation, a central aspect of Marx’s analysis of the capitalist system (Choonara, 2017; Edwards, 1990). As Choonara (2017) indicates, accumulation is central to capitalism, because within it, commodities are produced for the wider market. Thus, whilst a division exists between capitalists and workers, another similarly exists between capitalists themselves. Capitalists are compelled to appropriate the surplus value workers produce (ie. to exploit them) and re-invest this into production for the extraction of more surplus value or profit, ploughing this back into production yet again in an unyielding, relentless drive to accumulate. It is in the interests of capitalists to do so – it is for the survival of their production processes – because they are in competition with other capitalists (Giddens, 1973). In the forgoing senses, Marx (p.26) remarks in *Wage Labour and Capital* that the “interests between capitalists and workers are diametrically opposed”, but also, notes the existence of a dependency relationship. Workers need capitalists in order to secure their livelihoods, but in needing them as such, simultaneously have to contend with their exploitation. On the other hand, capitalists need workers, whom they exploit, in order to secure the viability of their production processes. This oppositional but interdependent relation between capitalists and workers is another basis upon which class struggle emerges within capitalist society.

There is some need, therefore, to resolve the arguments put forward in this section. Earlier, it was argued that, in the form of appearances, the social relations between individuals in the

cases discussed may be conceptualized in terms of transformational leadership. From the descriptive findings of this study, it thus *appears* that MDs may be regarded as transformational leaders, inspiring, motivating and empowering employees as ‘followers’ to enhance their commitment, performance and organization performance overall (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2010). This is, of course, only one way to describe the transformational construct, and it is notable that amongst some prominent researchers, transformational leadership tends to be portrayed as the means through which the divergent, or at the very least, differing, interests between leaders and followers may be aligned. For instance, Burns (1978: p.20) suggests this, arguing it represents the means through which “leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality”. In doing so, the purposes of these individuals may begin as “separate but related”, but ultimately, “become fused”. Burns (1978) goes on to write that “power bases are linked not as counter weights but as mutual support for common purpose”. Similarly, Bass and Riggio (2006: p.3) note that the mutual development of both leaders and followers prescribed by the transformational construct is premised upon “aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization”.

Other researchers, however, have questioned mainstream approaches such as transformational leadership for tending to assume that the “interests between leaders and followers automatically coalesce” (Collinson and Tourish, 2015: p.577), and otherwise, are circumspect in claiming that they do at all (Collinson, 2011). For Spector and Wilson (2018), transformational leadership denies the possibility of conflicting interests between individuals as a basic constituent of organizational reality. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) have recognized this to some extent as well. According to these researchers, there may certainly be instances of shared interests between organizational members. This is perhaps clear from the descriptive findings

of this study, as organizational members across the cases work towards the shared goal of organization growth – the ‘object’ of activity. However, the variety of differences amongst individuals in terms of their gender, race, class, age, occupation or hierarchical positioning necessarily implicates a “multiplicity of actors, wills, interests and logics permeating complex organizations” (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: p.132) that need to be accounted for by researchers. In short, there is something to be made of the argument by Learmonth and Morell (2016), that “the leader/follower dualism is hard to read as anything other than a denial of... the structured antagonism between capital and labour” (p.10). More specifically, transformational leadership may certainly be relevant for understanding the concept of entrepreneurial leadership, but in the context of owner-managed SMEs, it potentially conceals and contradicts an underlying reality constituted by the capitalist-worker social relation, one that is characterized by exchange, exploitation, domination and struggle. This is a central contribution of this thesis and it is discussed again in the final chapter.

### 7.3. The Tools Mediating Activity

As discussed in Chapter 4, the notion of ‘tools’ has been outlined in various ways by Marx, Vygotsky and Leontev. For Vygotsky, ‘tools’ are central to psychological activity as ‘signs’ that mediate the relation between stimuli and responses. For Marx and Leontev, however, ‘tools’ are situated in the context of the labour process, mediating the relation between individuals and the object of labour. Leontev (2009) particularly argued that tools could be physical or social in form, and in the latter sense, “is the product of social practice and of social labour experience” (p.193). In more recent work, Adler (2007: p.1321) has drawn attention to how ‘tools’ may be construed as “techniques of work organization (such as the principles of bureaucracy, Taylorism or lean production)” that represent “a step towards more rational, conscious planning and management of large-scale, interdependent operations”. Following Adler (2007), ‘tools’ may be characterized as management practices more generally, but building on this, it may be argued that these serve contradictory ends. On the one hand, it is worth recognizing that management practices may be enabling, to the extent that these confer some benefits to individuals and organizations. On the other hand, however, these can equally be constraining, serving as a means of control that further entrench the relations of domination inscribed within the capitalist-worker social relation. At least two aspects of the descriptive findings discussed in Chapter 6 may be construed as tools – namely, hierarchy and empowerment – and the following discussion explores these further.

The argument that hierarchy can be construed as a management practice, and therefore a ‘tool’ in activity’, obtains relevance where we consider the work of Henri Fayol (Linstead et al, 2009). As discussed in Chapter 4, Fayol developed the notion of the ‘scalar chain’ when outlining his principles of management. Central to this is the practice of hierarchical organization, which



supplies the basis for organizational layering, reporting lines and the designation of authority to facilitate coordination and communications within organizations. As Child (2011) has argued, hierarchy, in at least one sense, serves as a technique of organizing and facilitating collective work or effort. According to this researcher, hierarchy may also provide individuals with a sense of belonging within their organizations, serving as a means to “create both collective order and personal sense out of what would otherwise be a chaotic and threatening world” (p.502). Fairtlough (2007), whilst setting out the alternatives to hierarchy, has also noted that it presents a “formidable list of advantages”, including “familiarity, naturalness, prevention of chaos, discipline, leadership, use of scarce talent, personal motivation, personal identity and clarity” (p.40). In all the aforementioned senses, hierarchy, as a management practice and ‘tool’ in activity, may thus be enabling for both organizations and the individuals within.

However, as Child (2011) has also argued, there is a pertinent need to question such justifications for hierarchy based on what it may achieve. As he writes, hierarchy can prove to be costly in organizations, protecting the interests of those in power and deflecting scrutiny from their activities. Child (2011) thus notes the wider social costs of hierarchy include lesser transparency, the breakdown of trust in organizational leaders and wider inequalities of wealth and power. Particularly, however, hierarchy can equally be constraining if construed as a means of control. The argument that hierarchy is for control certainly is relevant considering Marx’s (1867/1976) insights that it emerges within the capitalist labour process as the scale of cooperation increases. As such, it is the means by which certain individuals “command... in the name of capital” (p.450), allowing for discipline over workers and the work they perform (Brighton Labour Process Group, 1977). As limited and/or partial as they may appear in some instances, hierarchies are thus for “control and distinction, about allowing the few to decide for

the many, whether what they decide are the detailed rules... or the core values of the culture” (Linstead et al, 2009: p.225-226).

As discussed in Section 6.2, hierarchies are evident across all cases. In some instances, these are immediately evident from organizational structure charts (eg. *CommsInc*, *BuildInc* and *TechInc*), and otherwise, from respondent descriptions of their job titles, roles, the reporting lines amongst them, and indeed the kind of work initiatives in which they engage. From the descriptive findings, it appears that hierarchy is enabling in a few senses. For instance, hierarchy is arguably enabling as it provides a means for coordinating the different kinds of work individuals partake in, and as such, facilitates collective effort. This was suggested by the MD of *CommsInc*, for example, who noted how, in the past, the organization had been “*quite unstructured*” and “*just had people sort of dotted around doing different things*”. According to her, the implementation of a “*clear structure – there’s me and our office manager and then we have account managers who manage with an account executive if there was a new client*”, alongside the designation of teams to be assigned to new clients, thus allowed the organization to be “*structured for growth*”. The argument that hierarchy facilitates collective effort can similarly be made with respect to other cases. For instance, at *DigitalInc*, participants discussed how a ‘team structure’ was in the process of being implemented at the time of interviews, ultimately with team leaders reporting in to the MD. To this end, one respondent discussed how this would “*help with delivering service to clients as we grow and also just from an administrative perspective, it’s easier to manage if you know, yes, these three people work on this set of things and these three people work on this set of things.*” (DI\_OM). Similarly, the potentially enabling effect of hierarchy for facilitating collective effort was suggested by the MD where he discussed his own job responsibilities in the organization. He referred to one of these responsibilities broadly in terms of “*structure*”, and explained this further as follows;

*“So structure is making sure that everybody knows what they’re doing. Because what I’ve found throughout the years of running this company is the number one concern is never people not wanting to work, it is people not knowing what they have to do. So, being given a job, being given a task isn’t enough. It’s knowing how that task fits into the jigsaw. What are the pieces closest to that task? What do the other pieces of the jigsaw look like with relation to that piece of the jigsaw they’re working on? They don’t always need to see the full jigsaw. They need to have an idea of what that will look like. But they need to know what the pieces are surrounding that, so that they know where it fits.” (DI\_MD)*

The foregoing quote and ‘jigsaw’ analogy is useful, as it highlights how, in addition to being a means for facilitating collective effort, hierarchy can provide individuals with a sense of identity, in terms of where and how they ‘fit’ within the organization relative to one another. This was suggested in some interviews where respondents described the structure of their respective organizations in some detail. According to these accounts, individuals were seen to occupy hierarchical positions ‘at the top’, ‘below’ others, ‘in the middle’, or ‘out of the side’ of individuals or teams of individuals;

*“Broadly speaking, we have – I don’t know why I’m gesturing this [inaudible]. But broadly speaking, we have [DI\_MD] at the top as the M.D. and also, to be honest I think this might be more important, as our primary sales tool.... Directly below him is [DI\_OM], who recently had a title rename, I can’t exactly remember which, and who will be heading up one of the teams once the team split happens. She functions as one of the client handling managers. But she also functions as something of an overall advisor. Below her, you have [DI\_AM1], [DI\_AM2] and*

*[DI\_DEV], all of whom are client handling managers purely. Their job is to look over the sites, get familiar with what the customer needs, keep in touch with the customer, and so on and so forth... And they're all on a level but when the team split happens, [DI\_AMI] will be moved up and people will be moved into two different groups... Out of the side of that, there's me as the copy team, and anyone else who comes in to do the copy will also be out on the side..." (DI\_CW)*

*"[The organization structure] is kind of split into two, because you've got the two biggest employment sections of the business being, um, sales or corporate team under [TI\_ComD].... And then you've got the processing, because it is quite manually labour intensive, so you've got the warehouse team under [TI\_WD]... And the other bits in the middle, the other people in the middle of that tend to be the people who aid them. Um, so I'd say that the outside, the outside two on the chart that you've got in front of me are probably productive staff and the middle staff are probably your non-productive staff i.e. they don't, their daily work doesn't increase numbers of stuff sold or processed, but it aids everyone else in doing the business. Um, it seems strange because if you think if you look at [TI\_ComD's] department, you've got quite a number of people in there. So, 20 staff under [TI\_ComD]. So that's sales in. But then if you look at the sales out team... it's a much smaller team but obviously..." (TI\_CompD)*

Finally, hierarchy can be interpreted as enabling as it can instil a sense of ownership in the individual for their role and attendant responsibilities. This was suggested during the interview with the MD of *TechnInc*. According to him, the organizational structure, which he developed and implemented, presented clear demarcations or boundaries between the various functions,

such as finance, sales and IT. The MD therefore discussed how employees are clear on what they are responsible for, and are able to recognize when they must step up to attend to problems in their area of work;

*“Um, I’ve developed that structure myself. And I’ve taken no notice of anybody else’s structure on purpose because I find that if you do, you sometimes can be influenced and you should do what you think is right... I believe that every single person on that list, you can understand very quickly for somebody coming from the outside, like yourself, who’s got no experience of this business, you can see that... finance speaks for itself. Systems speaks for itself. Sales speaks for itself. And they own it, you know... [So] there’s not much that falls between the gaps. I think if you throw a problem in the air, one of them would instantly grab it because they’d know it was theirs... You know, if I sat there and say, ‘We’ve got a problem with this’ at the nine o’clock meeting, the person that I would expect to come up and say, ‘That’s mine, I’ll take it. I’ll come back to you’. And we always say, ‘This time tomorrow’. So, it’ll be like, ‘I’ll take that [TI\_MD] and I’ll be back to you this time tomorrow’.”*

*(TI\_MD)*

Hence, hierarchy can be enabling in the foregoing senses. To summarize, it provides a means for coordinating the different kinds of work individuals partake in and facilitates collective effort, provides individuals with a sense of identity, in terms of where and how they ‘fit’ within the organization relative to one another, and can instil a sense of ownership in the individual for their role and attendant responsibilities. However, the counter-argument here is that hierarchy is predicated upon the centralization of authority within the organizations. Indeed, to a considerable extent across the cases, it is the means by which the ‘object’ of activity is defined

for staff respondents. MDs thus assume the responsibility for prescribing the specifics of what is to be achieved in the production of growth as an object or a commodity, by establishing objectives relating to revenue, employee numbers and EBITDA targets, all of which staff respondents appear to unquestioningly orientate themselves towards (perhaps especially in the case of *TechInc*). In the sense thus described, hierarchy in the cases can indeed be seen as a means of control, constraining in itself, as it allows for discipline over workers and the work they perform.

The second aspect of the descriptive findings that is relevant for discussion here is the issue of empowerment. In the more prescriptive literature, there is very little consensus as to what the concept means (Wilkinson, 1998), although researchers do agree that individuals and organizations can benefit from it in practice. For example, Humphrey (2014: p.242) has observed that empowerment can represent “a set of management practices” taking different forms including self-managed teams, and a means by which greater autonomy can be extended towards workers. Bowen and Lawler (1992) have outlined different approaches towards empowerment – job involvement, suggestion involvement and high involvement. These are seen to convey various benefits, as employees may be more responsive towards customers, or derive greater satisfaction and meaning from their work. Some have also advanced theoretical work. According to Conger and Kanungo (1988), empowerment can be conceptualized in two ways – first, as a relational construct, wherein power, as the possession of authority and control over resources, is shared by managers with their subordinates; or second, as a motivational construct and a means to enable employees and enhance their efficiency. Conger and Kanungo (1988) favour the latter view, arguing the former is too limiting. These researchers thus offer a lengthy definition of empowerment as a process, which to paraphrase, involves enhancing organizational members’ self-efficacy by removing inhibiting conditions.

In the aforementioned ways, empowerment may be construed as a management practice that can confer various benefits upon individuals and organizations. However, researchers of a more critical persuasion have also argued that empowerment practices can be associated with managerial attempts to engender changes in different forms, “from the mechanistic (involving structural change) to the more organic (concerned with attitudes/culture)” (Morrell and Wilkinson, 2002, p.122; also, Wilkinson, 1998). Particularly, some have argued that empowerment is equally representative of a means of control. For instance, Hardy and Leiba O’Sullivan (1998) have argued that the concepts of power and empowerment are inextricably interlinked, but literature on the subject has tended to marginalize the former (eg. Conger and Kanungo, 1988). To address this problem, Hardy and Leiba O’Sullivan (1998) provide a four-dimensional framework to illustrate and explain how power operates through practices of empowerment. One of these dimensions are of interest here in this discussion, and it concerns the argument that within organizations, employers fundamentally retain the discretion to decide whether, how and/or the extent to which employees may be empowered at all. In these terms, empowerment practices can appear to be “less a redistribution of power and more like a reconstitution of it” (Morrell and Wilkinson, 2002; p.122).

As per the discussion of findings in Section 6.3, empowerment is a central feature of organizational life for staff respondents across all cases, with the exception of *SecurityInc*. From the descriptive findings, one potentially enabling function of empowerment is that it fosters creativity and innovation. This applies especially in the case of *DigitalInc*, where innovation is regarded as “*one of the big ethos*” (DI\_AM2) for the organization. The MD foregrounded the importance of this, indicating “*we want to always be thinking of new ways of thinking, and asking why, you know, why are we doing things this way?... Let’s change that.*” Innovation is fostered in the organization “*both by prodding people to have ideas about things*

*and just naturally trying to recruit people who are interested in being better*”, or “*putting an emphasis on the fact that we want people to be able to ask ‘why’*” (DI\_OM). Employees discussed how they are empowered to be innovative as they are encouraged to “*come up with our own ideas... [and] ways of implementing them*”, or encouraged “*to question [DI\_MD]’s ideas on the hope that the net idea that comes out at the end of that will be stronger for it*” (DI\_CW). For one of the Account Managers at *DigitalInc*, the experience of being empowered to innovate was suggested in the MD’s willingness to entertain novel ideas, no matter how preposterous they might be, and explore potential ways of operationalizing those ideas (DI\_AM1).

Aside from this, empowerment may be construed as enabling in the sense that staff respondents are able to work relatively autonomously, making decisions as necessary within the context of their individual role and responsibilities. At *TechInc*, for instance, all functional directors indeed suggested a sense of empowerment in their respective roles, particularly with respect to making decisions in their own areas of responsibility. One respondent expressed how the MD had “*created a management style that everyone knows that they can do what they need to do to get the job done and is allowed the leash to be able to do that*”, although staff are “*accountable should it not perform*” (TI\_CompD). This was similarly acknowledged by other directors and staff respondents at different hierarchical levels of the organization, such as those in the sales, accounts and warehousing functions (see Data Structure 1.2). Similarly, in the case of *BuildInc*, empowerment is key for the organization, as according to the MD, “*it’s very important that everybody is empowered to deliver what we want them to*”. In relation to this, staff respondents discussed how they were able to formulate their own plans of work prior to discussing it with the MD (BI\_BDL), or develop the scope of the job role and responsibilities jointly with the MD (BI\_CL).



As this would suggest, however, the decisions on whether and the extent to which staff should be ‘empowered’ at all is made at the discretion of the MDs themselves. MDs thus expressed, for example, how they “*want everybody to be, feel that whatever it is that their role is, that they should own it and they should make as many decisions as they can on their own*” (TI\_MD), or alternatively, how it is important that “*everybody is empowered to deliver what we want them to*” (BI\_MD). As such, control is exercised over employees’ access to decision-making processes and responsibilities. For employees, access to decision-making responsibilities remains at the level of their individual jobs, whilst control over wider organizational imperatives remain at the discretion of the MDs themselves. In the foregoing sense, acts of empowering the workforce, of providing autonomy to employees, or access to decision-making responsibilities within the context of their roles, can be regarded as an enactment of organizational hierarchies. Empowerment is predicated upon the centralization of authority, through which access to and involvement in decision-making processes are determined by a minority for other organizational members.

#### 7.4. Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has aimed to provide a discussion of the descriptive findings from this study, re-contextualizing those within the theoretical frame developed in Chapter 4. In doing so, I have provided three sets of arguments in order to articulate how ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ may be theoretically expressed as an ‘activity’ – one that is object-driven, mediated by social relations and tools, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process. To this end, I firstly argued that it is plausible to interpret organization growth as the ‘object’ of the activity of entrepreneurial leadership. In the form of appearances, organization growth is the ‘object’ as it embodies the true motive, or meaning and purpose of this activity, and is simultaneously given, socially constructed, contested and emergent. Also in the form of appearances, the ‘object’ of growth is a commodity, and may potentially be expressed in terms of use and exchange values. In the course of its production, growth is fetishized to appear as a ‘thing’ to producers, rather than a product of their labour, and the social relations involved in its production are concealed.

Second, the discussion centred on using Marx’s concepts of cooperation and the division of labour as a means to explore the descriptive findings and analyse the social relations mediating the activity of entrepreneurial leadership. In doing so, I argued that the cooperative power of employees, expressed in already existing social structures, is made to appear as the power of MDs over them. MDs do so by claiming the responsibility for designating organizational cultures of team-working. This suggests a division of labour, between the MDs who take responsibility for designing the organization, and how employees relate to the organization. In at least three of the cases, the design of organizations is indeed informed by the production and

application of scientific and/or technical knowledge, derived from business coaching services and academic programs.

I further argued that across the cases, the social relations between individuals may potentially be interpreted in at least two ways – first, between leaders and followers, in terms of transformational leadership; and second, between capitalists and workers. The former was problematized in certain ways, and the latter, explored in terms of the relational dynamics between both parties. Consequently, it was argued that transformational leadership may be relevant for understanding the concept of entrepreneurial leadership, but in the context of owner-managed SMEs, it potentially conceals and contradicts an underlying reality constituted by the capitalist-worker social relation, one that is characterized by exchange, exploitation, domination and struggle.

Third, the discussion focused on the kinds of ‘tools’ that mediate the activity of entrepreneurial leadership. For this thesis, ‘tools’ are characterized as management practices more generally, and as both enabling and constraining. Two aspects of the descriptive findings were interpreted in these terms – namely, hierarchy and empowerment. Hierarchy can be regarded as enabling because it provides a means for coordinating the differentiated work of individuals and thereby facilitates collective effort, provides individuals with a sense of identity, in terms of where and how they ‘fit’ within the organization relative to one another, and can instil a sense of ownership in the individual for their role and responsibilities. Empowerment can be regarded as enabling, as it may potentially foster creativity and innovation, or facilitate autonomy at work whereby individuals can make decisions as necessary within the context of their role and responsibilities. However, the counter-argument is that both can be regarded as a means of control and therefore constraining. Hierarchy is predicated upon the centralization of authority

within organizations, allowing for discipline over workers and the work they perform. Empowerment is similarly predicated upon the centralization of authority, through which access to and involvement in decision-making processes are determined by a minority for other organizational members.

The following chapter moves to conclude this thesis – I discuss the provisional nature of these findings in terms of study limitations, along with how the main research question has been addressed, research contributions, and recommendations for further research.

## 8. Conclusion

In this final chapter, I complete the thesis by discussing a few issues. To begin with, I provide a summary of how the main research question has been addressed. I then build on this by offering a more detailed discussion of the main contributions of this study to research on entrepreneurial leadership. This is followed a discussion of the theoretical and methodological limitations of my work in order to provide a critical appraisal of it, and subsequently, some recommendations for further research are further articulated. I close out this thesis with some final thoughts on the PhD process and what I will take away from it.

