

# Radboud Universiteit



## **They who sow shall reap: leadership and innovative work behavior within Dutch tech start-ups**

### **Master's Thesis**

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## Preface

In front of you lies my master thesis 'They who sow shall reap: leadership and innovative work behavior within Dutch tech start-ups'. This thesis is part of my master Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the Radboud University of Nijmegen. From last January until the thirteenth of June, I have researched and answered the research question: *How do the entrepreneurial and transformational leadership styles of founders within Dutch tech start-ups influence the employees' innovative work behavior?*

Over the past few years, I have discovered more and more that I am happiest when I can be entrepreneurial. Thus, the first adventure in the attic began in 2019 and has been successfully concluded in 2022. Within that time, I have discovered that I have a soft spot for the tech world and specifically tech for start-ups. Discovering what works and what doesn't has something special. In my view, discovering what works and what doesn't always find its origin in "the idea". From these thoughts, my topic was born.

In this preface, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the realization of this thesis. First of all, I would like to thank Sibel Ozasir Kacar for her time, feedback and soothing words when I lost track. I would also like to thank my girlfriend Floor van Bussel. She has supported me the last few months in this process and always offered a listening ear. Even when I told the same story three times. She kept listening.

For the reader, I will describe how the transformational leadership style and the entrepreneurial leadership style influence innovative work behavior within Dutch tech