### 8.1. Addressing the Research Question

The research question underpinning this thesis was developed and articulated based on the literature review presented in Chapter 3. I will use this section of the concluding chapter to summarize how the question has been addressed, before expanding on this with a detailed discussion of the contributions of the thesis. To reiterate, the research question for this study was, *what are the implications of ownership for understanding the concept of entrepreneurial leadership in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises?* Broadly, the first implication is that a focus on ownership in studies of entrepreneurial leadership can allow us to explore and critically interrogate the form and salience of leadership in SME organizational contexts. In other words, the focus on ownership allows us to question dominant understandings in the extant literature – that entrepreneurial leadership is about individual heroics, suggested by traits, behaviours or competencies, or the generation of positive outcomes at the individual, group or organizational levels. Instead, findings from this thesis suggest that a focus on

ownership in SME contexts can sensitize the researcher to the ways in which respondents interpret their experiences with leadership in their organizational lives, especially where these are framed in positive ways, leading to the problematization of those interpretations. In doing so, a focus on ownership can sensitize the researcher towards exploring the multiple, overlapping and potentially contradictory forms of social relations between individuals in SME contexts.

A second implication is that the focus on ownership in the study of entrepreneurial leadership can sensitize the researcher towards exploring power relations between individuals in SME contexts. Findings from this study suggest that ‘power’ in owner-managed SME contexts can be interpreted in terms of relations of domination, whereby a majority of individuals are subordinated to a minority grouping given the relative differences between them in their ownership of the organization as private property. In the context of this thesis, ‘power’ in these terms was explored and illustrated through the hierarchical structuring arrangements that were a consistent feature across all the organizations. Whilst hierarchy can be interpreted as being enabling in a few senses, it can equally be construed as a means of control, in terms of exercising ‘power over’ others. As it was discussed, hierarchy is predicated upon the centralization of authority, whereby the few decide for the many, with regards to issues such as organizational goals, culture, or access to and involvement in central decision-making processes within the organization.

A third implication is that a focus on ownership allows us to fundamentally re-conceptualize ‘entrepreneurial leadership’. As such, it allows us to problematize the argument in the existing literature that entrepreneurial leadership is about individual heroics, and instead, facilitates a re-articulation of the concept. Findings from this study suggest that entrepreneurial leadership

may be regarded as an activity that is object-driven, mediated by social relations and tools, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process. Understanding entrepreneurial leadership in this sense is valuable as it allows us to account for ownership and its relational implications. For instance, it allows us to explore how certain individuals may possibly assume multiple roles as ‘leader’ and ‘capitalist’, and others as ‘follower’ and ‘worker’. As such, ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ can be re-articulated as a form of ‘doing’ – it is an activity – oriented towards the production of some *thing* (ie. the object and commodity) and made possible by other *things* (ie. the tools and social relations mediating that activity).

## 8.2. Contributions of this Study

The four contributions of this study are discussed in the following sub-sections. In doing so, the discussion draws on material presented in the different chapters of this thesis, and as such, I provide explicit signposting to these chapters where necessary. The initial three contributions are theoretical in form. First, I discuss the articulation of entrepreneurial leadership as an ‘activity’ that is object-driven, mediated by social relations and tools, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process. Second, I discuss the implications of this study for the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and organization growth that has been discussed in the literature. Third, I discuss the relevance or significance of the transformational leadership construct for conceptualizing entrepreneurial leadership where owner-managed SME contexts are concerned. The fourth and last contribution of this study is methodological in form. I discuss the implications of my research for considering the issue of context when studying entrepreneurial leadership.

### 8.2.1. The Activity of Entrepreneurial Leadership

As discussed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.6), much of the existing research on entrepreneurial leadership has prioritized a focus on the individual, informed by concepts and theories such as entrepreneurial orientation, opportunity, transformational leadership, authentic leadership and situational leadership. Entrepreneurial leaders are thus regarded as different from ‘others’, given their abilities to identify and build on opportunities for new ventures, demonstrate ‘transformational’ behaviours, influence employee or organizational performance through some brand of authenticity, or detect contextual changes and adjust their behaviours accordingly. Some researchers have further explored the traits, skills and competencies, or explored the question of education, learning and development with respect to individual entrepreneurial leaders. Some have also sought to explore the concept of gender, but with respect to individual women entrepreneurial leaders. Certain researchers have indeed attempted to buck this trend of individualism, advocating more collective or relational approaches towards studies of entrepreneurial leadership (Sklaveniti, 2017; Cope et al, 2011). However, such work resides on the margins given the dominant focus on the individual.

I have further argued that this dominant focus on the individual implicates a heroic approach to the study of entrepreneurial leadership. This is deeply problematic, as it imposes a narrow conception of what entrepreneurial leadership can possibly refer to and may undermine attempts to think about the concept in alternative ways (Alvesson, 1996; Learmonth and Morrell, 2016). Particularly, I have argued that we do not know enough of how context can inform our understanding of the concept of entrepreneurial leadership, and more specifically, of how ownership can influence the form of social relations within SME contexts – social relations concerning leadership or otherwise. A focus on context more broadly is indeed



justifiable, given that this is seen to be especially pertinent in the study of entrepreneurial leadership (Harrison et al, 2015; Leitch and Volery, 2017) and the constituent disciplines more generally (eg. Zahra, 2007; Jackson and Parry, 2011). A focus on ownership is especially pertinent, as this may, for instance, enable us to evaluate the significance of ‘leadership’ in SME contexts. Additionally, a focus on ownership can facilitate further understanding of power relations. Some researchers have indeed called for the examination of power in studying entrepreneurial leadership, albeit in terms of gendered analyses (eg. Harrison et al, 2015; Stead and Hamilton, 2018). However, more broadly, and much like ‘mainstream’ leadership studies (Collinson, 2011), the question of power has not been explored by researchers yet. With reference to these issues, I advanced the main research question for this thesis, inquiring about the implications of ownership for understanding entrepreneurial leadership in the context of owner-managed SMEs.

To this end, the first contribution of this thesis is represented by the theorization of entrepreneurial leadership as an ‘activity’. To explain this in the simplest possible terms, entrepreneurial leadership as an ‘activity’ can be understood as a form of ‘doing’, which arguably, is implicit in many definitions of the concept in the extant literature. For instance, Renko et al (2015: p.2) define entrepreneurial leadership in terms of “influencing and directing the performance of group members toward the achievement of organizational goals that involve recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities”. For Wang et al (2012: p.507), it refers to “the ability to influence others to manage resources strategically in order to emphasize both opportunity-seeking and advantage-seeking behaviours”, whilst Leitch and Volery (2017: p.148) define it as the “leadership role performed in entrepreneurial ventures”. In this thesis, entrepreneurial leadership can similarly be regarded in the most basic sense as a form of ‘doing’, but particularly, as an ‘activity’ that is object-driven, mediated by social relations and

tools, and contextualized within the capitalist labour process. This theorization is informed by analyses of interviews conducted with organizational members of SMEs, but additionally, my readings of the dominant conceptualization of ‘activity’ (Engestrom, 1987, 2000, 2001), awareness of debates associated with this (eg. Nicolini, 2012; Avis, 2007; Warmington, 2008), and readings of Marx (1867/1976), Vygotsky (1978) and Leontev (1978, 1981/2009).

This theorization of entrepreneurial leadership as an activity is a contribution because, firstly, it allows us to account for the issue of ownership. Fundamentally, this is given by contextualizing entrepreneurial leadership as a mediated activity *within the capitalist labour process*. In this labour process, individuals can be regarded as occupying different roles due to the commodities they exchange entering into it. As discussed in Chapter 7 (see Section 7.2), one of these commodities is money, in the form of wages, whilst the other is labour power, or the capacity to work. Certain individuals, without ownership of the means of production, are compelled to sell on their labour power to certain others. These latter individuals, who do own the means of production, purchase labour power that is set to work in the labour process. Theoretically framing entrepreneurial leadership as an activity within the capitalist labour process is therefore central, as this enables one to account for the issue of ownership and the relational implications of this.

Secondly, this theorization of entrepreneurial leadership as an activity is a contribution, because it facilitates an understanding and problematization of the social relations that are constitutive of entrepreneurial leadership as a mediated activity within the capitalist labour process. In this thesis, as discussed in Chapter 7, leader-follower relations may be relevant, considering my interpretations of respondents’ accounts of their experiences with leadership. In the context of SMEs, some individuals may certainly be construed as empowering others,

leading them, and being ‘transformational’ in their efforts to do so. However, such interpretations can be problematized in certain ways, and claims about leadership can be difficult to sustain where alternative interpretations of social relations are considered. Particularly, the findings of this study suggest that, in the context of owner-managed SMEs, ownership can predetermine an individual’s right to lead, the ways in which they lead, the ways in which they are perceived to lead, or the ways in which others perceive they are led. If ownership is this relevant, then perhaps the concept of leadership has limited value – it is meaningless, conceptually vacuous, and we are better off without it where the concept of entrepreneurial leadership is concerned. Alternatively, we may take our cues from Marx (1867/1976: p.451) to assert that the “leadership of industry is an attribute of capital” – that within the capitalist labour process, certain individuals lead because they assume the role of ‘capitalist’ given their ownership of the means of production.

Third and lastly, the theorization of entrepreneurial leadership as an activity is a contribution, because it facilitates an understanding of the asymmetrical power relations associated with the social relations engendered through private ownership. This understanding is possible through, for example, the discussion of the kinds of ‘tools’ that mediate the activity of entrepreneurial leadership. For this thesis, ‘tools’ are, at least in part, the means of control that further entrench relations of domination between capitalists and workers. As discussed in Chapter 7 (Section 7.2), relations of domination are central to the capitalist-worker social relation of the labour process, given individuals’ differentiated ownership of the means of production. As I also discussed (Section 7.3), organizational hierarchies and the practice of empowerment are both more or less common across all the organizations studied for this research. Both hierarchy and empowerment can be interpreted as the ‘tools’ of activity in this study – the former provides the centralization of authority, is the means by which the ‘object’ of activity is defined for

workers, and consequently, the means by which their work and behaviours with reference to the 'object' are rendered calculable. The latter, empowerment, can equally be construed as a means of control. Directors retain control over wider organizational imperatives, whilst restricting employees' decision-making responsibilities to the scope of their individual role and responsibilities.

### 8.2.2. Entrepreneurial Leadership and Organization Growth

The argument that organization growth is an outcome of entrepreneurial leadership has been made in empirical research conducted in the subject area. In some instances, the link between entrepreneurial leadership and organization growth as an outcome has been framed implicitly. For instance, Chen (2007) has suggested that entrepreneurial leadership can stimulate the creativity of teams in the context of small and/or medium-sized new ventures. In turn, this may enhance the capabilities of those organizations to innovate and produce potentially lucrative patents. In other research, Gupta et al (2004) have argued that entrepreneurial leadership is fundamentally premised upon strategic entrepreneurship. This can enable the development of practices or processes that underpin a "basis for competitive advantage and technological growth in all types of firms that are oriented towards leadership excellence in the new global economy" (p.243). According to Gupta et al (2004), entrepreneurial leadership thus involves the interrelated activities of scenario and cast enactment. Entrepreneurial leaders envision possible opportunities to "revolutionize the current transaction set, given resource constraints" (p.247), and assemble the actors necessary for the achievement of desired objectives.

In other instances, the link between entrepreneurial leadership and organization growth has been framed more explicitly. For example, Swiercz and Lydon (2002) have argued that entrepreneurial leaders must develop the appropriate mix of functional and/or self-competencies to navigate the different phases of growth that new organizations face. According to Zaech and Baldegger (2010), leadership drives new venture performance in terms of sales growth, and founding CEOs must therefore adapt their behaviours to the context for organization success. For McCarthy et al (2010), entrepreneurial leaders with ‘an open leadership style’ that “demonstrate the essence of transformational and authoritative leadership” can more effectively secure competitive advantages and grow their organizations in volatile business environments. Environmental volatility or ‘dynamism’ has especially been explored by some researchers. For instance, Ensley et al (2006) have argued that transformational behaviours may be more impactful on the sales growth and revenue of new ventures in volatile business environments, whilst transactional behaviours can be more impactful in benign ones. Huang et al (2014) have suggested there is a link between entrepreneurial leadership and the growth potential of new ventures, but this is moderated by the volatility of the external environment.

As such, and according to the foregoing researchers and empirical articles, entrepreneurial leadership invariably drives organization growth. However, given the dominant focus of the literature, organization growth is portrayed primarily as an outcome of individual effort. This recalls the bias towards the individual in entrepreneurship and leadership research, which some have indeed sought to problematize (see Section 2.1.3 for a fuller discussion of this). Particularly, some researchers have reminded us that conceptions of leadership unproblematically linking the individual to outcomes can potentially be regarded as misattributions of causality. For instance, Pfeffer (1977) has noted the dearth of evidence

concerning the effects of leaders on organizational outcomes. In doing so, he argued that leadership is a phenomenological construct, and attributions of causality towards leaders may be grounded in a belief that individual actions are more controllable than contextual variables. For Meindl et al (1985), leadership is romanticized when it is assumed that the individuals or activities associated with it can influence organizational outcomes. As they argue, this stems from an attributional bias, as individuals choose a preferred interpretation when making sense of highly complex events.

With the foregoing discussion in mind, the second contribution of this study is also to the literature on entrepreneurial leadership. This study contributes with the argument that organization growth is the product of human labour, rather than the ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ of an individual in terms of traits, behaviours and/or competencies. The basis for this contribution resides in the theoretical frame discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis, and discussion of the descriptive findings in Chapter 7. To summarize the theoretical grounds, I argued that the ‘object’ of activity may firstly be regarded in a form of appearances, in terms of the meaning, motive or purpose that satisfies needs. Equally, in the form of appearances, the object is a commodity, consisting of use and exchange values that may stand in a contradictory relation to each other. In this form of appearances, however, the object and commodity are both fetishized, such that the social relations inherent to their transformation or production are concealed and mystified. Underpinning this conceptualization is the argument implicit to Marx’s notion of fetishism – that appearances and reality are rarely, if ever, perfectly aligned or synonymous and so we must venture beneath the surface of things to understand them further (Harvey, 2014; Callinicos, 1983).

Informed by this conceptualization, I argued that the ‘object’ of the activity of entrepreneurial leadership can be regarded as organization growth. From the descriptive findings, it thus appears that for research participants, organization growth embodies the “true motive” (Leontev, 1978: p.98) or “meaning, motive and purpose” of activity (Engestrom and Keruoso, 2007: p.337), and is “simultaneously given, socially constructed, contested and emergent” (Blackler, 2009: p. 27). Additionally, the re-contextualization of the descriptive findings suggest that as the object, organization growth may also be construed as a commodity with a dual form. Growth is useful, in so far as it motivates or secures the commitment of employees. For it to be useful as such, it must be spoken of in ways that signal certain qualities such as ambition, aggression, dominance and competition. It could thus be argued, therefore, that the use value of growth is premised upon rhetorical appeals – ways of persuading or influencing – that motivate or secure the commitment of organizational members. Additionally, growth has an exchange value, as it may be monetized for the benefit of shareholders and/or to finance business operations. Further, it is possible to argue that there is a relation between these use and exchange values - without such rhetorical appeals that secure commitment, exchange cannot occur. If one does not appeal to another in certain ways, one cannot extract commitment or effort from the other, and it is consequently difficult to realize the exchange value of growth by monetizing it.

The potential limitations of these interpretations were also acknowledged, especially concerning the relation between the use and exchange values of growth. Nonetheless, based on the descriptive findings, it was argued that organization growth, in production as a commodity, is fetishized – it appears as a ‘thing’ to producers, rather than a product of their labour, and the social relations involved in its production are concealed. Organization growth thus appears to respondents in terms of the different objectives relating to revenue, employee numbers,

EBITDA and social impact targets that they collectively strive towards. However, growth is a product of human labour, and does take the form of asymmetrical social relations between producers. For instance, and to a considerable extent across the cases, the ‘object’ of activity is defined for staff respondents by the MDs themselves. MDs thus prescribe the specifics of what is to be achieved in the production of growth as an object or commodity, and staff respondents largely unquestioningly orientate themselves towards this. As such, it is not the ‘entrepreneurial leadership’ of an individual which drives organization growth, but the work of people. Organization growth is the product of human labour, and social relations that are asymmetrical in form. Some recommendations for further research on this are discussed later in this chapter.

### 8.2.3. Transformational Leadership and Entrepreneurial Leadership

As discussed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.4.1) of this thesis, and reiterated in Chapter 7 (see Section 7.2), transformational leadership can be regarded as a central theoretical resource for researchers studying entrepreneurial leadership. For example, Gupta et al (2004) have argued that the commonality between transformational and entrepreneurial leadership lies in the individual’s ability to “evoke superordinate performance by appeals to the higher needs of followers” (p. 245). Findings from a study conducted by McCarthy et al (2010) suggest that, within a sample of Russian entrepreneurs, an “open style... consistent with the characteristics of transformational leadership – educating, inspiring, energizing and exuding charisma” (p.55) are overwhelmingly evident. These researchers suggest that this may potentially be consistent across countries and cultures. Renko et al (2013) have sought to conceptualize entrepreneurial leadership in terms of some of the four ‘I’s of transformational leadership - idealized influence,



inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. For these researchers, intellectual stimulation is central, as entrepreneurial leaders “seek new ways of working, seek opportunities in face of risk, and are not likely to support the status quo” (p. 4) in order to engage their followers.

The centrality of transformational leadership is further evident in examples of research informed by situational approaches to leadership, as discussed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.4.3). For instance, Ensley et al (2006) have argued that transactional approaches are more effective in benign environments when leader behaviours are “more routine” (p.259) and geared towards maintenance functions. In contrast, these researchers suggest that transformational approaches are more effective in dynamic environments and times of crisis. In their study of small Chinese manufacturing firms, Wang et al (2012) have argued that the strategic focus of the firm determines the choice between transactional and transformational approaches. Zaech and Baldegger (2017) have similarly explored both approaches in the context of new ventures. These researchers suggest founder-CEOs must be able to adapt their leadership behaviours to the situation to be most successful.

This study offers a contribution to this body of literature by critically evaluating the significance of transformational leadership for understanding entrepreneurial leadership in the context of owner-managed SMEs. Particularly, in Chapter 7 (see Section 7.2), I argued that in the context of owner-managed SMEs, transformational leadership potentially conceals and contradicts an underlying reality constituted by the capitalist-worker social relation, one that is characterized by exchange, exploitation, domination and struggle. To summarize that discussion, the interpretations of respondents’ accounts tend to suggest that transformational leadership may be relevant for understanding the social relations between them. MDs may be

regarded as transformational leaders – they act as role models, inspiring, motivating and empowering employees as ‘followers’ to enhance their commitment, performance and organization performance overall (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2010). However, this can be problematized, because of the possibility of impression management on the part of some respondents. Additionally, the applicability of transformational leadership can be problematized because it potentially imposes relatively specific ways of thinking about the social relations between individuals, whilst discounting or marginalizing the relevance of others (Learmonth and Morrell, 2016).

Thus, in Chapter 7, I argued for a way to account for the foregoing issues without undermining the importance of respondent accounts, the descriptive findings and transformational leadership. To do so, it was suggested that transformational leadership could be relevant, but only in the form of appearances. It is relevant given the interpretations of respondent accounts provided in the descriptive findings, but there is a need to consider the underlying reality that such appearances potentially conceal. Underpinning this is my ontological commitment outlined in Chapter 5 of this thesis – the contradiction between reality and appearances implicates a need to explore the latter further (Harvey, 2014; Callinicos, 1983). What emerged from the discussion in Chapter 7 was that transformational leadership potentially conceals the social relations between capitalists and workers in the context of owner-managed SMEs. Further, transformational leadership potentially contradicts the capitalist-worker social relation in a certain way. Particularly, in mainstream theorizing, transformational leadership tends to be portrayed by some researchers as the means through which the interests between leaders and followers may be aligned (Burns, 1979; Bass and Riggio, 2006), a point that has been noted and contested by some researchers (eg. Collinson, 2011; Collinson and Tourish, 2015; Spector and Wilson, 2018). In contrast to this, the capitalist-worker social relation can be regarded as

being inflamed by a tension of interests. This, for instance, stems from a struggle over the length of the working day, or alternatively, from the exploitative quality of the capitalist-worker social relation.

Thus, and to reiterate, transformational leadership may be relevant for understanding the concept of entrepreneurial leadership, but in the context of owner-managed SMEs, it potentially conceals and contradicts an underlying reality constituted by the capitalist-worker social relation, one that is characterized by exchange, exploitation, domination and struggle. More broadly, this contribution is significant, as it problematizes the concept of transformational leadership and its relevance for understanding entrepreneurial leadership. In the literature, transformational leadership has arguably been deployed in ways that contribute to the heroic lustre of entrepreneurial leadership. Findings from this study suggest that transformational leadership could be relevant given the ways in which respondents discussed their work/leadership experiences and relationships. However, this ‘talk’ can be problematized in certain ways, and more importantly, the theoretical frame and Marx’s insights remind us that private ownership generates a certain specific form of social relations that may overlap, conceal and contradict those associated with leadership.

There is potentially a question concerning the plausibility of the underlying reality, and it may help to address this here in terms of the different ‘qualities’ of the capitalist-worker social relation. First, the topic of employment contracts was not explored during the research interviews. However, all five cases are commercial organizations, and as such, employees would presumably have some form of contractual relationship with their respective employers. Exchange relations between these parties could be plausible. Staff respondents sell their abilities to work to business owners in exchange for wages. Second, relations of domination

are perhaps especially plausible, given the discussion of ‘tools’ in Chapter 7 (see Section 7.3). Hierarchy represents the centralization of authority, and to a considerable extent across the cases, is the means by which the ‘object’ of activity is defined for staff respondents. MDs thus prescribe the specifics of what is to be achieved in the production of growth as an object or commodity, and staff respondents largely unquestioningly orientate themselves towards this. Empowerment can similarly be regarded as a way in which asymmetrical power relations manifest between respondents. As I argued, it is similarly predicated upon the centralization of authority, through which access to and involvement in decision-making processes are determined by a minority for others.

Third, the interview material certainly did not generate insights related to the issue of exploitation. However, this should not suggest that the issue is to be discounted or dismissed entirely. Indeed, Choonara (2017) has made some important points in this regard. As he argues, exploitation is central to the capitalist mode of production, a “universal condition” (p.32) for it, as it drives the generation of surplus value or profit. According to Choonara (2017), the degree of exploitation may vary spatially and/or temporally. However, it is misguided to think that British workers are less exploited than their counterparts in ‘developing’ countries, as it is possible that the former generate more surplus value than the latter for every unit of wages earned. Last, interview material did not explicitly suggest themes or issues that could be interpreted in terms of the ‘struggle’ between capitalist and workers, for instance, in terms of the lengthening of the working day. The issues of struggle and, to a relatively lesser extent, exploitation, are therefore perhaps harder to substantiate and defend than exchange and domination.

#### 8.2.4. Context in the Study of Entrepreneurial Leadership

It was argued in Chapter 3 of this thesis that existing research on entrepreneurial leadership has neglected to consider how context may inform our understanding of the concept. Particularly, I argued we could benefit from more knowledge of how context influences the ways in which leadership is practiced, enacted and construed by organizational actors within SME environments. Indeed, it was discussed in Section 3.1 that a key problem with the research is a lack of specificity concerning the kinds of organizations to which entrepreneurial leadership applies. Researchers have thus applied it towards studies in a variety of contexts, and for some, entrepreneurial leadership “is not specific to any type of organisation, industry or culture and can flourish in different settings” (Leitch and Volery, 2017: p. 148). Some research on entrepreneurial leadership has accounted for context, but in a limited or partial way. Particularly, research informed by situational approaches to leadership (see Section 3.4.3) has indeed considered the various dimensions of context relating to new and small organizations, such as culture or environmental dynamism. However, this body of work has tended to confine theoretical and analytical perspectives to how context influences individual leader behaviours. Further, such research has tended to present dichotomized analyses, drawing attention to how leaders ‘switch’ between either transformational or transactional behaviours depending on the changes in their environments.

This study contributes to the literature on entrepreneurial leadership by offering an understanding of how context can be operationalized and explored empirically in this area of research. As discussed in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.5), my approach was to operationalize the work of Porter and McLaughlin (2006). Participants were asked questions relating to organization scale in terms of turnover and employee numbers, business activities and

demographic composition (ie. age, gender, ethnicity). They were also asked for their perceptions on organizational goals, structure, culture and espoused values. By raising these sorts of questions and following up on responses, I sought to draw out accounts and perspectives that would enable me to develop rich descriptions of the organizations and various issues of interest. The second section of the interview schedule focused on the issue of leadership. I asked about their experiences with leadership in their organizations, and for examples of leadership they had experienced in work. These questions were designed to ensure that respondents could freely offer their thoughts without me leading them. Overall, the approach that was taken was valuable, as it enabled me to focus on participant interpretations, compare their perspectives on different organizational issues, develop rich accounts of their organizational lives, and critically interrogate the form and salience of ‘leadership’ in SME contexts (as discussed in Section 7.2, for example).

In this approach, this thesis adds to the small number of articles that have studied entrepreneurial leadership qualitatively, engaging with owner-managers and employees of SME business contexts. From the review of literature that was conducted (see Chapter 3), it would appear that just three studies have been configured as such thus far. These are studies by Kansikas et al (2010), Wang et al (2012) and Harrison et al (2016). Of these three, this study is perhaps most similar to the one by Wang et al (2012). In their research, Wang et al (2012) have indeed sought to “capture the complex context of entrepreneurial leadership” (p.517). These researchers designed their interview schedules to understand founders’ backgrounds, the development of the organization, the organizational context (eg. organizational values, strategic orientation, etc.), and the wider context that the organization operates within. Interviews were conducted with founders and managers in two different Chinese high-technology ventures.

My study is similar in these respects, but different where analytic frameworks are concerned. Wang et al (2012) performed content analysis on their data set, developing an analytic framework to guide them from the outset of this process. This framework included a “three-by-four matrix encompassing leadership styles (ie. transactional, transformational and situational leadership) as one axis and leadership contexts (ie. personal, organizational, national cultural and transitional contexts) as the other axis” (p.517). In my study, analysis was guided with a set of sensitizing concepts, none of which were associated with leadership theories. As discussed in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.6), some of the concepts were more factual and descriptive in nature, and referred to aspects of the cases such as employee numbers, business revenue, business activities, clientele, service areas and demographic compositions. Other concepts were more interpretive, and focused on participant interpretations of various issues, such as organizational values, vision, culture, structure, goals, reputation and decision-making processes.

This approach was valuable for my research process, as at the initial stages of analysis, I was able to ‘hold off’ interpretations of the data in terms of established leadership concepts and theories. This was necessary, given the range of critical literature or ideas on the topic of leadership with which I was familiar (eg. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Collinson, 2011, 2014, 2017; Ford, 2006; Grint, 2005a; O’Reilly and Reed, 2010; Stead and Elliot, 2009). Arguably, the avoidance of established leadership concepts and theories – such as transactional, transformational or situational leadership – in the initial stages of the analytic process prevented individualized, essentialist, gendered, racialized and romanticized (or, otherwise, ‘heroic’) interpretations of the data. The descriptive findings that were generated from this process, and the re-contextualization of these findings, then enabled me to problematize the use of leadership theories and concepts in the study of entrepreneurial

leadership, leading to one of the principal contributions of the research (see Section 8.1.2). Having discussed the four contributions of this study in detail, I offer critical appraisal of my work next.

### 8.3. Critical Reflections on Study Limitations

As indicated in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.2.4), I recognize from a critical realist philosophical position the provisional nature of the arguments generated regarding my interpretations of the data and descriptive findings of this study. As such, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of what I have done, as far as I am aware of them. Some of these are theoretical in nature, others methodological, and I will offer critical reflections on these issues in the following discussion.

With regards to the former, the first limitation possibly relates to my arguments concerning the ‘object’ – organization growth. Overall, and as discussed in Section 7.2, I argued growth can be construed as a commodity with a dual form of use and exchange values, and is fetishized in production. I recognize some of these arguments are potentially flawed and may certainly be problematized. For instance, commitment to organizational causes may be secured in other ways, albeit not always successfully (Kunda, 1992), and it is plausible that organization growth itself, never mind its monetization, may not be realized without rhetorical appeals that secure motivation. Aside from this, it is worth recognizing some have acknowledged how commodities are produced *for the wider market* (Choonara, 2017; Dunne 2011). Reflecting on the theoretical findings of this study, a question may be raised as to whether the use value of a commodity may plausibly be inferred outside the sphere of exchange. I do therefore recognize



that my interpretations in respect of use and exchange values may be problematized. However, and despite these issues, organization growth, rather than organization services or the organization form itself, does appear across the cases as the ‘object’ of activity. It does appear to be what respondents collectively strive towards, and therefore can be seen to represent the meaning and motive of their activity. Particularly, I do think my arguments concerning its fetishism in production are warranted. Growth does arguably appear to its producers as a ‘thing’, rather than in terms of the social relations between them in production.

Second, my arguments concerning the social relations that mediate the activity of entrepreneurial leadership may be questioned. For instance, I should acknowledge that the capitalist-worker social relation does not perhaps apply to all cases. The exception is potentially the case of *BuildInc*, as at the time of interviews, the MD did not indicate he had an ownership stake in the business. Moreover, I recognize as well that the manager-worker social relation may be valid, if the discussion of descriptive findings moved beyond the frame of reference used in Section 7.2 (ie. the definition of ‘management’ provided by Cunliffe, 2009). Business owners do ‘manage’ the daily affairs of their organizations in one way or another, and as such, it would have been valuable to explore and problematize at least a triad of social relations – namely those between leaders/followers, managers/workers, and capitalists/workers.

In the context of the discussion presented in Section 7.2, another potential criticism is that aspects of my re-contextualization of the descriptive findings over-estimate employee, or ‘worker’, solidarity. This possibly occurs in two instances – first, in the argument that staff respondents’ capabilities to cooperate already exist in the form of social structures, and second, where I suggest that their interests as ‘followers’/‘workers’ are homogenous and opposed to those of ‘leaders’/‘capitalists’. Furthermore, the exploration of the social relations that mediate

the activity of entrepreneurial leadership in this thesis may certainly have explored the issues of gender and power more substantively, issues that have been of interest to a number of critical researchers working in the topic area. This could have for instance involved exploring the extent to which organisations' imperative to grow, or the commodification of organisation growth, are representative of masculinized ideals or discursive representations that dominate over agents of capital.

A third theoretical limitation may potentially be identified in my use of Activity Theory. To the extent that the object, social relations and tools of mediated activity are contextualized within the capitalist labour process, a question may be asked as to why I did not just draw on Labour Process Theory in the first place. Indeed, what I have formulated, advanced, and used to interpret my descriptive findings may be viewed with some cynicism as 'old wine in a new bottle'. This is fair, but I would counter that Labour Process Theory itself appears to be a deeply contested set of ideas, as evidenced by the dialogue between Thompson and O'Doherty (2011), for example, and it does not seem that any kind of reasonable consolidation has been achieved despite attempts to articulate a theoretical core for it (eg. Thompson and Smith, 2000). Moreover, Activity Theory did appear to me to represent a means to engage with Marx's theoretical ideas in a more systematic way, beginning with the concept of the 'object'.

Finally, the potential methodological limitations of the study should be discussed. I believe that my methodological choices are appropriate and I have discussed these as transparently as possible. However, in developing the thesis and the research, it may have been relevant to explore potential biases on my role as a researcher. For instance, it could have been interesting to explore how the professional context I was a part of (the Department of Management Learning and Leadership) shaped the development of my interest in critical approaches.

Further, it would have been interesting to explore how this context shaped my role as a researcher, in terms of how my choice of philosophical positioning was developed, data was collected or analysed, or the theoretical context utilized. Indeed, this professional context was influential in many ways and further exploration of such issues would have been worthwhile.

Moreover, the chosen research techniques may have been complemented in certain ways. For example, interviews represented the primary means of collecting data, but there is a question of whether multiple follow-up interviews with participants would have been beneficial, in terms of ascertaining the relative durability of their perceptions regarding various interview themes or changes to the organization (especially, for instance, the issue of organization growth). I did try to conduct multiple interviews in the initial stages with respondents from *CommsInc* for example, but this was difficult due to drop-outs. After conducting a follow-up interview with the MD of the organization, I contacted staff for the same, only to learn that those based in the Lancaster office were to be made redundant that month. Multiple interviews could have precipitated a longitudinal design, a methodological choice that many entrepreneurship researchers may perhaps advocate. This could have been useful in this study perhaps for elaborating on the temporal qualities of the theoretical frame. However, this design was difficult to implement given the intended timeline of the project – I was quite committed to completing the project within five years of starting as a part-time PhD student, in the midst of other professional and personal commitments, and a longitudinal study would have kept me in the field for longer than possible.

#### 8.4. Recommendations for Further Research

A number of recommendations for further research are plausible following this study. For instance, this study focused on for-profit SMEs as a means to understand and explore the concept of entrepreneurial leadership, but further research could productively explore how individuals in other contexts experience leadership. Such contexts may include social enterprises wherein attempts to balance profit imperatives against social aims could potentially reveal interesting insights about leadership processes. Particularly, I would suggest exploring the organizational contexts of cooperatives and employee-owned businesses. These are of course a minority, compared to the traditional form of enterprise that is owned and managed by individuals or relatively smaller teams. However, successful access and empirical work in such organizations could facilitate richer understandings of how the equal or more symmetrical distribution of ownership impacts the way in which individuals organize themselves, act entrepreneurially, experience leadership, or perhaps draw attention to a different configuration of social relations between them. Further, such empirical work may potentially facilitate the conceptualization or theorization of ‘ownership’ itself, which through my research, appears to me to be under-theorized in the study of entrepreneurship.

Further research could elaborate on the theoretical frame developed through this thesis. For instance, more empirical work could be conducted to explore how the object of entrepreneurial leadership as an activity may be alternatively conceived, perhaps in terms of the social (re)production of labour power (Warmington, 2008), or as ‘runaway’ objects that have the capacity “to escalate and expand to a global scale of influence”, in positive and negative ways (Engestrom, 2009: p.304). Considering organization growth as an object and commodity, there is scope to explore how individuals in SME settings give meaning to the salience of it, the

multi-faceted use and exchange values that may be attributable to such meanings, how these values stand together or against each other and the consequences of this for organizations and their members alike. There is potential to explore the forms of labour associated with the notion of organization growth as a product of human labour. Such research would undoubtedly benefit from other techniques such as observations and longitudinal designs. Additionally, there is room to explore the mediated nature of activity further, perhaps in terms of how language and discourse mediate the activity of entrepreneurial leadership as ‘tools’, and potentially, the implications of this.

## 8.5. Final Thoughts

I will use this final section of the thesis to briefly offer some reflections and consider some implications of my work. To start with, I think it is worth recognizing that completing this PhD has been a valuable and fascinating journey in many ways. I was recently thinking back to when I started it, and what prompted me to take this path in the first place. To my memory, at the very outset, doing a PhD appeared to be a way to express some degree of creativity and imagination, and maybe apply my interest in writing. I have received, however, much, much more from the journey. I have had the opportunity to be part of a stellar institution in a wonderful city, work alongside and learn from talented academics, work with an inquisitive lot of students, and engage with the local business community. Whilst doing so, I have been able to develop and express my independence as a researcher – learning the craft of research, developing my writing, thinking and problem-solving skills, setting goals and timelines for a project which I own, and working under pressure to meet those, for instance. This journey has been punctuated with ups and downs, but through all of this, I have been fortunate to encounter the work of various writers and researchers, some of whom appear to me as intellectual giants in their respective fields. Much of this work has served to challenge, repudiate and sometimes reinforce the ways in which I think, and in many instances, introduce new ways for me to think about research issues in which I take an interest.

In all these ways, completing this PhD has been incredibly stimulating. Approaching the end of it, however, has led to a more sobering realization. Namely, that there are certain structures and patterns that can condition us to think and behave in certain ways, operating almost insidiously at times without our knowledge. Particularly, capitalism is arguably very much a part of the different fabrics of society we experience and witness. Many aspects of our social

worlds may plausibly be explained with reference to it – from the managerialism that is sometimes rampant within our institutions, to their untrammelled growth ambitions, to the social and income inequalities inherent within them, to the precarious work experienced by many, and indeed, our notional understandings of ‘work’. From this vantage point, it is difficult to rest satisfied with critiques of individuals or collectives and what they do, investigating asymmetrical power relations, the extent to which these may be gendered and/or racialized, the kinds of identities that are produced and maintained or shift over time, or the kinds of organizational practices that make these things possible. Such issues are of course relevant and important for research, and the kinds of social (dis)order we experience and witness ought to be laid bare.

However, and to paraphrase Marx, we make ourselves not just of our own volition, but in a context and circumstances that are given to us, and if these are to lurch from crisis to crisis taking us with them (as some would argue), it seems appropriate and important that they are equally taken to task. PhD study has thus been eye-opening, but it has also provided me with the awareness that there is much left to understand and uncover. It has made me aware of the extent to which academic concepts and the phenomena they relate to may be problematized and explored in alternative ways, and I look forward to opportunities for doing more of such work on my path ahead wherever that leads.

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## **Appendix 1 – Participant Information Sheet for Owner-Manager**

### ***Title of the Study***

A study of leadership amongst owner-managers and employees within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The aim of the study is to investigate how owner-managers and full-time employees of SMEs understand and experience leadership within their organizations. To this end, I am particularly interested in a few themes, namely the career backgrounds of owner-managers and employees, their work activities and views on the organizational context, and their understanding and experiences with leadership and related issues.

Your views and your colleagues' on the topic will be valuable for academia, namely as existing research has focused exclusively on individual leaders within organizations ranging in size and form. For participants, the findings may illustrate the quality and complexity of leadership relationships in their organizations, thereby offering scope for professional and organizational development. Upon completion of the study, an anonymized report of research findings can be made available to all participants, if this is requested.

### ***Design of the Study***

Data will be collected from participants through one-to-one interviews in two separate stages, each lasting approximately one hour. In the first stage, interviews will focus on your career background, present organization, role and responsibilities, work relationships, and views on leadership and related issues. The second stage will be conducted approximately three months later, and will explore changes in regards to the themes explored in the first stage.

### ***Why have I been invited to participate?***

You are invited to participate as your views and experiences are of substantial value to the study given your role as an owner-manager of SME.

In addition, I request permission to contact four full-time employees within your organization for their voluntary participation as well, as their views will be similarly valuable for the study. A similar information sheet and consent form will be provided to these individuals to ensure informed consent.

### ***What does study participation involve for me?***

Study participation is voluntary. All interviews will be conducted on a one-to-one basis with me, and through means and at locations that are convenient for and preferred by you.

It is expected that each interview stage will last for approximately one hour. After the two interview stages are completed, follow-up interviews may be requested if there are questions that have arisen through the data collection process. If you agree to participate, I will contact you to discuss any further queries you have and fix an appointment for our first interview.

### ***Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?***

All information from participants will be kept strictly confidential. Interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder for transcription purposes. Prior to transcription, the digital recorder will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet which only I have access to. The audio recordings will be transcribed by me, and participants will be offered the opportunity to read and comment on the interview transcripts. Once confirmed, the audio recordings will be destroyed.

All transcripts will be stored securely as encrypted files on a password-protected computer, and only I will have access to this. All Identifying data, such as the names of organizations and participants, will be treated as

confidential and anonymized where it is used in the final PhD thesis, publication of academic journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, organization reports and presentations delivered by me. The data will be retained for ten years upon completion of the study, after which it will be destroyed.

***What if I decide I no longer wish to participate?***

You may withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw within four weeks after the commencement of interviews, the data collected during and relating to your participation will be destroyed and not used in the study. However, data will be retained for study purposes if you decide to withdraw after four weeks, as it would already have been anonymised and analysed for study purposes.

***Declaration of Funding***

This research project is partly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, United Kingdom.

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## **Appendix 2 – Participant Information Sheet for Employee**

### ***Title of the Study***

A study of leadership amongst owner-managers and employees within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The aim of the study is to investigate how owner-managers and full-time employees of SMEs understand and experience leadership within their organizations. To this end, I am particularly interested in a few themes, namely the career backgrounds of owner-managers and employees, their work activities and views on the organizational context, and their understanding and experiences with leadership and related issues.

Your views and your colleagues' on the topic will be valuable, namely as existing research has focused exclusively on individual leaders within organizations ranging in size and form. Also, findings from the research may benefit the everyday practices of owner-managers and employees by understanding and explaining the issues of interest with respect to the organization within which they are situated. Upon completion of the study, an anonymized report of research findings can be made available to all participants, if this is requested.

### ***Design of the Study***

Data will be collected from participants through one-to-one interviews in two separate stages, each lasting approximately one hour. In the first stage, interviews will focus on your career background, present organization, role and responsibilities, work relationships, and views on leadership and related issues. The second stage will be conducted approximately three months later, and will explore changes in regards to the themes explored in the first stage.

### ***Why have I been invited to participate?***

You are invited to participate given your role as a full-time employee within an SME. Given the purpose of the study, as outlined above, it is expected that your views and experiences are of substantial value to this study.

### ***What does study participation involve for me?***

Study participation on your part is voluntary, even if the owner-manager of your organization has agreed to participate. All interviews will be conducted on a one-to-one basis with me, and through means and at locations that are convenient for and preferred by you.

It is expected that each interview stage will last for approximately one hour. After the two interview stages are completed, follow-up interviews may be requested if there are questions that have arisen through the data collection process. If you agree to participate, I will contact you to discuss any further queries you have and fix an appointment for our first interview.

### ***Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?***

All information from participants will be kept strictly confidential. Interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder for transcription purposes. Prior to transcription, the digital recorder will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet which only I have access to. The audio recordings will be transcribed by me, and participants will be offered the opportunity to read and comment on the interview transcripts. Once confirmed, the audio recordings will be destroyed.

All transcripts will be stored securely as encrypted files on a password-protected computer, and only I will have access to this. All Identifying data, such as the names of organizations and participants, will be treated as confidential and anonymized where it is used in the final PhD thesis, publication of academic journal articles,

book chapters, conference papers, organization reports and presentations delivered by me. The data will be retained for ten years upon completion of the study, after which it will be destroyed.

***What if I decide I no longer wish to participate?***

You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you decide to withdraw within four weeks after the commencement of interviews, the data collected during and relating to your participation will be destroyed and not used in the study. However, data will be retained for study purposes if you decide to withdraw after four weeks, as it may already have been anonymised and analysed for study purposes.

***Declaration of Funding***

This research project is partly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, United Kingdom.

***Contact information of the researcher and supervisors:***

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### Appendix 3 – Participant Consent Form

Please initial box

- 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the named study and have had the opportunity to ask questions about it
- 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw within four weeks after the commencement of interviews
- 3. I agree to participate in the study

Please tick box

Yes

No

- 1. I agree to the interview being audio recorded for transcription purposes
- 2. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications and data being published that does not reveal my identity
- 3. I agree that all data will be stored securely and destroyed ten years after the study ends

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Name of Participant

---

Date

---

Signature

---

Name of Principal Investigator

---

Date

---

Signature

## Appendix 4 – Summary of Organizations and Respondents

Organization	Respondent		Interview Details	
	Role	Identifier	Date/Time	Duration
CommsInc	Managing Director	CI_MD	17th Mar 2016, 10am	0.42
			30th August 2016, 3pm	0.30
	Senior Account Manager	CI_SAML	22nd Apr 2016, 2pm	0.31
	Account Executive	CI_AE	22nd Apr 2016, 3pm	0.39
	Senior Account Manager	CI_SAMB	28th Apr 2016, 10am	0.22
	Office Manager	CI_OM	29th Apr 2016, 3pm	0.22
SecurityInc	Managing Director	SI_MD	6th Apr 2016, 11am	1.26
	Senior Manager	SI_SMHR	5th May 2016, 11am	0.56
	Senior Manager	SI_SMM	3rd May 2016, 2pm	0.56
	Senior Manager	SI_SMOM	26th May 2016, 12.30pm	0.44
BuildInc	Managing Director	BI_MD	1st Jul 2016, 10am	0.46
	Biz Devpt Leader	BI_BDL	26th Jul 2016, 11am	0.56
	Office Manager	BI_OM	26th Jul 2016, 10am	0.20
	Senior RLO	BI_CL	11th Oct 2016, 10am	0.40
	External Consultant	BI_EC1	20th Oct 2016, 11am	0.20
	External Consultant	BI_EC2	26th Oct 2016, 2pm	0.20
DigitalInc	Managing Director	DI_MD	24th Oct 2016, 11am	1.00
			12th June 2017, 2pm	
	Account Manager	DI_AM1	24th Oct 2016, 2pm	0.24
	Copywriter	DI_CW	24th Oct 2016, 3pm	0.27
	Account Manager	DI_AM2	24th Oct 2016, 4pm	0.14
	Operations Manager	DI_OM	31st Oct 2016, 12pm	0.31
	Developer	DI_DEV	31st Oct 2016, 1pm	0.18
TechInc	Managing Director	TI_MD	14th June 2017, 11am	1.18
	Compliance Director	TI_CompD	14th June 2017, 1pm	0.46
	WH/Distro Director	TI_WD	14th June 2017, 2pm	0.23
	WH Team Manager	TI_WTM	14th June 2017, 3pm	0.31
	Systems Director	TI_SyD	15th June 2017, 10am	0.27
	Commercial Director	TI_ComD	15th June 2017, 11am	0.39
	Finance Director	TI_FD	15th June 2017, 12pm	0.18
	Account Manager	TI_AM	15th June 2017, 1.30pm	0.23
	Systems and Ops Support	TI_SyS	19th June 2017, 3pm	0.09
	Ops Director	TI_OD	19th June 2017, 12pm	0.40
	Broker Sales	TI_BS	19th June 2017, 1.45pm	0.15
	Ops Assistant	TI_OA	19th June 2017, 2pm	0.12
	Finance Assistant	TI_FA1	15th June 2017, 2.30pm	0.15
	Finance Assistant	TI_FA2	15th June 2017, 3pm	0.13
Sales Director	TI_SaD	19th June 2017, 1pm	0.32	

Table 6: Summary of Organizations and Respondents

## Appendix 5 – Interview Schedule for Owner-Managers

Tell me about your career background prior to this company? (*To probe – Previous work places, roles, responsibilities*)

Tell me about how this business was founded?

Was there a particular vision for the company prior to starting up?

- If yes, how would you articulate this vision? Who was responsible for it? How has it changed today? Why has this changed?
- If no, why was it the case? How did this impact the business in the early stages? Is there one now?

Tell me more about the business itself

- What are the key business activities?
- Who are your main clients?
- What regional areas do you serve?
- Could you roughly indicate the annual turnover of the company?

How many people work in the business? What kinds of work do they do? What kinds of qualifications are usually required at the point of hiring? How would you describe the gender and ethnic mix of staff?

What's it like to work in the company? (*probe for perceptions on organizational culture/climate*)

How would you describe the goals of the company?

- Who has been responsible for setting these? How have these been articulated to employees? How have staff responded to these?
- If no goals, why is this so?

How would you describe the values of the company? (*Prompt with examples if required – eg. ethics, diversity, pro-activeness, risk-taking, innovation, creativity, change*)

- Have these been made explicit to staff? How have staff responded to these?
- If no values, what do you make of that? Should such values be encouraged/sustained?

How would you describe the company's reputation? How would clients describe the company's reputation?

Do you report to anyone in the company? If yes, tell me more (probe for name, role, frequency of interactions, quality of interactions); How much autonomy do you have in your work?

Who reports directly to you in the company? If yes, tell me more (probe for name, role, frequency of interactions, quality of interactions); How much autonomy do you have in your work?

What are your own job responsibilities? Are these responsibilities shared by anyone else in the business? If yes, how so? If not, why?

Tell me more about how decisions are made in the company? (*Probe for specific examples*)

How would you describe your relationships with your employees? (*probe for example of situation*)

Do you think you have any commitments to the employees in the company?

- If yes, what are these? Why?
- If no, why not?

Do you think the employees have any commitments towards you?

- If yes, what are these? Why?
- If no, why not?

What kinds of projects have you been recently involved in? (*Probe for responsibilities, tasks, duration, co-workers, general thoughts on experience*)

Would you regard yourself as a leader in the company?

- If yes, how so? How would you want your employees to relate to you as a leader in a work situation? Why?
- If no, why not? How would you want your employees to relate to you in a work situation?

Could you tell me about a recent experience at work where you think you provided leadership? How did your employees respond to this leadership you provided? How did this impact the work that you were involved in at the time?



## Appendix 6 – Interview Schedule for Employees

Tell me about your career background prior to joining this company (*To probe – Previous work places, roles, responsibilities*)

What prompted you to join this company?

Are you aware of any goals that are in place for the company?

- If yes, what are these? How have these been articulated to you? Who has been responsible for setting these? How do you generally feel about these?
- If no, how do you feel about that? Would it be worthwhile to have goals in place? Why?

Is there an emphasis on any kinds of values? (*Prompt with examples if required – eg. ethics, diversity, pro-activeness, risk-taking, innovation, creativity, change*)

- If yes, how would you articulate these values? Who has been responsible for making these explicit? How have these been made explicit to you? How do you generally feel about these?
- If no, how do you feel about that? Would it be worthwhile to have such values in place? Why?

How would you describe the company's reputation? How do you think your clients, customers or suppliers view the company?

What's it like to work here? (*Probe for perceptions on organizational culture/climate*)

Are you involved in decision making processes in the company? If yes, tell me how so? (*Probe for specific examples*)

Do you report to anyone in the company?

- If yes, who? What's their position in the business? How frequently do you interact? How would you describe the quality of your interactions? How much autonomy do you have in your work?

Does anyone report directly to you in the company?

- If yes, who? What's their position in the business? How frequently do you interact? How would you describe the quality of your interactions? How much autonomy do they have in their own work?

What are your own job responsibilities? Are these responsibilities are shared by anyone else in the business? If yes, how so? If not, why?

How would you describe your relationship with the owner-manager? (*probe for example of situation*)

Would you say you have any commitments towards your employer?

- If yes, what are these? Why?
- If no, why not?

Do you think the owner-manager has any commitments towards you?

- If yes, how so? What are these? Why?
- If no, why not?

What kinds of projects have you been recently involved in? (*Probe for responsibilities, tasks, duration, co-workers, general thoughts on experience*)

Would you regard the owner-manager as a leader in this business?

- If yes, how so? How would you want the owner-manager to relate to you in a work situation? What would you do in response?
- If no, why not? How would you want the owner-manager to relate to you in a work situation? What would you do in response?

Could you tell me about a recent experience at work where you felt the owner-manager provided leadership? What did you do in response? How did this impact the work you were involved in at the time? What kind of impact did this have on the business?

## Appendix 7 – Data Structures

### 1.1. Hierarchy

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
Org Handbook		Organizational Structure		Organizational Hierarchy	Hierarchy (CommsInc)
		Job titles			
		Reporting lines			
CI_MD	"I hope to grow a bit"	Expanding the business	Growth orientation		
CI_MD	"I hope to grow a bit"	Attributing to self			
CI_MD	"I signed up with a growth accelerator coach just before the government scratched the scheme"	Being coached for expansion			
CI_MD	"so I'm working with him at the moment to set up some goals for the next couple of years where we will reach a million turnover and sort of be on that"	Setting expansion objectives			
CI_MD	"the idea being that as we grow we'll give people monetary rewards when we do win big contracts. And also potentially I'm looking at sort of share options and things like that."	Planning for buy-in			
CI_OM	"[CI_MD] wants to, you know, wants to grow the business to reflect that we're working with, within new sectors."	Attributing growth orientation to MD	Developing Organization Culture		
CI_MD	"I try, and it is difficult, but I try to create an environment where we are hard working but we also have lots of fun"	Crafting culture			
CI_MD	"Ah, something we're still working on really, you know that's part of the reason for working with this business coach. I think honesty and transparency"	Crafting values	Enactment of Hierarchy		
CI_AE	"I suppose like because it's a small company, and it's very much sort of [CI_MD's] company, she is the decision maker, she, if she wants something doing, I imagine it would be happening, because it's her company, it takes her direction."	Attribution of decision-making authority			
CI_AE	"I just had a one-on-one interview with [CI_SAML] that lasted about half a day I think, or a good few hours... And then a written exercise which completed... She was very, very happy with it, and then she rung me to say they did, she... they liked me, they were very interested, but she didn't feel comfortable making the decision on her own because she was quite new to, this would be her first time managing for the company. So [CI_SAML] asked for a, arranged me to go for a second interview with [CI_MD] and I met the two of them. That was more a sort of relaxed, we went to a café, had lunch, and essentially [CI_MD] was just getting a feel for me and what I was like as a person, rather than actually interviewing me. And once she'd met me, and was happy with, you know felt like I seem a good, good person, I'd be able to do the job, they just offered it to me..."	Decision-making Processes - Example			
CI_SAML	"Well, all of it really is driven by [CI_MD] we're not really asked to make decisions in the company, certainly not from my point of view, I'm not asked to make the decisions, she decides and then it kind of happens even down to my own position. I was made, I was an account manager when I started with her and then I became a senior account manager, but that wasn't really a discussion that we had, I was just kind of made a senior account manager and told it was going to happen and that's kind of how we kind of ran with it. So there isn't a lot of mutual discussion or decision-making or consultation, the decision's made and it happens and then you contribute to that"	Decision-making Processes - Example			
CI_AE	"[CI_MD] when it comes to recruiting is quite happy to email the team and go, 'does anyone have any expertise with recruiting, any knowledge they could share, any way we could push this better?' So whenever we're trying something new, I always get the impression [CI_MD] looks into the team and what we could all contribute..."	Decision-making Processes - Presence of consultation			

CI_SAMB	<i>"Usually, it would probably start off as conversations between senior managers in the business, our MD, the owner or account director and perhaps myself talking about ideas and whatever we need to think about and coming up with a kind of a coherent plan really at that initial stage, and then once we've got a bit of an idea about what we really want to go with that, there'll be a case of most of our weekly meetings, communicating the ideas to say, 'hi clients, we're thinking about this, what does everyone, you know, what does everyone think in response to that', and then from there it's some dialogue really to ensure that everyone's opinion is listened to, and then, you know, from the initial idea, someone else might have an additional idea that really kind of lets it fly. So in the first instance when we're thinking about things, it would probably be yeah, the senior team, and then as and when decisions are implemented, or prior to that, more and more people onboard to have a talk about it..."</i>	Decision-making Processes - Presence of consultation			
CI_OM	<i>"First of all I'll do some research, and then once a month I'll have a monthly catch-up with [CI_MD] and propose to her a new idea that I might have or a new system that I want to implement and discuss that, and then you know I'll also discuss things with people in the office, like what's working, what's not working to... I'd say it's a collaborative way of working, I think would be my sort of conclusion, working in theatre, working collaboratively, I think we apply that same methodology to work at the company"</i>	Decision-making Processes - Presence of consultation			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
DI_MD	<i>"There's me and then there's [DI_OM] who is the operations manager. And then there's the client relationship managers. And they will delegate out to implementers or to junior developers."</i>			Organizational Hierarchy	Hierarchy (DigitalInc)
DI_AM1	<i>"[DI_MD] is a gifted salesman... None of the other people in the office could do it. So, there's a very sensible reason why he's at the top. Other than that, everyone beneath [DI_OM] is kind of on the same plateau. There are some differences between the copy staff and the non-copy staff, and also the dev staff, because dev and copy, kind of, sit outside what we do. They're necessary but they're not underlings, they're not subordinate to us. They're just the people who help us do things."</i>				
DI_OM	<i>"But in terms of hierarchy, it essentially goes: [DI_MD] at the top, then me, then account managers with [DI_AM1] at the head of that, because he's being pulled up into a team leadership position, and then kind of everyone else"</i>				
DI_CW	<i>"Broadly speaking, we have [DI_MD] at the top as the M.D... Directly below him is [DI_OM] who recently had a title rename, I can't exactly remember which... Below her, you have [DI_AM1], [DI_AM2] and [DI_DEV], all of whom are client handling managers purely.... And they're all on a level but when the team split happens, [DI_AM1] will be moved up and people will be moved into two different groups. Out of the side of that, there's me as the copy team, and anyone else who comes in to do the copy will also be out on the side. There's our technical guy. And again, as more technical people are brought in, that department will expand. And there's [name] who oversees projects, proposals, processes and scheduling. And basically, keeps everything running fairly smoothly."</i>				
DI_AM1	<i>"it's very communicative in the way that we work. Nobody has ultimate authority. Although technically [DI_MD] could stomp on all of our ideas if he wanted to, he just doesn't."</i>				
DI_CW	<i>"We have a table of organization, we have a hierarchy, but it's deliberately a loose one with a lot of feeds both ways, kind of thing."</i>				
DI_AM2	<i>"I'd say it's quite flexible. There's not a particularly, it's not very like a strict hierarchy at the moment... it's not like a boss and then the people underneath and people underneath. The responsibility is just kind of shared out. And people who are good at certain things do those things. And people who are better at things, do the other things."</i>			Enactment of Hierarchy	
DI_MD	<i>as the company grows, we have a growth plan for 1.4 million by 2020. And we want to get to 20 employees by 2020. The reason that it's been somewhat slow growth is because I want it to be organic and sustainable. And that sustainability is our belief in how, you know, the world should be – sustainable, you know.</i>	Expanding the business	Growth orientation		
DI_MD	<i>Yeah, we've seen a phenomenal growth. And it's due to things like LEAD. It's due to things like me repositioning myself to work on the business, not in it. To be able to strategically look at what everybody's doing.</i>	Attributing growth orientation to self			
DI_MD	<i>one of my reasons for starting this company and for creating these futures for the team, who I never call employees. Well, I try to refrain from calling them employees. And I never ever call them staff. I think staff is a demoralising word, it creates a hierarchical structure that doesn't need to be there. Team - we are a team.</i>	Crafting culture	Developing Organization Culture		
DI_MD	<i>"I want [the organization] to be a brand in and of itself... [The organization] will have its own brand, and the brand will be the people. And it will be a place that people want to work"</i>	Org vision			
DI_MD		Attributing org vision to self			

DI_MD	"Personalisation, innovation, commercialisation, knowledgeability, longevity and efficiency."	Org values			
DI_MD		"it is six words that encompass exactly what we stand for as a company"			
DI_MD	"we managed to work around it and we got six values down. And you know, I tailored that to some degree, but I made it so that they were their values. They decided. And it actually, we're trying to create a better word out of it, but an acronym for that is PICKLE."	Attributing org values to self			
DI_MD	We're restructuring at the moment to create teams. So that's why we're recruiting at the moment to create two teams – a team A and a team I. Not a team A and a team B. Because that would create - or not a 1 and a 2 - because that would create a distinct subdivision of those two. We're creating an A and a I, so that they're equal. They want us to have names but I thought they can still have names if they want to, I don't mind. And I think if they created the identity themselves, I like the idea of that. But the team leaders of those teams would then report into me.	Elaborating org structure	Restructuring Initiative		
DI_MD	"There's me and then there's [DI_OM] who is the operations manager. And then there's the client relationship managers. And they will delegate out to implementers or to junior developers."				
DI_AM1	"[DI_MD] is a gifted salesman... None of the other people in the office could do it. So, there's a very sensible reason why he's at the top. Other than that, everyone beneath [DI_OM] is kind of on the same plateau. There are some differences between the copy staff and the non-copy staff, and also the dev staff, because dev and copy, kind of, sit outside what we do. They're necessary but they're not underlings, they're not subordinate to us. They're just the people who help us do things."				
DI_OM	"But in terms of hierarchy, it essentially goes: [DI_MD] at the top, then me, then account managers with [DI_AM1] at the head of that, because he's being pulled up into a team leadership position, and then kind of everyone else"				

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
Org chart		Organizational Structure Job titles Reporting lines		Organizational Hierarchy	
TI_MD	"The vision of the business is to, er, improve and, but stay in the area, the arena we're in... Um, and growing the business. You know, we want 3000 customers. We want to dominate the FTSE 350....So, um, the vision of the business is really to increase to 3000 companies, still in the UK. Um, we only deal with, the average amount of time we deal with our client base is um, about 2, 2.5, 2.7 times per annum. We want to increase that to four. And the average deal size that we do is about £600 per deal. We wanna increase that to a thousand. So, the triggers are all kind of commercial. We want 3000 clients. We wanna deal with them every quarter and we wanna do a thousand pounds deal every time we do a deal."	Expanding the business			
TI_MD	"the revenue target for this year is six million, up from 4.8."	Turnover objective			
TI_MD	"we've got EBITDA targets. And they take precedence over growth targets, so I'm not, you know, our EBITDA target for this year is 1.5 million pounds. It was targeted at 1.0 million last year and we did 1.15 million, so we were ahead of target. This year it's 1.5 million and er, again, I think we'll come in a little over that as it's going so far. We've done April, May and we're in June now, so we're coming to the end of Q1 for us and everything's looking like there's no reason we shouldn't hit about, on a run rate, about 1.6. So, that would be unbelievable. We think we need to turn over six million to do it, but we don't care whether we do six million or whether we do, I don't care whether we do 4.9 million. Because if we do 4.9 million and 1.6, we're just more efficient on 4.9. So, it's all about the EBITDA for us"	EBITDA objective	Growth Orientation	Enactment of Hierarchy	Hierarchy (TechInc)
TI_MD	"As a managing director, my job, the way I see it is to, is ultimately to make this business, um, the best it can be on a daily, weekly, monthly basis. And you know, that is easily measured and most often measured in our performance. So, you know, we have effectively an EBITDA target to make on a monthly basis. And that's, we focus on that heavily, you know. my ultimate role is, I am judged ultimately, it falls on my shoulders to produce the budget and the figures that we, you know, we push ourselves to each month."	Attributing growth orientation to self			
TI_CompD	"I think what's happened is, again, credit to [TI_MD] and to [TI_FD], is that we've started to focus on looking on the bottom line rather than the top line (laughs). Er, so now that's, talking about [TI_MD's] strategic decisions to cut off a lot of that turnover and it slowly went from 12 to seven, down and we're now sort of about five ish. Um, to cut your turnover by over half in over seven years, but to make it a much, much, much more successful company when you're looking at the bottom line. I mean, that's a huge decision, going back to your earlier question"	Attributing growth orientation to MD			

	<i>about [TI_MD] and decisions he makes final say on. It's those sort of direction and strategic decisions that have obviously benefitted the business greatly."</i>			
TI_OD	<i>"We never would have done a million pound EBITDA had we not of had strong leadership from [TI_MD]... I think everyone works better and is led better when you've got a target to meet because you've got something to aim for. And [TI_MD] came up with a target and he led the whole, the whole fight for the target, if you will, for the financial year. And then, and then we achieved it. So, I suppose, the fact that we achieved it is proof of good leadership"</i>	Attributing growth orientation to MD		
TI_ComD	<i>"we're very driven by numbers, so. But weird numbers, like in my room you can't go home on 99 phone calls, right, you're just not allowed. You have to do a hundred. We're very much it sounds - this is not a plan for a business by the way - very into fives and zeros. So, sometimes we'll be like, right, so we've set the budget this month and say it comes out at four, nine, nine, £499,000. We'll be like oh no, no, no, no, no, needs to be five... a lot of other things I might suddenly think, right, in July, team, we're going to do this. And it might be an incentive for the person who brings the most tablets in. It might be the person who brings the most laptops in and it's not a particular goal, but I know if I put, if I box that off the room will focus on it and I know it'll bring revenue and I know that'll contribute towards the budget. So, it can be smaller things. We might have a week where we have an incentive of whoever books the most, I don't know, deals in Scotland or it can be anything. But it's all for the greater good of the number, really."</i>	Performance orientation		
TI_SaD	<i>"with my team I think if you look at, if we say, "Right, we've got to turn over half a million pounds this month". You know, it's, I don't find it daunting anymore, but for some of the younger lads in the team I think they find it quite daunting. But then we'll sit down and we'll break it down into categories and say, "Right, this is gonna contribute £100,000, this is gonna contribute £50,000". And just break it into chunks and then as the month's going on we're saying, "Where are we versus this?" And then break it down daily, you know, daily targets, weekly targets and then monthly targets. And it all, suddenly this big daunting number is broken down into manageable chunks and it drives the lads as well, thinking I've, you know, I'm a hundred quid off my target for this category and thinking right, what can I do, what can I do. And it just, it just works."</i>	Performance orientation		
TI_OD	<i>"Well, monetary wise, the goals of the company are always to increase the EBITDA. I would say that we were obviously aiming to do a million pound last year, which we achieved. Um, so obviously this year we look to increase it. I'm still not 100% sure on whether [TI_MD] wants to increase it to £1.25 or £1.5. Um, but yeah, we're massively focused on numbers. Massively focused on the EBITDA figure and getting that up... I mean, I suppose that's it. The bottom line is always the numbers, isn't it? Without the numbers, we wouldn't be here, so"</i>	Performance orientation		
TI_SyD	<i>"we put the finances up. What the targets were. Where we're at. Um, now we've got sales targets for selling the kit, but we've also got targets for charging. So, I can look at all the deals which are in processing and see all these have got post charges, you know, we're gonna charge after the fact. You know, we've charged upfront for collection, but these have got processing charges later. So, I can go, "Well, I can help you get that if we get that deal through faster". So, we can bill that now."</i>	Performance orientation		
TI_BS	<i>"[TI_SaD] goes to a morning meeting every day. And he knows where we should be and where we want to be, and will come back and relay that information to me. Like, I was on my own last week because [TI_SaD] was off. And I wanted, I'd heard, nobody came to me and said, "We need to be at this by the end of the week". But I, kind of, on my own decided that I'd like to get to £150,000. And I got to £149,200 but I also knew there was a £3000 invoice that I could create before 9 o'clock this morning. So, in essence I just couldn't tie it all together in time on Friday, but I knew before 9 o'clock this morning I would be at £153,000 or £152,000. And I was."</i>	Performance orientation		
TI_AM	<i>"Um, the target, because we're targeted individually for an amount per month. So, I need to, my target is £10,000. So, I need to bring £10,000 of profit to [TechInc]... To get my commission on top of my wage. Um, in order for me to make £10,000 worth of profit, I would probably need to bring in, in a combination of invoices and IT equipment mobile phones, probably need to bring in about £20,000 because from the overall figure you've got to pay the couriers. You've got to pay the processing department, you know, for the processing of all the equipment. So, any costs, you cover your own wage out of there as well. So, the only stressful bit is worrying whether you're going to bring in enough to hit your target, because you wanna hit your target."</i>	Performance orientation		
TI_MD	<i>"Um, so I think I've built a great culture here. At which I'm slightly reserved in saying because it sounds quite arrogant to say that, but it's what I believe. I believe that I've built a company where people feel comfortable, secure. Um, you know, we don't have any zero-hour contracts here... Everybody here is either full or part-time employed... Everybody here is employed by this business, employed by me. And, um, everybody's on a set wage, monthly wage as in, you know, there's no variance in that. Apart from the fact that we then offer advances on your basic. We offer bonus schemes. We offer incentives. We offer, we do some mad stuff, you know, where we buy breakfast for everyone on the last day of the month and you know, small things like that. But things that make people understand that they actually are a lot more than an employee and a number. Um, you know, I think I could go on and on saying that, you know, I think we've, I'm not saying we've got it 100%</i>	Crafting culture	Developing Organizational Culture	

	<i>right, I'm sure we could improve, but I think we've got, we've got it nearly right. Um, and I think that is proved if you look at the people that work here. The vast majority of them have worked here a long time."</i>			
TI_SaD	<i>"[TI_MD's] managed to create a great ethos because everyone is very professional, but it's still got a family based feeling where he's managed to build a team where we work for each other. So, it makes, it makes it very easy to resolve any, you know, any hiccups, any, if we've got a project that we've not experienced before, you know, we can all sit down and people very much work for each other... [TI_MD's] built a very, I think, pretty unique and special system in the way that it is a family run business in a sense but it's very, very professional as well"</i>	Crafting culture		
TI_ComD	<i>"in a lot of companies it's cool to, like, doss if your boss isn't in or, you know, that kind of stuff. We've managed to create something here that it's, that's not cool. And you know, you work hard, you work really, really hard and you put everything in and you do care. And it's just the culture of it really. And I don't know how that's been created really, but I guess when you start with, you know, one person and you grow, you do employ people who are culturally, fit in or you know. Without out being, it's not cliquey but you know."</i>	Crafting culture		
TI_MD	<i>"I think the rebrand, completely my idea. Um, the logo was completely my idea. Er, the name's completely my idea. Er, I went home at Christmas, last Christmas, well, yeah, last, where are we at now, September, so the Christmas before. Went home and thought we need a change. Lots of things we need to change. Er, not that it was going bad. Wasn't, wasn't that it was in trouble or anything like that. I just, I just felt it'd had got a little bit stagnant. And it needs to push on and go to the next level, and I thought to do that we're gonna rebrand. So, I came into work on the 2nd January and said, "We're gonna change our name. And we're gonna change our name and I've drawn a logo." And I drew it on a piece of paper. And this is gonna be the logo. And this is gonna be the name. And this is what we're gonna, and this is the message that we're send out to our base. And we're gonna change the colour scheme. And we're gonna change the uniform. So, demonstration of leadership, I think, um, I think the rebrand..."</i>	Attributing rebrand initiative to self	Rebranding Initiative	
TI_CompD	<i>"I think probably... the rebranding of the business, and the way he went about it and making the decision to at that point, again, cut off a lot of, a lot of the business... I think that's what he sees his role at and I think that's what we see his role at, is that there is these major decisions right at the top – what's the strategic decision, what's the direction we're going in? And he makes those decisions. And he, somehow, sort of embodies us and empowers us all to follow behind him and make sure that, it might not be 100% the right decision, but if we work hard enough hopefully we'll make it work."</i>	Attributing rebrand initiative to MD		
TI_ComD	<i>"Totally [TI_MD]. We were all like, "What? Really? Have we not got enough to do?" But he's like, "No, this is the right thing to do". And it was. It completely was. It's like [the old name] never existed. Which is quite clever, really"</i>	Attributing rebrand initiative to MD		
TI_FD	<i>"I suppose in the way that we, that we changed the name really. [TI_MD] came to us with the idea. Mind you, if we'd said "No", he probably would have gone ahead with it! (Laughs). But he came to us with the idea of changing the name. We formulated a plan, we didn't just do it quite quickly because I think he, he probably mentioned it in maybe April time and we didn't change the name... And we didn't change the name until September. Because you need, there's a time that you need, obviously, to plan everything. There's a lot of work that goes into it. But it did work really well."</i>	Attributing rebrand initiative to MD		
TI_WD	<i>"when [TI_MD] got everybody together and went through his plan, you know, five-year plan on where he wanted to be and what he wanted to do, and restructuring and what have you, you kind of bought into it. And it actually turned a bit of a negative into a massive positive... [TI_MD] had a partner that wanted to do different things. So, [TI_MD] made it, you know, made his feelings strong that he wanted to take it on himself and then with that a new lease of life with [TechInc]"</i>	Attributing rebrand initiative to MD		
BS	<i>"Absolutely. Because it demonstrates what we do...Now we do so much more. We still have mobile phones, but we do IT. We do data wiping. We do data destruction. We do asset management. We do so much more... Not only that, [TI_MD] and his business partner split up and [TI_MD] needed his own identity. You know, it's okay carrying on a business enterprise that you and your partner created, your other director. But once one director's gone, you need to, right, this is mine. This is my baby, I need to own it. And he did. And I think it was the best thing to do. I think it was definitely the best thing to do."</i>	Attributing rebrand initiative to MD		
TI_MD	<i>"The vision of the business is to, er, improve and, but stay in the area, the arena we're in... Um, and growing the business. You know, we want 3000 customers. We want to dominate the FTSE 350....So, um, the vision of the business is really to increase to 3000 companies, still in the UK. Um, we only deal with, the average amount of time we deal with our client base is um, about 2, 2.5, 2.7 times per annum. We want to increase that to four. And the average deal size that we do is about £600 per deal. We wanna increase that to a thousand. So, the triggers are all kind of commercial. We want 3000 clients. We wanna deal with them every quarter and we wanna do a thousand pounds deal every time we do a deal."</i>	Attributing growth orientation to self		

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
All		Job titles Reporting lines		Organizational Hierarchy	
SI_MD	"Currently the main sort of measurements that I look at with my senior managers is to grow sustainably"	Expanding the business	Growth Orientation	Enactment of Hierarchy	Hierarchy (SecurityInc)
SI_MD	"10% growth per annum in terms of turnover, whilst maintaining 10% nett profit level and that's where I am with my growth stats"	Business expansion targets			
SI_MD	"So you know one thing we're looking into, which is a personal belief of mine as well, is expanding our corporate social responsibility strategy"	Expanding social impact			
SI_MD	"So the things that we're looking into at the moment... would be forming our organization as a B-corp or going down the ISO 26000 route, which is the corporate social responsibility ISO standard and investing more in technology and innovation with tools to help our staff when they're working and create something that our competitors cannot emulate very easily"	Social impact targets			
SI_MD	"So, we don't have many, you know, and again this came back from MBA, we've changed you know, I'm guilty of changing often, and again that's in our quality statement, you know to improve means to change, and to improve everyday means changing often. I think it was a saying that Churchill first captioned that I've stolen, now... So I will change a lot. Currently the main sort of measurements that I look at with my senior managers is to grow sustainably and that equates to a 10% growth per annum in terms of turnover, whilst maintaining 10% nett profit level and that's where I am with my growth stats"	Attributing growth orientation to self			
SI_SMOM	"I think [SI_MD] had sent a draft out and it was the 200 by 2020, and that's really our growth that we, sort of, plan to. He wants 10% growth per year."	Attributing growth orientation to MD			
SI_MD	I get to write my own future, you know, and dictate how things are going to run, you know and I see the company as setting up a movement that I'm shaping everyday... Try and make it quite a fun place, but a fun place with discipline, you know it comes back to that integrity for instance, we do have to be professional, we have to look parts, we have to present the organization well	Crafting culture			
SI_MD	The vision now, so we've got an overriding mantra, which is quality people in quality places, and it's about taking on only the best candidates, giving them the best training and the best package to keep them happy in the work, and only taking on the best customers as well.	Org vision			
SI_MD	I: So this mantra, was this something that you crafted? P: Yeah, so expanded over time, it was a way of summing up in one sentence what we're all about	Attributing org vision to self			
SI_SMOM	So, it was a few years ago and [MD] called us all into the office and sort of said, "You know, we want a new strapline for the business". It used to be 'staff, clients, community', which didn't really say what we were, it just sort of said where we operate really and the things we bear in mind as a business – the staff, the clients and the community. So, he wanted something new. We came up with a few bits and [MD] came up with 'quality people quality places'. So, after we'd sort of put a few ideas he, kind of, went, "I really like this one, so I'm going to use it".	Attributing org vision to MD	Developing Organizational Culture		
SI_SMHR	So, it was just something [MD] made up one day, I think. And to be honest with you, it actually fairly encapsulates the business mantra.	Attributing org vision to MD			
SI_SMM	I think [MD] came up with it and then I sort of like ran out really, I think it was a good surmise...	Attributing org vision to MD			
SI_MD	you know we've got four key values. Pride, friendliness, teamwork... one more, I remember this one, integrity [laughs]... you know that sort of dictate how we should be operating.	Org values			
SI_MD	So at the moment, four corporate values, it was about six months ago during my strategic module for my MBA that I came up with this mission-vision-values statement.	Attributing org values to self			
SI_SMOM	[MD's] been away doing his MBA at the moment and I think he's come up with them off the back of that. So, I don't know if he'd seen it somewhere else or in another business, but he'd come up with, I think, a few more actually. And I think over the course of a couple of months we banded about which ones did we like and [MD] came up with these four.	Attributing org values to MD			



SI_MD	<i>"We will have blazing rows at times, nothing personal, but blazing row trying to get your point across, and you know it's our job to prove to the rest of the team why our ideas work, you know that can be bringing up a research paper, or it can be doing some work ourselves, or a case study or a focus group or anything, so yeah a scientific, democratic, blazing row debates but ultimately with the buck stopping at me, so less and less often now am I saying look guys, we're just doing it my way, less and less, but it will still happen on occasion..."</i>	Attributing decision-making authority to self		
SI_SMOM	<i>"I: So, how do you guys make decisions in the senior management team? How does that work? P: Um, we usually just do what [MD] tells us to. (Laughter) I think, joking aside, that has always been the way it's been. And it still is, to a degree. He's the MD"</i>	Attributing decision-making authority to MD		
SI_SMHR	<i>"P: So, we used to make decisions according to what I call the Captain Picard model. Now, I don't know whether you've ever watched Star Trek: The Next Generation- I: A little bit, yeah (laughs). P: But basically, [MD] asks for suggestions, everybody makes suggestions and then [MD] decides what happens. That's how we ran it up until the end of 2014. There's still a bit of that goes on, but it's much more of a democratic process now."</i>	Attributing decision-making authority to MD		
SI_MD	<i>"We're changing the company vehicles at the moment, I want to go with something sustainable, I want electric cars, it's not feasible at the moment, we don't have the charging units at the office and the landlord is dragging their heels putting them in... I'd like to, and I've got the business director saying 'I want to go with the petrol car, it's cheaper', it's cheaper now, and we had a big argument in the SMT this week about what's cheaper now, and what's cheaper over the years and what's the... you know more than anything we need to act in a way that we say that we act. You know we say that we're a sustainable organization, well let's take the lead in buying innovative vehicles that look after the environment and also cost us less to run. And I'll ask for a scientific approach to be done, and by that I mean an analysis of what the vehicle costs now, and you know that's not the only cost, we've got cash in the business, so what's the vehicle cost now, compared to it's resale value, what's the actual devaluation of this vehicle, and what's the actual running cost of this vehicle compared to now."</i>	Decision-making process - example	Decision-making Processes	
SI_SMOM	<i>[MD] was trying his best to get a consensus from people on uniform in the office. And he was saying, "Look, you guys, you know, I've got some real beef with the uniform standards in the office, but I want to know from you guys what do you think is appropriate". And all of us just said, "you know, it's no good us coming up with an idea that we want, because you're just going to overrule us anyway (laughs) and just decide what you want to do. So, you might as well just tell us what you want and we'll all just work towards that"</i>	Decision making process - Example		
SI_SMOM	<i>a few months ago [MD] really wanted electric cars in the business. He was adamant, he'd read it somewhere either on his MBA or he was adamant that 14001 the standard was electric cars and it was going to be brilliant for the business and have loads of good impact. And then, over the course over a couple of weeks, [Commercial Director] had done a lot of research into it and realised that actually, practically using electric cars in our business wasn't going to work because there aren't enough charging points and we're going to have all these sort of problems. So, these were laid out to [MD] and over the course of a couple of weeks, [MD] held his hand up and said, "Actually, yeah, you're right, let's just stick to what we use currently and then we'll do something different".</i>	Decision making process - Example		
MD	<i>"We will have blazing rows at times, nothing personal, but blazing row trying to get your point across, and you know it's our job to prove to the rest of the team why our ideas work, you know that can be bringing up a research paper, or it can be doing some work ourselves, or a case study or a focus group or anything, so yeah a scientific, democratic, blazing row debates but ultimately with the buck stopping at me, so less and less often now am I saying look guys, we're just doing it my way, less and less, but it will still happen on occasion..."</i>	Attributing decision-making authority to self		
SMHR	<i>you know, they've all got the same job title now, which is a decision I took a couple of years ago, to make sure that, to reduce the likelihood of them saying, that's not my job, or someone else thinking, this isn't your job. You know, these four individuals all have the same job title and it is senior manager, even though behind the scenes to us they've all got their own areas of specialism and responsibility, but it's important you have always got multiple tasks and projects going on in the organization, and different work groups forming, and these people can head work groups up, be part of other people's work groups and get involved in everything so a bit of a change in tactic</i>	Formally designated heterarchy	Formally Designated Heterarchy	
All		"farcical situation"		

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
Org Chart		Organizational Structure		Organizational Hierarchy	
		Job Titles			
		Reporting Lines			
BI_MD	<i>"[Chairman] and [CD] who own the business came to me and said, "we want to grow our business, this is what we want to do, can you do it for us?" and we had a bit of a discussion, and that's why I'm here. I'm here three and a half years later, we've gone from 40 employees to about 130, turnover's gone from 3 million to 15 million. So going in the right direction, but it's all about the people as far as I'm concerned, and you know, knowledge and experience, so that's what we're here to do..."</i>	Growth mandate	Growth Orientation	Enactment of Hierarchy	Hierarchy (BuildInc)
BI_MD		"we've gone through a period of quite substantial growth"			
BI_MD	<i>"So the key for us is to just maintain as much as we can and try and keep around this 15-20 million, understand what our overhead is and what we need to run the business, and then just make sure that we continuously deliver what we say we would."</i>	Business maintenance			
BI_MD	<i>"that's what I've tried to do here is, we try to speak to people as we'd want to be spoken to. We're all here to do a job at the end of the day, but we want to empower people to be passionate about what they do, not just, "I'm a number and if I didn't turn in tomorrow, not that it will make any difference", and it's just a different way of thinking about it and I think it gives everybody that little bit of a lift."</i>	Crafting culture	Developing Organizational Culture	Enactment of Hierarchy	Hierarchy (BuildInc)
Website	<i>Our vision is to deliver a quality building service to local people, with teams who are dedicated live and work in their communities.</i>	Org vision			
BI_MD	<i>"The vision is, the overall vision is to just create, to deliver local services to local people by local people, that's our vision"</i>	Org vision			
BI_MD	<i>"It was done between me and [CD] but I think, it comes from where, the business that I'd came from in the past is that was a similar sort of vision in that, trying to get the right people with the right skill set"</i>	Attributing vision formation to self			
Website	<i>"We always put our customers first; We always work safely; We are committed to our people; We are passionate about our performance; We always work with integrity"</i>	Org values			
BI_MD	<i>"They were formed, I did them. I literally, when we initially, when I joined the business, [CD] didn't have anything like that, because my background I'd worked at a PLC and a few other things, we created the vision, values and the mission statement when I first joined to say this is how we're going to run our business and this is how we want it to be."</i>	Attributing value formation to self			

## 1.2. Empowerment

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
CI_MD	"I think people respond well to being trusted and empowered to get on with stuff... I think you need to kind of, give people the skills, if they need training whatever to do something, and then empower them to get on and do the job. And if they need help then hopefully they will come to us, but... and so that's kind of worked, because people seem to enjoy just getting on and doing something"	Empowering staff			Empowerment (CommsInc)
CI_MD	"Once they're confident, I really very much let them get on it, and with the idea that they'll keep me updated on what's happening, and then they'll come to me if they do have any problems or queries or things that I can help with, but yes, I'm very keen to give them full autonomy"	Empowering staff			
CI_MD	"I always keep saying to people, you know, if you have any ideas for how you can do things better in the business, just say, because it was set up by me, with my systems and my ways of doing things and my ideas and they're not always the best ideas, so if there's a way we can do things better then that's brilliant"	Empowering staff			
CI_SAML	"[CI_MD] wanted me to take on more clients, but she also wanted to give enough space for herself to start looking after, looking at growing the business, so she... and she also wanted me to start looking at growing the business in the North, once we got sort of [CI_AE] completely bedded down, and had my role settled and established, start growing the business in the North of the UK"	Being empowered			
CI_AE	"I think like a couple of the people, the managers, can be very like, 'Oh I'll just check with [CI_MD]', 'And her response is just always like, 'Oh yeah, yeah, just do it, wherever it's fine, you know she liked doesn't need to know the details, she trusts your judgement. I mean, I've sent her email going like 'Oh, I've looked at this course, I think it could be interesting, I've tried to justify it, and she just told me, 'yeah, yeah it's fine, if you think it's good, and [CI_SAML] thinks it's good, then go for it, do it,' so..."	Being empowered			
CI_SAMB	"One, giving me the chance in the first place to actually do it, some managers or leaders wouldn't you know, wouldn't risk it, they might, you know, might think or do some practice runs before, but [CI_MD] trusted me to get on with it and thought it would be the best way for me to learn just to do it"	Being empowered			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
DI_MD	"we want to be creative and new. We want to always be thinking of new ways of thinking and asking why, you know, why are we doing things this way? Because that's the way we've been doing it for ten years – why? Let's change that."	Empowering staff			Empowerment (DigitalInc)
DI_OM	"Yes, we do try and foster innovation. Both by prodding people to have ideas about things and just naturally trying to recruit people who are interested in being better... While blind obedience in employees is sometimes less of a headache, we do like putting an emphasis on the fact that we want people to be able to ask 'why'. Not because they don't believe in the decision, but to understand the thought process behind it. And if they think that they can come up with something better, something more cost effective, something just more fun, then yeah, by all means talk to us. Or just start doing it and then show us the results."	Empowering staff			
DI_AM1	"[DI_MD] likes the word 'innovative'. He'll use it at every opportunity. He wants us to be ahead of the curve in the things that we're thinking of doing... He's always willing to take on stuff. If we come up with some crazy batshit idea and just kind of go, "Hey, [DI_MD], let's do this!" He normally doesn't just shoot it down, he'll normally think about it and give us some way of achieving it"	Being empowered			
DI_CW	"[DI_MD] wants there to be a flow of ideas and a flow of drive. He likes us to show our initiative. He likes to show that we're on the ball and working on problems. And like a lot of bosses I have encountered in the past who say that, he talks the talk and he walks the walk on it. I have never yet run into an issue from following my own initiative and been hung out to dry as a result. Sometimes it's gone well, sometimes it's gone badly - that's one of those situations. It's gone well more often than not. But he encourages us to come up with our own ideas and encourages us to look at ways of implementing them. And he encourages us to question his ideas on the hope that the net idea that comes out at the end of that will be stronger for it."	Being empowered			
DI_AM2	"A big thing that [DI_MD] goes on, talks about a lot with us is innovation and how we want to be innovative. And that it's important that we think before the client does, because when you get to the point where the client is the person coming up with all the ideas, then they kind of start questioning exactly what we're doing and why they're having to think of new things. And so, I think being innovative and making sure that we've got a USP and making sure that there's a reason why clients not only stay, not only start with us but also stay with us, because it's	Being empowered			

	<i>a lot easier to keep a client once you've already got them than it is to keep hiring new, keep finding new clients. So, and I think that a key way to do that we've been is, sort of, one of the big ethos of us is to make sure that we stay innovative"</i>				
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Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
TI_MD	<i>"But I would like the more people who feel empowered and make their own decisions and move forward. And I was only discussing this morning a member of staff on there who never ever, ever does anything but gets on with it themselves, yeah. And they understand what their boundaries are. They understand what they can and can't do. We obviously have lots of internal protocols that mean that you can't have somebody... overstep the mark or make decisions that are not in their remit. But as much as possible, absolutely, I want everybody to be, feel that whatever it is that their role is, that they should own it and they should make as many decisions as they can on their own."</i>	Empowering staff (general)			Empowerment (TechInc)
TI_MD	<i>"I think everybody on that list is better at their job than I am at their job now. I couldn't do what [TI_SyD] does. I couldn't do what [TI_CompD] does. I couldn't do what [TI_FD] does. I couldn't do what any of them do as well as they do. That gives you an immense amount of satisfaction. Um, and that's not because I think I can't do it, I think it's because I've empowered them. They've grown, developed, learnt...they own, they absolutely own it and they do it better than me. So, all I'm trying to do is bring it all together."</i>	Empowering staff (directors)			
TI_ComD	<i>"I'm all for, you know, ownership, empowerment, responsibility. Definitely...I think it grows you in your career. And you know... with love in my heart, I haven't got time for 16 people to keep coming and asking me if they should do that. You know. But they can if they want."</i>	Empowering staff			
TI_CompD	<i>"I think [TI_MD's] created a management style that everyone knows that they can do what they need to do to get the job done and is allowed the leash to be able to do that, but you are accountable should it not perform. And that's not like, that's not to say you've always got to make the right decision and it's always got to be right. Obviously, he encourages people to make the right decision every time, but if you make the wrong decision, you're not gonna get lynched for it, it'll just be brought up amongst everyone else and everyone else will try and help you sort it out."</i>	Being empowered			
TI_ComD	<i>"...I think [TI_MD's] given everybody that as well. You know, if you make a decision, if you want to stand by that decision and you think it's right, then you go with it. But you're not gonna get, you're not gonna get into trouble or disciplined if you've made the wrong call. Because he trusts you enough to make the right call. And he almost wants to distance himself a little bit and give the team a bit more"</i>	Being empowered			
TI_SaD	<i>"It's, you know, I've been here a long time, but [TI_MD] instils a lot of trust in us and he says, you know, he likes to know about things but he's very much that, you know, it's your department. We talk, anything that is interdepartmental, we always sit down and talk about it. We've got agendas in our meetings and, you know, it really structures that. But if I, a lot of the time, I used to go and see him a lot and say, "What do you think?" And he's like, "It's your call". So, you know, he's instilled that confidence in me as well, that he trusts that I'm doing it for the right reasons and I'll do it properly."</i>	Being empowered			
TI_OD	<i>"I think certain things I would ask for advice on. Probably are certain things that I would feel like I should ask on. Um, but in general, decisions for the department on a day-to-day basis, yeah, I'd just make decisions on different things all the time, I don't have a problem. You know, if I need to change something, I'll just change it."</i>	Being empowered			
TI_SyD	<i>"I've got, within scope, I've got pretty much a free rein on what I do. If I've got an idea, I can implement it and see if it works or see if it fails. If it works, great. If it fails, we just roll it back, try something else."</i>	Being empowered			
TI_BS	<i>"Yeah, I make decisions every day. I don't need to tell [TI_SaD] what I do. I tell him as a courtesy on some things. On other things, I can, if I sell a list, I'll sell the list. I don't need to say, "I've sold this". The only time I will speak to [TI_SaD] really, is if I have any doubt. Because he's the sales director. So, common courtesy would dictate that if I'm uncomfortable with something I should be involving [TI_SaD]. So, if I've got a list of laptops and base units, PCs, and I think it's worth £3000 but I'm only being offered £2200, I run the figures and it's like these are very, very close. At that point, I will say to [TI_SaD]: "Four people have offered around the same money on this. I think it should be higher but that's what they're offering". And he'll make that call. I'll make the call. [TI_SaD] was just off last week and I'll do it."</i>	Being empowered			
TI_AM	<i>"Well, it's for you to decide isn't it, whether something's gonna be worth doing or not worth doing, or whether, you know. Sometimes you're not sure, you think you've got a customer, they won't pay you for the collection but you're kind of like, well, their equipment might be worth this, you might do this. It's nice to be able to make the choice yourself. It's nice if you want to do it, you should, yeah. Because ultimately, if I bring something in and I bring it in and it loses me a hundred pounds, it's only going to affect me. It's gonna affect my figure. So, yeah, I like that fact that we can choose. But if I was unsure, I'd, or any of us, we would check, yeah."</i>	Being empowered			

TI_WTM	<p><b>P:</b> Um, there's been a few jobs that have come in which are quite delicate on what we need to do with each individual item. Whether it's gonna be scrap. If it's gonna be kept to be wiped or destroyed. Whatever instructions you're given, I've been told it's my decision to make. Don't listen to anybody else, it's your decision.</p> <p><b>I:</b> Told by whom?</p> <p><b>P:</b> By [TI_MD] Um, because I'm, I've got a wealth of ideas on what to do and experience because I've been in there a long time, I know what unit is what. Straight away by looking at something, I know where it's gonna go. So, it means for me to split it before it comes into my department, which will make the job easier, I have to make that decision on what needs to be scrapped and what needs to be kept and come into the room for processing. Then I will deal with the scrap..."</p>	Being empowered			
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Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
SI_SMOM	<p>For example, one of our biggest client, which turns over almost £700,000, which is a huge part of our business, the directors from there, although they run everything operationally through me and they don't have much interaction with [SI_MD] when there's a real problem like there was with the guy I was talking about the other week and stuff, they'll involve [SI_MD] in it. Which is nice because, you know, in the past [SI_MD] would come in with his size nines, as we'd say, and sort it, and now he isn't because he's come in and said, "Actually, you guys have done a real good job, there's not much we can do about this, but I'm going to take the burden off you and sit with the director or the owner of that business and we'll formulate a plan and we'll run it through you".</p>	Micromanagement			
SI_SMHR	<p>if he's dealing with something he considers himself to be smarter than you on, he will stand there and micromanage you. If he recognises that you know more about it than he does, he'll just tell you to go away and sort it. But because most of the areas I work in, I know more about than he does, for example, health and safety, and quality management. With the greatest respect to him, he doesn't want to know about the boring and as long as they're getting done and the company isn't open to any liabilities, he's happy not to get involved with those. Training, for example, he knows he doesn't know as much as I do, so he's happy to let me get on with it. And that kind of thing. Whereas I think the ops managers have it worse because [SI_MD], obviously, used to do the operations when the company first opened, because there was no management team under him. He feels that he's a great ops manager and so he feels that he can micromanage them, like sending them tiny changes to time plans, for example</p>	Micromanagement			Micro-management (SecurityInc)
SI_SMM	<p>I'd call it veiled autonomy... I'd say a lot... I think it's made out like I can sort of go out and do my own thing basically, and I'm trusted to sort of go out and make decisions basically. I function on my own, but I think [SI_MD] likes a degree of control and still likes to micromanage basically. And I think we've got a pre-existing work relationship where as I've developed and gotten better to be honest with you, he still thinks I need managing the same way I did when we started all those years ago basically</p>	Micromanagement			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
BI_MD	"we want our business to be known for being a leadership-based business. We don't want to be known as one of these businesses that we see everyday in our industry that says, 'yeah, all our people go through leadership training', but they are in a management organization. No flexibility, no intention to ever develop any of their staff, and we're talking about some big, big businesses, that they say they do it and they don't. So in our business it's very important that everybody is empowered to deliver what we want them to..."	Empowering Staff			Empowerment (BuildInc)
BI_MD	"So for example when [CLO] first came in as Customer Liaison Officer, it was a case of saying, 'I've got a rough idea of what I want you to do, and I can provide you with a rough job spec, but over the next 12 months, I want you to try and define what that's going to be. This is what I want to deliver, I'm not quite sure. Because I brought you in, you are more specialized than I am in that area, so you tell me what we need, and if you need support, then you need to come to me and say, I want to do this... it is your skillset in running that customer department that I'm after, that's what I brought you here for..."	Empowering Staff - Example			
BI_MD	"Sometimes they'll come to me and they'll say, I'm not sure he's the right man to do this job... Rather than just coming to me with a concern and saying 'I'm not quite', well what is that based on, what is the theory behind it, why have you got that thought, what can we do to sort of, does he need additional training, does he need... it's trying to talk through that information, so when they go away, rather than me solving the problem for them, they've solved it themselves but in a different route really... It's trying to get them thinking in a vein where they're thinking for themselves, and they come with a solution and say, 'I've got this problem, I'm too labour short, but I've done this, done that, are you happy?"	Empowering Staff - Example			
BI_BDL	"My business development role's very fluid, what I tend to do is give myself a bit of a six-month structure, plan. So I kind of have to empty my head and write down, this is what I'm planning on doing... this is the support that I may need or may not need, if there's any time out of the business then I'll just really structure it down, then I'll have a one-ton-one with [MD] usually about once a quarter, we will have a catch-up and go, 'right, well this is what I've got planned for the next six months, if you see it any different then let me know, but I'm just going to crack on with it.' Within that six month period, there'll be things that come in outside of that that I'll need to pick up and develop, which is fine, there's always a capability and capacity to do that"	Being Empowered			
BI_CL	When I very first met with [CD] and [MD], they were looking for a liaison officer... and they asked me, "What do you do, what have you been doing? Tell us about yourself". And I went through the range of things that I'd been doing from first leaving school to that point. And they sat and said to me, "You're more than a liaison officer, we need to do some thinking about how we make this work within our organisation". They were looking for somebody that was just going to be based on site doing a liaison officer's job, but I was offering them a bigger package. So, at the very start, when they came to me and they said, "Right, we've got the offer for you, but it's quite vague what your role will be and we'll build it together based on what you want to be doing and what you don't want to be doing. What we need, what we don't need. So, it will stay fluid for a period of however long is needed until we define just what your role is"	Being Empowered			
BI_CL	"The liaison officer that we were talking about, that we don't want, the job that we've won needs a liaison officer on it. So, we weighed up, collectively, different options. So, there was a discussion with [CD] one of the contracts managers and me, about what are the options. And we were just sat in the office debating it - well, we can do this, we can do that, we can do the other. And it was going round and round and round in circles. And [MD] just came over and put a stop to it very quickly and just said, "Look, you need" - to me - "You need to make the decision, this is your team. We'll support you. We'll do whatever we need to do to make sure it goes smoothly, but stop this. Stop having input and come on, make a call." So, that was quite nice. And it was just very, very, not diplomatic, but it was just well handled"	Being Empowered			
BI_BDL	"we're in a closed environment, generally everybody knows what everybody's doing, I'll make decisions on certain things where I feel comfortable up to a level. If I need any checkback then I'll just pen a bit of a brief background on an email, send it to either [MD] or [CD] and say, 'look, this is what I'm proposing, are you alright with it if I run with it'. And then I'll get a yea or a nay"	Being Empowered			
BI_BDL	"I've just done that with a supply chain exercise, because the business has grown some of our processes have not kept up with our business and I've noticed that we're exposed a little bit around some of our health and safety checkoffs with some of the subcontractor supply chain. Because it's not within my preconstruction remit, I've just [inaudible] and said, 'look, I've got the time at the moment, it's quiet for me, this is what I'm experiencing, this is where I think the risk is to the business, the proposal is I do X, Y and Z, bring it all in line and then its manageable, we just manage it on once a quarter.' Commercially that sits with [CD] so I just sent that to [CD], CC [MD] in, [CD] said 'absolutely fine with me, crack on with it.'"	Being Empowered			

### 1.3. Culture/Social Structure

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
CI_MD	<i>So one example being, [name] and [name] are coming down today, and they're spending today and tomorrow with us and we have a lunch in the office where we're having a 'chili challenge'. [name] and [name] challenge each other to see who can eat the hottest chili. And then this evening we're going out for a, going to a wine bar, where they're doing a special wine tasting for us and again we're having a bit of a competition. And then in the morning we're doing some barista training in a local coffee shop. So just started, and kind of fun, so once a quarter we try to get together and have a day where we kind of forget about work and do some kind of fun, more team building stuff.</i>	Building camaraderie	Teamworking	Culture	Culture/Social Structure (CommsInc)
CI_MD	<i>So one example being, [name] and [name] are coming down today, and they're spending today and tomorrow with us and we have a lunch in the office where we're having a 'chili challenge'. [name] and [name] challenge each other to see who can eat the hottest chili. And then this evening we're going out for a, going to a wine bar, where they're doing a special wine tasting for us and again we're having a bit of a competition. And then in the morning we're doing some barista training in a local coffee shop. So just started, and kind of fun, so once a quarter we try to get together and have a day where we kind of forget about work and do some kind of fun, more team building stuff.</i>	Blurring work/life distinction			
CI_AE		"it's almost sort of detoxing"			
CI_SAMB	<i>We work in kind of, pretty much there are three different teams here, in terms of the accounts side anyway, so myself and [name] work very closely on our accounts base, [inaudible] work very closely on theirs, and then we have the team in Lancaster who work very closely together, and in terms of autonomy yeah we're pretty much we're left to it</i>	Teamworking			
SI_OM		"sharing good practice"			
SI_OM	<i>people feel like they're wellbeing is invested in therefore they want to invest into the business as well....</i>	Transacting on individual well-being			
SI_OM	<i>you see people in different roles to what they're doing in the office</i>	Role-changing			
CI_OM	<i>you see people's strengths and you see their weaknesses and where they need support</i>	Exposing the individual			
CI_OM	<i>on the team days we definitely get to support each other and show each other maybe our strengths which we don't get to show when we're in the office, and also where we can be nervous, where we can be vulnerable, where we can laugh, what makes us laugh, all those sorts of things are really important to make us a whole human being rather than a computer</i>	Humanizing the individual	Community Relationships	Social Structure	
CI_MD	<i>Generally I think it's good, I think it's much easier when it's face to face. I don't think [inaudible] as quite there yet, in terms of Skype is not as good as having everyone in the room together. So yeah, generally, generally very good</i>	Positive working relationship (w/ staff)			
CI_SAML		Positive working relationship (w/MD)			
CI_AE	<i>when I did this event in Birmingham for three days, it was me and her working on it together, just the two of us, so that gives me a really good chance to spend time with [MD] get to know her, you know as a person. So I think that has helped build a better relationship, getting to just essentially work together on a project</i>	Positive working relationship (w/MD)			
CI_SAMB	<i>And so when I first met [MD] really connected with her, really liked her as a person</i>	Identifying with MD as a person			
CI_SAMB	<i>respected her and what she'd achieved in her career</i>	Identifying with MD as a professional			
CI_SAMB	<i>I would say my relationship with [MD] is really, really good, we got on at a professional level and yeah we get on at a personal level as well</i>	Positive working relationship (w/MD)			
CI_OM		"feels like it's a family run business in a way"			

CI_OM		"we know our boss and feel very close to her"			
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Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
DI_MD		"Team - we are a team. We're on a level playing field, just like a football team or a rugby team, or a sports team. You know, there is a captain. There is somebody in charge, but everybody has to play the game. And play equally. Sometimes you have to pass to somebody else. And sometimes you have to be the playmaker."	Teamworking	Culture	Culture/Social Structure (DigitalInc)
DI_AM1		"we will look after one another. If somebody makes a mistake, then everyone who can help will leap in to help. We're very, very well supported... the amount of interaction that we have about problems and the way in which the team works together to solve them, is something that I haven't really experienced before."			
DI_CW		"Everybody's there to hear when someone needs to vent. And often someone will come up with a suggestion. We're all fairly aware of what's going on with everyone else's clients and responsibilities, in the broader sense if not in the specific details. And can often keep an eye out for them and say, "Hey, this is – I recently read this article online which reminded me of your client, it might be of use to you"."			
DI_AM2		"And I think it's got a good, sort of, mesh of personalities, which helps it to work quite smoothly and everyone's got their own strengths and weaknesses. Um, which means that it's got quite a good balance of workload as well. "			
DI_AC	"Team - we are a team. We're on a level playing field, just like a football team or a rugby team, or a sports team. You know, there is a captain. There is somebody in charge, but everybody has to play the game. And play equally. Sometimes you have to pass to somebody else. And sometimes you have to be the playmaker"	First amongst equals			
DI_CW	"[MD] kind of wants to employ people that he sees, I don't think necessarily as equals, but as near equals. He wants to employ experts rather than just disposable cogs. He wants to employ individuals with personality. And with their own initiative"	First amongst equals			
DI_AM1		"I've never worked anywhere which has so much of a bond between every person that works here. We're all friendly with one another. We all get on."			



DI_OM		"generally it's a really good working environment... It's quite friendly, we all get on quite well"			
DI_OM		"We are all pretty nerdy! So, we have an office full of nerds and geeks... we can't have an office wide discussion about comic books."			
DI_CW		"There's a very strong collaborative atmosphere... laughter tends to spill out of the office."			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
TI_MD	"I think it's, um, I think it's fair. I think it knows it's fair. I think it's fun. I think we try and make it fun... this is a commercial business and it's here to make profit and that's a serious business, but it doesn't have to be to the point where nobody's walking round and smiling and enjoying what they're doing... Our trainer always says this is the only company that she's ever seen that's run like a corporate in that all the best bits of a corporate, the professionalism, you know, the dynamics of it, the structure of it, all the good things that a corporate has, we have. And yet, we also somehow manage to have all the benefits of a family type company. And I think it is run like a family business. Although a big one."				
TI_CompD	"when I first started it was a real sales party type ethos... Work hard, play hard. Um, typical, what you envisage as your typical sales room type thing that you see on all the programmes and comedies that they do around those sort of things. But as it's progressed from just being as it was then... It's now obviously into a professional service thing and with that the atmosphere has changed slightly to more of a serious one but when you can, people are more than happy to still have a really, really good time"				
TI_ComD	"it's like, it's like a corporate, it can be a corporate it if wants to be. So, on a Monday if somebody's come in, it can suddenly turn into a corporate firm, right, if it needs to. But then on a Tuesday, it's back to being a family business again. So, it's both. Which is quite unusual, really. That's how I'd explain it. It's just a nice place to be".			Culture	
TI_OD	"I think it's quite a strange mix of corporate and small business, which is quite strange. So, it's corporate by way of there are rules, you know, surrounding, just surrounding things - lateness, holidays, sickness, those type of things... they apply to everybody right the way through the business. No matter what level you're at... And I think that's what helps create the culture that we have, the fact that no matter where you are on this hierarchy, if you will, um, you are tret the same. The basic HR rules apply to everybody. And I think it's very open place. I think that, you know... [AM] from sales will see [MD] on the corridor and say, "Hiya [MD] did you have a good weekend?" I think in a lot of places, particularly when you start getting to our size, I don't think you have that kind of relationship just flying around the building between everybody. Um, and I think that's probably what makes a big difference."				Culture/Social Structure (TechInc)
TI_SaD	"[MD's] managed to create a great ethos because everyone is very professional, but it's still got a family based feeling where he's managed to build a team where we work for each other. So, it makes, it makes it very easy to resolve any, you know, any hiccups, any, if we've got a project that we've not experienced before, you know, we can all sit down and people very much work for each other"				
TI_WD	"I'd say it is very, you know, it is stern but fair. And it has that kind of like, it has a kind of family atmosphere down there, where you know, there is a laugh and a joke, but on the other side there is a line that you can't cross"				
TI_ComD	"We had a really good month a few months ago and we all went out, um, for a meal the other Friday. You know, probably 80% of the workforce came and the people who didn't come were the people who maybe couldn't come for whatever reason. I think that's quite unusual really and people have worked here a long time, so people are friends as well... it's very social here and I think that's um, that helps as well, really"	Community relationships			
TI_OD	"I think it's very open place. I think that, you know... [AM] from sales will see [MD] on the corridor and say, "Hiya [MD] did you have a good weekend?" I think in a lot of places, particularly when you start getting to our size, I don't think you have that kind of relationship just flying around the building between everybody. Um, and I think that's probably what makes a big difference."	Community relationships	Community Relationships	Social Structure	
TI_SaD	"everybody knows each other. There's not a, you know, I don't think there's too many companies where you can go and everybody will know everybody's name. And I think that's really, really strong."	Community relationships			

TI_WD	"generally, it's quite, you know, a kind friendly atmosphere to work in and you know, everybody's there to help each other. So, it's better than what I've worked in previously, let's say that. But, you know, you have one or two that do make it difficult, you know can make it difficult, but now since I've taken over, you kind of, it's limited them numbers to be fair."	Community relationships			
TI_BS	"I just find that everybody is concerned and looks after you. Like your family. It's kind of weird, because I've just got along really well with everybody. I get along really well with [MD], his sister [ComD]. [SaD], I've always got along with [SaD]."	Community relationships			
TI_WTM	<b>I:</b> Yeah. What do you like the most about the company? <b>P:</b> Um, I think it's the closeness, really, with everybody. Because you know everybody upstairs and you know everybody downstairs, and it's just having a good relationship with everybody. Which is a good atmosphere at work, I feel. Um, just like one big family really. It's great	Community relationships			
TI_FA1	"Everyone's just so welcoming. It's, you're a part of a team even though we have so many different teams. Everyone's still a big team. So, it's a nice relaxed atmosphere. Even, you know, you've got your jobs to do, you know when to do them, but you feel like you've got the time. You feel like you can talk to anybody about anything."	Community relationships			
TI_FA2	"I mean it is all, they do try and make it as friendly as possible. They do things to, they have like nights out where everyone's entitled to come if they want to. Obviously, it's voluntary - you don't have to, they don't force it on you. But they try and make it so that everybody is included in it. Rather than it being, sort of, so segregated or anything like that. It's make sure everyone tries to mix and tries to integrate everybody, and it's good in that respect."	Community relationships			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
SI_MD	The vision now, so we've got an overriding mantra, which is quality people in quality places, and it's about taking on only the best candidates, giving them the best training and the best package to keep them happy in the work, and only taking on the best customers as well.	Org vision			
SI_MD	it gets used in a lot of our marketing material, it's on our business cards, it's on every single page of the website, it's on our email footers, we use it everywhere we possibly can do	Objectification of vision			
SI_MD	So it makes the staff feel like they're part of something	Vision for shaping staff identity			
SI_MD	you know we've got four key values. Pride, friendliness, teamwork... one more, I remember this one, integrity [laughs]... you know that sort of dictate how we should be operating.	Org values			
SI_MD	you've got an office that's mid-refurb at the moment, next time when you come and visit it, it will be all re-furbished and the four rooms which we'll be left with are getting renamed and the four rooms are getting re-named after the values in the organization	Objectification of values			
SI_MD	Some of it has been sent out in staff surveys to the staff, we ask them to let us know how they feel the values fit in terms of the whole organization and how the values fit, and I see that as being not just a survey but another aspect of communication, and really it's about taking my time and making sure that when I do push these values and the rest of the strategic statements out, the mission statement, the vision statement and everything else, that its really ready to go and hit the ground running and I've got a lot of our existing stakeholders, be that staff, clients, suppliers, the bank manager, anyone, bought into these values when they do get pushed out.	Pushing values	Militarized	Culture	Culture/Social Structure (SecurityInc)
SI_MD	For instance, when someone's in for a disciplinary, rather than looking down the code of conduct or the contract, what have they breached, why are they in there for a disciplinary, it's far better to say which of the values have they breached and the values can be more overarching in that respect, you know it's something for the staff to say, 'Am I acting within the four values when I make this decision?' You know that can go from my decision, strategic decision, on which customer to take on, or which markets to move into, right down to middle management decision, you know, how to, should we take on this member of staff, should we discipline this member of staff if they've breached a value? And some of the decision of the members of staff on the front line, how they're interacting with the public or with the customer on a daily basis, are they in line with the four values	Values - Behavioral conditioning			
SI_MD	You know, a good example would be six months ago, I had some concerns about some complaints that were coming in, you know and I thought there was a high number of complaints coming in about a particular door supervision team and the way they were acting, so I brought this up with my senior management team and they were reluctant to do much about it at the time, but they did and we had some	Values - disciplinary mechanisms			

	<i>CCTV footage of the team acting in ways that we didn't see fit. We reviewed it and we thought creating awareness of the problem would be enough and that the behaviours of this particular team might change and they didn't, so essentially it led to an intervention from the police and from our regulator the SIA on one or maybe two individuals who worked for us. The crux of it... you know people who don't fit in with the values have got no place in the organization</i>				
SI_SMOM	<i>our aim, our vision, if you like, is to operate everything that we do against those four core values of the business. So, you know, the pride is things like uniform. And we can almost adapt those four core values to anything that we particularly want it to mean. You know, integrity is all the disciplinary stuff, but it's also how good you are at your job and how much effort you put in, you know, how much training are you're going to attend. It's all about the integrity of the individual. And we can adapt anything to it, so that's really good, I think</i>	Values - Disciplinary mechanisms			
SI_SMHR	<i>So, integrity, the way Peter wants to work with this is not just honesty, not just trust worthiness in our business relationships, but also things like a personal integrity. Have I done as much work as I could have done? Have I done my best today? Did I put that off? And basically, just asking yourself, being mindful about what you're doing. Asking yourself these questions about have I really shown integrity? A good example of this from my personal practice is working outside the office. Now, Peter's put a lot of work into this recently because there was, in his head, a belief that if you're not in the office you're not working. There was a case where if I was really not feeling well that day, if I knew I was going to have a bad day, I would come into the office rather than work from home. Because if I'm sat in the office not doing much, I'm working. If I'm banging out a load of work at home, I'm doing nothing. And that was literally how he saw it.</i>	Values - Behavioral conditioning			
SI_SMHR	<i>So, integrity, the way [MD] wants to work with this is not just honesty, not just trust worthiness in our business relationships, but also things like a personal integrity. Have I done as much work as I could have done? Have I done my best today? Did I put that off? And basically, just asking yourself, being mindful about what you're doing. Asking yourself these questions about have I really shown integrity?</i>	Values - Disciplinary mechanisms			
SI_SMHR	<i>Pride, he talks about valuing the job that you do, but he tends to link it in with uniform standards. So, have you had a shave? Are you wearing your best kit? Did you polish your boots before you came in? But also, do you value the job that you do?</i>	Turnout			
SI_SMD		<i>"I consider these people friends..."</i>	Community Relationships	Social Structure	
SI_SMHR		<i>"One of the advantages of having an informal office culture..."</i>			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
SH	it's just the way the culture of the organization is, it's quite unique really... every single person that works for us is very, very well-thought of, they're not just a number, they have a position within the organization, and they're all looking, and they have our best interests at heart"	Collegiality	Teamworking	Culture	Culture/Social Structure (BuildInc)
CY	"it's from day one walking into that office... from that point I never felt like the new girl. And I don't know why, I don't know what it was that anybody said or did, there's no specifics, but I was never made to feel like a newcomer. But as well, there's a lot of staff that have all worked together at previous companies and I was never made to feel like an outsider to that, as well. There's some very close knit relationships that have been in place for 20 - 30 years for some of the staff, but I was never made to feel excluded from that little circle, which I don't know how - I don't know how you can stop that naturally happening, but they've never made me feel like an outsider"	Collegiality			
KW	"if one of the lads' is experiencing something at home, then that support network is there. For example, Darren's just had a kidney transplant and there was concern about him and making sure that he was right and well and everybody kept in touch with him as he wanted to be contacted, and everybody was pleased for him when he had his transplant and he was given the time to recover and he's been given the time to settle back in."	Collegiality			
SH	"it sounds strange this, but the way that we, when you asked me before about roles and responsibilities, while we have roles and responsibilities for everybody's job, one of the pluses of the business is the ability of people to move around	Shared job responsibilities			

	very, very quickly to jump in and help each other as a team rather than seeing somebody on the [inaudible] and just leaving him, "Oh, it's not my job", that sort of thing. It's that that's a very, very big positive to what we do..."			
CY	"There's some blurred lines between customer care and operational. Each contract has a site manager, or a couple of site managers, and a liaison officer, or a couple of liaison officers. So, the site manager is reporting to the contracts managers; the liaison officers report into me. But on site, what goes on, on site, is that the liaison officer and site manager work really closely together and share a lot of their duties, they'll both do a little bit for each other. And you find the site team will come to either me or the contracts manager, depending on who's there. If I turn up on site and there's an operational issue, they'll ask me and I'll either be able to answer or defer to one of the contracts managers. So, there's some crossover, some blurring of the lines. Not a true divide, this is your box and you're in it."	Shared job responsibilities		
KW		"it's a group of randomers thrown together that are all there supporting each other. And that's what this feels like. It's the people, for me, people that I've no personal links with, you know, we have social events, but I've nothing, no personal ties with any of them, but they are like my family. It's bizarre."	Community Relationships	Social Structure
CY		"Compared to where I was previously, it was like coming home, because I'd worked with quite a lot of the guys previously at [company name], that business was like a big family. So when the business folded in 2010, it was like a massive grieving period for me because I wasn't with my family. Because when one of us was kicked or under pressure, the rest of us were around us, around that person that had need of us"		

## 1.4. Commitment

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
SAML	<i>Yeah, I'd like her to have a successful business, so I'd like to contribute to her success, yeah...</i>	Commitment			<b>Commitment (CommsInc)</b>
AE	<i>I like the idea that I am part of the team that is creating this company. It's not that I work for the company, I'm helping build it, and make it what it is and I really like that. I feel that when you get into a job that's like that, the job becomes a lot easier. So I want the company to do well and I want to be a part of it, and it doesn't make me like, I don't have ideas in my head at the moment of moving on somewhere else or anything like that because what's going on in the company I want to be a part of that</i>	Commitment			
OM	<i>I want to work really hard for [MD] feels like it's a family-run business in a way, you know, we know our boss and very close to her, I want to work well, I want to do good work for [MD], because I respect her, she gives us a lot of respect....</i>	Commitment			
SAMB	<i>Working here is basically a joy, [MD] is very flexible but she trusts us all to get on with the work that we need to do, you know we can pretty much work anywhere we need to, when we need to, there's that flexibility in place. It's also really fun, and at the same time we're all really hardworking, we've got that kind of work hard play hard element, you know we get on with all of our clients, we're very lucky to work with the clients we do work with, and along with that I think because we're looked after by [MD] and I think because our clients are so fun to work with, I think that means everyone's always really engaged and really wants to get on with it and wants to do the best for the business, so there's, and I think when people come to the office they kind of sense that really in how we work, and also when we're out and about meeting clients in London, you know we're just, yeah, we're really happy to be here</i>	Commitment			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
DI_AM1	<i>"I love it. I've never worked anywhere which has so much of a bond between every person that works here. We're all friendly with one another. We all get on. We're all, kind of, oddly, we're all into the same sort of very niche geek activities. So, you've got like, maybe, four or five role players in the same room, which is an interesting experience. Everyone's got a very similar sense of humour. Everyone's willing to have fun with what they do. Because, I mean, quite a lot of the stuff that we do can be kind of a slog. If you've got a long-term technical project, say link audits, link audits take forever and they're really boring and they're not much fun. But we keep one another entertained. It's always a fun place to come and work"</i>	Commitment			<b>Commitment (DigitalInc)</b>
DI_AM2	<i>"yeah, it's good. I really like it. I think it's a - I've generally worked, because I've worked for the university for a bit and I've worked for people like McDonalds and TMP, which was a big survey company, those kind of things and it was really, really, sort of, massive organisations with HR and all these different departments. And a lot of the time I felt like that didn't quite work because a lot of information would get lost. It's a bit like Chinese whispers and by the time you got to the person you wanted to see or speak to, they didn't actually really understand the issue. And so, it's quite refreshing to be in a company where everyone you need to speak to is in one or two rooms. And I think it's got a good, sort of, mesh of personalities, which helps it to work quite smoothly and everyone's got their own strengths and weaknesses. Um, which means that it's got quite a good balance of workload as well"</i>	Commitment			
DI_OM	<i>"generally it's a really good working environment. I quite like it here, otherwise I wouldn't have stuck around. It's quite friendly, we all get on quite well. And Aaron is a great boss. He listens and doesn't just go off and do his own thing all the time and assume that the rest of us will fall in line. He actually values input from both myself and the rest of the team. So, we all have a hand in shaping the company and making sure that we're all on board with what's going on."</i>	Commitment			
DI_CW	<i>"I can cheerfully say that this is the most enjoyable place to work that I have worked in my employment history. There's a very community focussed atmosphere in the office. Everybody's there to hear when someone needs to vent. And often</i>	Commitment			

	<i>someone will come up with a suggestion. We're all fairly aware of what's going on with everyone else's clients and responsibilities, in the broader sense if not in the specific details. And can often keep an eye out for them and say, "Hey, this is – I recently read this article online which reminded me of your client, it might be of use to you". There's a very strong collaborative atmosphere, but it's also a fairly light-hearted atmosphere. There's a lot of conversation goes on in the office and a lot of laughter tends to spill out of the office."</i>				
DI_DEV	<i>"I really enjoy it. It's a nice, small team. Everybody gets on. There's no politics that I've come across with other agencies that I've worked for, that were perhaps a little bit bigger. It's growing. Yeah, no, it ticks all the boxes for me."</i>	Commitment			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
ComD	<i>"this is our first quarter of our next financial year, as in April, May, June. So, we've obviously done April. We had a really good May. So, we're now working really hard toward June because we need our first quarter to be strong. So, there's long term goals and there's short term goals, really. But we very rarely don't achieve them. And I think, not because the goal's set low, I think because everybody buys into it... My team has the biggest in March, which was obviously the last month of the year, they just had an unbelievable month. And it was because they thought - it doesn't matter to them, you know, the million EBITDA is not linked to what they get paid, they're on a separate commission structure - but they wanna win. They're a big room of people who wanna, you know, they're sales people at the end of the day, aren't they? They wanna achieve and they want to. But they equally I think, I think they like [MD]. And I think that matters, doesn't it? (Laughs). Because they want to achieve for him as well. Because he's a good boss, you know. He gives people, he's very fair and he'll help people out when he can. And equally, all he wants back is, you know, just a little bit back really."</i>	Commitment			Commitment (TechInc)
SaD	<i>"I've been, because of [MD's] management style, I've been personally invested in. I've felt like it's a journey I've been emotionally invested in for quite a number of years. And I think, and the same with the other shareholders, he's built this ethos and um, you know, obviously we've got, we've all got the same work ethic and that's why he's rewarded us the way he has. But it's nice that, you know, he's rewarded us with shares for the work ethic that he shares with us. And we share with him. So, I think, you know, that's been there for a number of years because otherwise he wouldn't have extended that to us."</i>	Commitment			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
SMOM	<i>"I love my job. I think, I love working for the company. And it's like everything, it's exactly like the way that our business is, it has peaks and troughs, some days are dreadful, they're awful, because unfortunately our business is reliant on other people. It isn't just how good I am at my job. You're putting guys out on the ground who make their own decisions"</i>	Commitment			Commitment (SecurityInc)
SMM	<i>"I gain a sense of achievement out of it when we get to a sense that... It's nice being able to go home from work and think that I've achieved something every day, although I've contributed somewhere. With my remit now, my scope is so large that anything I do the results are fairly instantaneous, very quick impact on the business as well, but also there's a legacy as well which I'm quite sort of proud of too."</i>	Commitment			
SMHR	<i>"the main thing I've been getting across today, I think, is the strange dichotomy there is. The fact that it's both the best place and the worst place to work. That Peter's the greatest leader and the most annoying micromanager. The fact that my role is really valued and also, sort of shoved to the side. And it's very, very strange that, sort of, dichotomy in the middle of it all. But ultimately, the most important thing is it's a really enjoyable place to work and for all of the frustrations, I would recommend it. And also it feels like it's going places in a way it hasn't before"</i>	Commitment			
SMOM	<i>P: I think one of our issues is we think that we are better than we actually are sometimes. I think that we believe quite strongly that we're the best. We're not always the best at everything that we do, but we have a belief, which does come from [MD] saying, you know, "We're world class and we're brilliant" but actually we're not that great at that. I: How does he do that? How does he communicate that to you guys?</i>	Cynicism			

	<i>P: (laughs) Well, usually through a sort of never ending, almost, positivity about certain things. Which is quite inspiring in some ways. Sometimes it feels a little bit disingenuous and a bit, sort of, he doesn't really know what's going on here (laughs). It's like, we are relying on the guys on the ground who sometimes are restricted by operational problems... And sometimes, you know, we're only as good as the guys we put on the ground. We're no better than that.</i>				
SMHR	<p><i>I: What I've noticed is that there's quite a bit of job specialisation but you've all got similar titles?</i></p> <p><i>P: Yes.</i></p> <p><i>I: So, how do you feel about that?</i></p> <p><i>P: I disagree with it. So, basically, everybody has got job specialisation but [MD] took away all of our titles and called us all 'senior manager'. And the idea was everybody should know everyone else's role, everyone should be able to a certain extent step into somebody else's role. And I don't know whether it was originally to breakdown a few barriers but, to be honest, I'd be happier calling a spade a spade. You know, I'm quite clearly a HR manager, so call me that! (Laughs). The operations managers are all quite clearly operations managers, so them that. Especially as we've got a farcical situation now where we've got five senior managers and no managers, so we've got no one to be senior too! So, why doesn't he just give us back our old titles? And we'll see whether that actually happens.</i></p>	Cynicism			
	<i>I know the complaints from all the ops managers are that [MD] will turn up at a random meeting and say something. In fact, I've got a good example for this – we won an award in 2014 for commitment to skills for the Red Rose Business Awards. Now, obviously as the HR guy I wrote that... And so, I wrote the submission and [MD] said he'd come with me to the presentation. And he was very, very enthusiastic and completely wrong about everything. And I spent a lot of time at the presentation going, "Thank you. Now, what he meant to say was this, this and this". (Laughter) And that kind of thing is something that as we get bigger, he's going to have to do less of.</i>	Cynicism			
SMM	<p><i>P: I organized a staff party basically and [MD] had been away on holiday, and I organized everything from the ground and put it all ready. And then he showed up on the day and tried to take control and just marshall everything, and I was like, 'No, this isn't happening, this is me, I've organized all of this, '...</i></p> <p><i>I: How did he respond to that?</i></p> <p><i>P: Badly... [inaudible] tried to have a little sort of contribution which was basically small gripes... there was a problem with everything then because it had not been run past him prior to the event itself, 'oh why did you put these differently? Oh the food's not in the right order' and everything else like that... I don't know whether it's a need to feel indispensable really, other than perhaps what it is, maybe he just wants to feel indispensable and always needed almost, I don't know</i></p>	Cynicism			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
BI_BDL	<i>"[BuildInc] is a, it is a really good place to work. It's got its challenges, but it's no different to anywhere else. But I tell you what, it's nothing like a PLC, there isn't the backbiting of a PLC, but nor is it a family business that's stuck in its ways, 'because this is what we've always done'. What I love about it, it's innovative, it is forward-thinking, we're always looking to see where the challenges are, but we work together to tackle those challenges as a group, but we're also picking up where we're not strong to be able to tackle some of those challenges, which is good, which is what I like, can be frustrating at times, but [inaudible]...."</i>	Commitment			Commitment (BuildInc)
BI_CL	<i>"I love it, absolutely love it. I enjoy getting up every morning and coming to work. I'm happy to give the extra hours that are sometimes needed, where – Sunday I sat there working for six hours. Sunday afternoon through till somebody shouted me tea's ready. And I don't mind it. I just, I just want the best for the whole team. So, if I can do any extra to help, I don't begrudge it. Where in previous companies I've sat there at night working away thinking why am I doing this? I hate this. I hate where I work, I don't want to be doing it. But you know, it's got to be, it was a duty. And this is more a labour of love. I love it"</i>	Commitment			

## 1.5. Ownership

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
CI_MD	<i>"A leader? Well, only because I set the business up and I've been around since the beginning and it is my business, and I make most of the decisions. We might have a sort of very democratic culture in the sense that I wouldn't want to impose things on people, but if I had to make a decision about something, would people disagree because I would, and um I suppose its, yeah... I suppose I am the only leader really..."</i>	Taking a superordinate position			
CI_SAML	<i>"I: Ok, so tell me more about your experiences with leadership in the company, and how often have you taken on a leadership role? P: Mmm... [pause, 17 secs] ... probably not much [laughs]... yeah I guess I act as the senior management but not necessarily in a leadership role, and I don't know that business development either are particularly sort of classed as a leadership role. For me leadership means the sort of drive and direction of the business, and I haven't really done that... I: Ok so how do you feel about that, how do you feel about not taking on a leadership role? P: I'm quite happy with that, yeah [laughs]... I: So you would prefer it if the MD takes on that role... P: Yeah... "</i>	Taking a subordinate position		Superordinate-subordinate relations	
CI_AE	<i>"you feel like you're part of building this company, and it is [MD's] company"</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
CI_OM	<i>"I think [MD] bases a lot of her leadership, is on trusting people and on expecting the best of people, expecting them to want to work hard and to do that, that's inspiring in itself because you're not being micro-managed, you feel a sense of freedom"</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
CI_MD		<i>"I'm gradually trying to take just a bit of a step back from the business, and so until now I have had my own clients, I've essentially been an account manager myself, whereas now I'm trying to take just a bit of a step back, [inaudible], and I'm trying to grow the business, find out about new opportunities and really be there to support my team and create a good environment for them to work in."</i>			<b>Ownership (CommsInc)</b>
CI_MD		<i>"the business runs very well really, and I'm just there to help it to grow, to make sure everyone's happy and working well, to help them with ideas and things like that, but I don't manage any clients directly. So I know a bit of a backstop, you know people are away on holiday, or they need an extra pair of hands so I'm there to help with that...I guess I'm there to support the people doing the work, to go out to be a bit of a rainmaker to bring in the new business, only bring in the business to sort of</i>	Working on the Business	Relations of Production	



		<i>embed it within the company, to make sure it's all running smoothly."</i>			
CI_SAML	<i>"I do PR and communications strategy , so the overview, I do all aspects of the creative campaigns really, I do writing, feature articles, press releases. I pitch to magazines, build relationships with editors"</i>	Job responsibility - PR and Comms	Working in the Business		
CI_SAML	<i>"I client-manage , so I build relationship with the clients and sort of manage the expectation and deliver results according to expectation and plans"</i>	Job responsibility - Client Management			
CI_SAML	<i>"I manage the PR account executive and I'm responsible for his personal development, to growth, and also part of my job is going to be growing the business in the North as well"</i>	Job responsibility - Business development			
CI_AE	<i>"So I'm an account executive, [SAML] as an account manager has six clients, and as an account executive I sort of just support her on those six"</i>	Job responsibility - Client management			
CI_SAMB	<i>"I'm kind of the account manager here"</i>	Job responsibility - Client Management			
CI_OM	<i>"So once a month I deal with all the invoices, so I deal with all the recharge sheets, a big part of my work is that we recharge all of our travel and sort of assistance to our clients, so I need to manage that, we have quite a sophisticated system in place to be able to deal with the amount of receipts that we have, and then making sure that they get allocated back to clients' invoices"</i>	Job responsibility - Client invoicing			
CI_OM	<i>"a big part of what I do is sort of employee wellbeing , so I'll organize team days"</i>	Job responsibility - Organizing team days			
CI_OM	<i>"day-to-day management of the office , stationary orders, that sort of thing as well..."</i>	Job responsibility - Admin support			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
DI_MD	<i>"sometimes I fear that they're laughing a little bit too much, but at the same time if I'm stressed and working hard, and they're having fun, I don't mind. Because I would rather carry the burden. Because I want them to enjoy their time here. And I, I love what I do. Even if I have that stress and that burden, I can carry it. I'm the driving force here. I can carry a lot more burden than I would want them to carry. Yeah, I delegate parts out when I feel people are ready. So, the culture is that they're listened to, as well. If they have a problem, I try and ask them. I will endeavour to. Sometimes I don't always have the time, but I try and make the time."</i>	Taking a superordinate position		Superordinate-subordinate relations	Ownership (DigitalInc)
DI_OM	<i>"I've definitely taken on a leadership role within a certain remit during my time in the company. Where I go, the team tend to follow. Which is sometimes interesting if [Di_MD] and I are pulling in different directions (laughs)."</i>	Taking a superordinate position			
DI_OM	<i>"I tend to help [DI_MD] refine his ideas and add my own twist on things at the end. Most of the time. There's few, relatively few initiatives that have been mine alone. I like letting [DI_MD] lead from the top, rather than coming in and undercutting him. Because I think that's just a healthier way to do things. I don't like the team seeing that we've had a disagreement about something, so we try and keep that to ourselves and only present an idea when we're both in agreement with it. I try and be quietly supportive or quietly critical, and then let [DI_MD] do the sort of showy, dramatic presentation type thing."</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
DI_AM1	<i>"[DI_MD] is an admirable guy. It's obvious to everyone in the office why he's in charge. And why we, we're actually quite fortunate to work for him, because he is a good boss. He listens to us. He cares about his staff, which is something that I haven't really experienced. I mean, people care about the loss of productivity when their staff aren't there, but he actually genuinely cares if we're sick. So, he's kind of, and his skillset allows him to exert authority without being obnoxious about it."</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
DI_CW	<i>"[DI_MD] wants there to be a flow of ideas and a flow of drive. He likes us to show our initiative. He likes to show that we're on the ball and working on problems. And like a lot of bosses I have encountered in the past who say that, he talks the talk and he walks the walk on it... he encourages us to come up with our own ideas"</i>	Taking a subordinate position			

	<i>and encourages us to look at ways of implementing them. And he encourages us to question his ideas on the hope that the net idea that comes out at the end of that will be stronger for it."</i>			
DI_AM2	<i>"I think [DI_MD] is a very good managing director. I think he's a very good leader of the team. I think he's very good at giving positive feedback, and I think that's important... But at the same time he's not afraid of criticising, he's not afraid to give constructive criticism, which is good because otherwise nobody's ever going to get better."</i>	Taking a subordinate position		
DI_MD		"We've seen a phenomenal growth. And it's due to things like LEAD. It's due to things like me repositioning myself to work on the business, not in it. To be able to strategically look at what everybody's doing. We're focussed on getting ISO 2015, ISO 9001:2015 next year. You can see on my board just in front of you there, there's roles and responsibilities. We're creating a lot of processes. We've got a new CRM system in place. We're using a lot more software. We're just streamlining everything and making people responsible and accountable for certain aspects of the chain."	Working on the Business	
DI_MD		"where we've repositioned me is there on the board – growth strategy, company direction and structure. I look after the people, so the people can look after the clients."		
DI_MD	<i>"structure is making sure that everybody knows what they're doing. Because what I've found throughout the years of running this company is the number one concern is never people not wanting to work, it is people not knowing what they have to do. So, being given a job, being given a task isn't enough. It's knowing how that task fits into the jigsaw. What are the pieces closest to that task? What do the other pieces of the jigsaw look like with relation to that piece of the jigsaw they're working on? They don't always need to see the full jigsaw. They need to have an idea of what that will look like. But they need to know what the pieces are surrounding that, so that they know where it fits."</i>	Management of Meaning		Relations of Production
DI_MD	<i>"I also do sales (laughs). Sales are such a dirty word. It is. I think sales is fine. It's a little bit like so many other words that have that rep that they're not. Sales is a necessary thing. And without sales, you've not got a company. And I only sell to people that want our services anyway"</i>	Job responsibility - Sales		
DI_AM1	<i>"Mostly it's to do with handling the clients and managing their expectations. Making sure that their demands are met... Yeah, I'm kind of the first point of contact for any one of my clients, and then the whole team deals with the workload that's generated"</i>	Job responsibility - Client Relationship Management		
DI_OM	<i>"So, my official job title has just changed and I'm now called the Operations Manager . So, on paper that means I'm responsible for workload capacity. I'm essentially project managing everything..."</i>	Job responsibility - Ops Management		
DI_OM	<i>"I also manage a couple of client accounts..."</i>	Job Responsibility - Account Manager	Working in the Business	
DI_OM	<i>"I... look after the team. So, I'm the person you come and ask if you have a question. I'm normally the first port of call for that."</i>	Job responsibility - Team Manager		
DI_OM	<i>"I do a bit of web design, a little bit of code, research, data analysis, all sorts of things"</i>	Job Responsibility - Dev work		
DI_CW	<i>"I am the copy team here , as I get referred to in a slightly plural sense. And my job is to produce blog posts, new content, content about new things, press releases, so on and so forth for our clients."</i>	Job Responsibility - Copy writing		
DI_AM2	<i>"I do client relationship stuff, so talking with clients."</i>	Job Responsibility - Client Relationship Management		
DI_AM2	<i>"And then I do SEO work and PPC work, so that's website improvements, helping them, you know, just optimising search engines and then running their ad campaigns on Google Adwords and Bing Ads."</i>	Job Responsibility - Dev work		

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
TI_MD	<i>"the business runs, no problem, you know. But there needs to be a boss... I just think sometimes you've gotta have somebody who sits, I often sit in that meeting and call the final shot. Like, we're gonna do this then. That's what we're gonna do. And I understand your point of view and I understand you disagree with that, but that's what we're gonna do. And then you can get on."</i>	Taking a superordinate position		Superordinate-subordinate relations	Ownership (TechInc)
TI_CompD	<i>"I think, I think that's what he sees his role at and I think that's what we see his role at, is that there is these major decisions right at the top – what's the strategic decision, what's the direction we're going in? And he makes those decisions. And he, somehow, sort of embodies us and empowers us all to follow behind him and make sure that, it might not be 100% the right decision, but if we work hard enough hopefully we'll make it work."</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
TI_OD	<i>"We never would have done a million pound EBITDA had we not of had strong leadership from [TI_MD]... I think everyone works better and is led better when you've got a target to meet because you've got something to aim for. And [TI_MD] came up with a target and he led the whole, the whole fight for the target, if you will, for the financial year. And then, and then we achieved it. So, I suppose, the fact that we achieved it is proof of good leadership"</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
TI_SyD	<i>"Um, leadership, it's all top down. So, like, a lot of people haven't had roles previously where they've been in management or they've had to run stuff. So, they'll take a lot of their cues from [TI_MD]. Um, his style on doing stuff. Which works in some cases, doesn't work in others. [TI_MD]'s very friendly, matey, matey. But then can suddenly switch to I'm your boss! Which some people have a difficulty doing themselves. Um, as I say, we're trying to get the culture where we're all working together, but sometimes you just have to flip."</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
TI_FD	<i>"I think the leadership works really well in the company. I think [TI_MD] is very good at doing the managing director role and letting the different departments have autonomy in their own department, if you will. But then he is always there if you need him. So, and then the team, the other directors, again I think it works well. "</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
TI_AM	<i>"Um, an example that would demonstrate his leadership? I suppose him taking everybody out as a company. That would be a sign. Only he could do that, can't he? Um, that shows he is the leader, isn't he. If you hit this target, you can go out and do this. So, that would be an example of his."</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
TI_MD		<i>"I think I've got the best of both worlds where I've stepped back so I technically don't have anything apart from the nine o'clock meeting... But that's something that I do want to do. But apart from that... I might not spend any time at all on systems for two weeks. Then I might do, then I might not, you know. So, I've got the best of both worlds where I can step into it, I don't interfere, I step in from an observational point, advice point... So, I'm not involved in the day-to-day. But I am here every day overseeing the business... So, um, I haven't got a remit. But my ultimate remit is to make sure this business is doing the best it possibly can and whatever I'm doing to make that happen"</i>	Working on the business	Relations of Production	
TI_MD		<i>"I think it's a fantastic structure. Um, all the people on that list report in to their various line managers, who report in to the directors. So, the only people that report to me are those, I only have seven people who</i>			

		<i>report to me out of 85... Um, and it leaves me free to, we're talking about entrepreneurial flow, I like to sit here and strategize how we can either improve what we're doing or what we should be doing next, within, very keen, within the thing we do. But, but what would be the next thing we should do. And get there before anybody else. And be better than anybody else."</i>		
TI_CompD		<i>"[TI_MD] makes a lot of the strategic final say decision, I would say. In terms of the day-to-day processing, he stepped back... so it's mainly on a strategic and a higher level than on a day-to-day running now, he'll make those decisions. Obviously, large expenditures and stuff like that, he'll like to make a final say on it."</i>	Working on the business (MD)	
TI_CompD	<i>"I deal with all of our regulatory bodies, being the Information Commissioner's Office for data. Um, the Environment Agency in terms of waste transfer, now hazardous waste, issuing the evidence, our waste permitting and licensing and waste carrier licensing. Anything that we need that's the sort of pre-requisite or mandatory thing that you have to operate in that space, I make sure we maintain..."</i>	Job resp - Liaising with regulatory bodies		
TI_CompD	<i>"I also do all of our management systems. So, all of our ISO, 9001, 14001, 27001, being quality, environment and information security management, respectively. I manage them and make sure those systems are in there."</i>	Job resp - ISO standards management		
TI_CompD	<i>"I also go and sit on a lot of councils and stuff like that as well, the DSET SERC, MTF, FCS, all those sort of different people. They're industry bodies essentially."</i>	Job resp - External representation		
TI_ComD	<i>"I look after the corporate team. So, my official title is commercial director. So, I look at anything to do with anything commercially that comes in. So, my team look after all the product that come in. So, they do that how, you know, whether they have existing clients or they prospect or they cold call or they get referrals, or whatever. But every single item that comes into this business is through my team."</i>	Job resp - Managing commercial team		
TI_OD	<i>"my main responsibility, really, is to be the liaison really between downstairs and upstairs. So, I'm kind of the link between the processing downstairs and the sales team upstairs. And then also then the process in general... Everyone has a job and then I kind of fit in between everybody's job, I suppose, to make sure everybody's doing their bit as well."</i>	Job resp - Operations management	Working in the Business	
TI_SaD	<i>"I'm responsible for basically finding the best sales outlets for the product that [ComD's] team bring in. Be that we decide that the item should go be refurbished and put on our e-channels, so eBay, the online e-store, Amazon, that sort of thing"</i>	Job resp - Identifying sales channels		
TI_WD	<i>"my job responsibility is looking after 40 members of staff downstairs in the warehouse. Over different departments but, you know, we have like an eBay side of it. We have phones - phone testing, phone wiping. We have IT audit test and wipe. We have a despatch unit."</i>	Job resp - Managing warehouse staff		
TI_SyD	<i>"I'm the Systems Director. So, that is digital and physical systems. So, it's, we're on a programme that I've made the system what runs the company from scratch. So, it's the CRM right the way through to processes downstairs, booking couriers, despatching, picking, stock control. So, I developed that. And what we also have to do is the physical systems of how things work and get processed in the building physically. So, how do they get from A to B. What jobs do they have to do? Who's in control of what?"</i>	Job resp - Developing/managing CRM systems		
TI_BS	<i>"we have channels available to us where, so brokering a sale is I will have a list of base units and laptops. I will send this off to one of my customers, he will offer £3000. I'll send it to another and he'll offer £3200. And I will work it all around until I get the best price. I'll always go back to the guys and say, "I'm sorry, but we've had this. Do you wanna go higher?" That's what brokering, that's what brokering means"</i>	Job resp - Brokering IT sales		

TI_AM	<i>"Um, really, I'm responsible for managing my customers. So, I would, I do a mixture of cold calls and obviously customers that I already have, so regular business. So, I would, I spend most of the day on the phone making phone calls, emailing people. Um, and then if that customer would say to me, "Right, okay, yes I've got this amount of equipment". I would then plan the collection of that equipment. So, I would deal then with the courier companies and work out the most cost-effective way. And work out how much profit we could make. How much we could return to the customer. Um, so then it's just a case of sort of booking that collection in and making sure that collection arrives. Keeping your customer informed."</i>	Job resp - Account management			
TI_WTM	<i>"I'm warehouse team manager... I've got eight staff under me, working in ITR. Um, I also keep an eye out on the Blancco [sp?] department as well. Um, I've got to keep updating my manager on what, where we're up to, what's currently being wiped on Blancco"</i>	Job Resp - Warehouse team management			
TI_WTM	<i>"I'm warehouse team manager, which is obviously the, if anybody is in need of anything around the warehouse in general, not just in my department"</i>	Job resp - Warehouse management			
TI_FA1	<i>"I'm a finance assistant. So, I deal mainly with our couriers, so any invoices to do with couriers. Any claims that we might have. Invoices to do with our eBay shop. I deal with mainly that kind of side of it. Raising POs. I cover credit control when the credit controller is on annual leave as well, which is just a part time job so I can still maintain my job. And I also cover accounts payable, our other finance assistant does that, when he's on leave"</i>	Job resp - Invoicing			
TI_FA2	<i>"I just sort of do odd jobs and bits and pieces in finance work really. But like I say, predominantly, I'm accounts payable. Um, I do deal with a lot of the money, sort of, coming in for PayPal and stuff like that... But, um, literally, I am just predominantly more to do with the invoicing side"</i>	Job resp - Accounts payable			
TI_MD	<i>"Yeah, there's not much that falls between the gaps. I think if you throw a problem in the air, one of them would instantly grab it because they'd know it was theirs. And I think that's really important... And we always say, "This time tomorrow". So, it'll be like, "I'll take that and I'll be back to you this time tomorrow"... I mean, you find operations and systems working together a lot. There's probably some overlap there. I've seen them help each other out. There's certain things that [OD] can do better than [SyD] that maybe you would argue is a systems function, but [OD] will do it because tomorrow she'll want some help with something that maybe isn't. They don't, they never, I never hear them say, "Well, actually, that's not my role. I'm systems. It's an operational role." I do actually encourage that because although I like fluid - fluid is good - there has to be ownership. So, you can't say, "Well, you do a bit and I do a bit". And nobody, then nobody - everybody has to own it. Because if nobody owns it, it doesn't get done the way it should get done. So, whilst there is a little bit of fluid across them lines, there has to be ownership. And the person, whilst you might help, you either own it or you don't. And if you don't, then you're not expected to do anything, but it's nice that they do."</i>	Job specialization			
TI_CompD	<i>"I think on paper, I think where everyone's put on there is where they are. Um, certainly... the directors will help other departments if they can. Um, because I, as I say, I help a lot of people out in [ComD's] team just because they'll get awkward questions from the compliance departments in their clients they're speaking to. So, I'll help them. Um, [ComD] might be looking for one hard drive to be destroyed before she can close a deal for one of her clients. And she'll ask "Can you find this hard drive and just get it shredded for me and get it logged so I can close this deal, because it's an 18,000-piece deal but I've got one bit that's not gone through and I can't close it until you've done that". So, they'll help like that. But, I don't think anyone's under any disillusion of what their, their role is within the organization"</i>	Job specialization			Division of Labour
TI_ComD	<i><u>I</u>: Yeah. Okay. So, I've seen this org chart but I was wondering how you would describe this on your own terms?  P: Er, don't know, really. I think it's very, um, neat and easy to understand. Everybody fits in a box, kind of thing, which I've seen some org charges and it's like who are they? I also think the job titles make it easy to understand what they do. Um, because obviously we speak to a lot of people in corporate businesses and you look at their job title and you just think what even is, what even is that? So, I think it's very simple. I don't think it's over complicated. Um, And I think it's just, it tells you exactly who's who and who sits where, really. I think it's quite defined really.</i>	Job specialization			

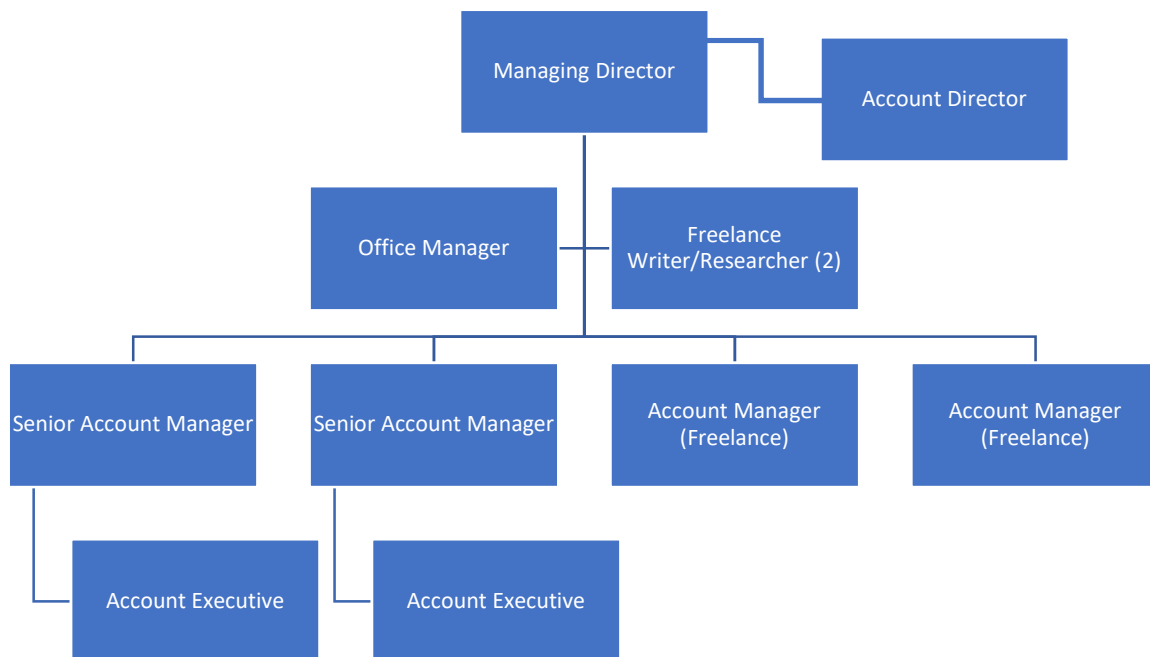
	<i>I: So, do you think roles and responsibilities are more fluid in practice than on paper?</i>			
	<i>P: Er, that's a good question. (Pause). No, I think they're quite set."</i>			
TI_FD	<i>"I might need some advice. They won't come in and do any work on the managements, for example. That's our work, but we might need advice or help in some way. But you wouldn't expect somebody to do your tasks, if you will."</i>	Job specialization		

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
SI MD	<i>"other people emulate and they see me as a role model, and they will mirror the way I act. And I like, I definitely like to think that because I treat my senior management team well, they will treat their management and supervisor team well, and if they treat their supervision team well, their supervisors will treat their frontline staff well. You know people emulate what people higher up the organization to do, so you know it's... I don't like to get big-headed about the term leader or anything, so that's my reluctance sometimes to say 'I'm the leader', but I can't get away from the fact that that's what I am, and why I am where I am, and that people do follow what I do"</i>	Taking a superordinate position		Superordinate-subordinate relationships	<b>Ownership (SecurityInc)</b>
SI SMOM	<i>"Yeah, it is, yeah. Um, I don't know. I guess it's, I think there's a better understanding in 2016 than there ever has been in the past of the difference between the management and leadership, in the sense of the two totally different things, so I think that's helped. And I think what we try and be is less bossy and more leaders. I think you can sort of see that coming through sometimes. I think [MD], it comes a lot of it from him, and as he learns via his MBA and as we go out courses like the CIM stuff and we have a better education of the difference, I think it really helps "</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
SI SMHR	<i>"[MD], on his good day, is a man that I'd be very happy to follow. He's got a vision, he knows what it is. It changes rather too regularly, but it's always been a broad brush strokes vision, i.e. we all know broadly where we're trying to get to, but the specifics change from day to day. "</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
SI SMM	<i>"I can't just be left to function in a vacuum basically, and sort of like left to sort of do my job, basically you need to go past [MD], because he's going to find a problem with it. So we rather he finds a problem with it before we released it, rather than sort of like release it and then have to try and sort of claw it back in or try and modify it"</i>	Taking a subordinate position			
SI MD		<i>"Well, wide varying and everything you know, I tend to keep the cogs moving together in the same direction, that's what I need to do, you know, I've got the vision and I need to make sure everyone else is aligned to that vision, that is my overriding job, you know to keep steering people down that path..."</i>	Working on the Business	Relations of Production	
SI SMOM	<i>"So, my role is to oversee all the door supervision aspects"</i>	Job responsibilities - Ops (Door supervision)	Working in the Business		
SI SMOM	<i>"My role at the moment though, because we don't have a senior manager that looks after events, we're all kind of having a hand in overseeing the events as well"</i>	Job responsibilities - Ops (events)			
SI SMHR	<i>"I've got overall responsibility in the organisation now for everything HR related. Most of my time is taken up by recruitment and training"</i>	Job responsibilities - HR (recruitment and training)			
SI SMHR	<i>"Organisational design and development has been something that I've been very heavily involved with of late, but [MD] makes all the final calls on it"</i>	Job responsibilities - HR (Org Design and Development)			
SI SMM	<i>"So I do the full marketing remit across the organization, so that will be everything from direct marketing through to all the digital stuff through to the PR and everything else as well"</i>	Job responsibilities - Marketing			

SI_SMM	"I do all the talent and marketing recruitment drives , so if we have a staffing shortfall in a particular area, it will come to my remit"	Job responsibilities - Recruitment			
SI_SMM	"I oversee all the procurement side of the organization , so everything from new office table through to uniform, I manage all that"	Job responsibilities - Procurement			
SI_SMM	"and I deal with all the quality assurance side of things of the business as well. So we have to meet certain quality standards to receive certain accreditations and it's down to me to ensure that we're still like following the correct procedures and processes in place as an internal checking measure"	Job responsibilities - Quality management			
SI_SMM	"I oversee all the sales work that the company does as well in terms of all the business development and all the tender-writing too"	Job responsibilities - Business development			

Source	Data	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
BI_MD	"[Chairman] and [Commercial Director] who own the business came to me and said, 'we want to grow our business, this is what we want to do, can you do it for us?' and we had a bit of a discussion, and that's why I'm here"	Enactment of growth mandate	Working in the Business	Relations of Production	<b>Ownership (BuildInc)</b>
BI_MD	"I do a lot of client relationships, so I'm managing clients directly..."	Client management			
BI_MD	"part of my skill set is the pre-construction side, so tenders, bidding, PQQ submissions, ITT submissions . So I tend to focus on that side..."	New contract tenders			
BI_KW	"I'm part of the preconstruction team , so I'll look very strategically at where the business needs to be in 6 to 12 months, and put a plan around that with regards to what we need to do to develop the current frameworks that we've got..."	Business planning			
BI_KW	"maintaining those relationships and also bringing in work outside of those frameworks, that existing clients..."	Client management			
BI_KW	"supporting the tenant liaison offices on worthwhile community projects"	Tenant Liaison Support			
BI_KW	"but I also take the lead on the social value side of the framework but also do a lot of preparatory work..."	Social value delivery			
BI_CL	"So, we've got eight liaison officers dotted across the North West working on different contacts, and I coordinate and look after them.."	People management			

## Appendix 8 – Organizational Structure Charts



*Figure 5: Organizational Structure of CommsInc*



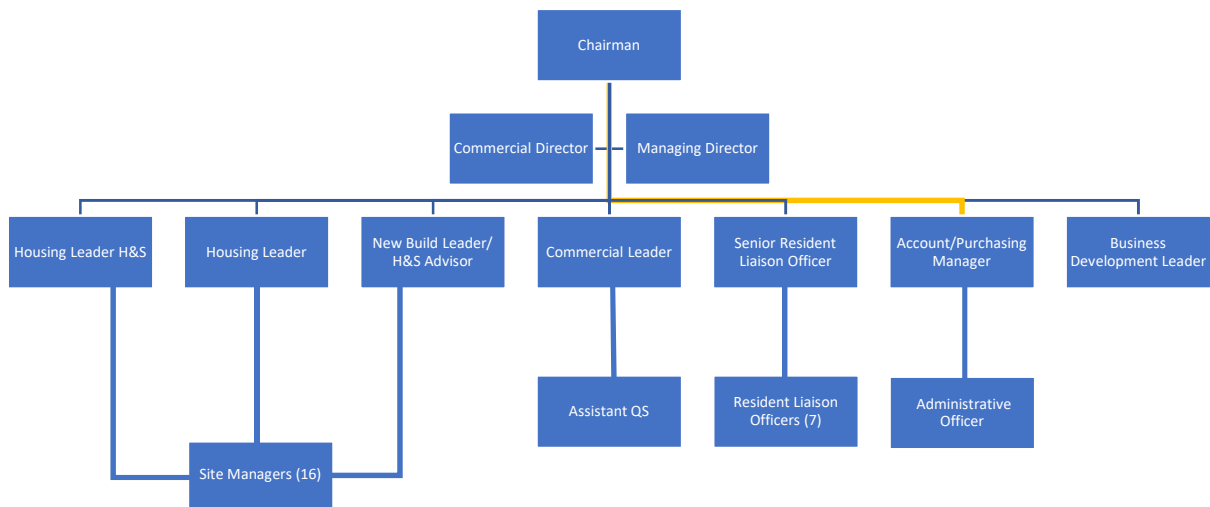


Figure 6: Organizational Structure of BuildInc

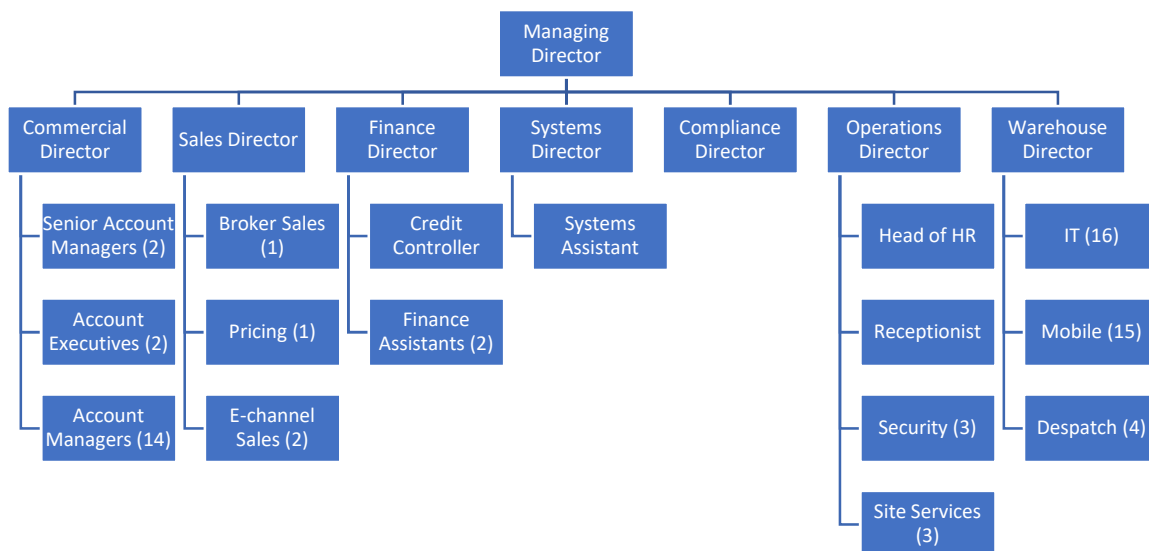


Figure 7: Organization Structure of TechInc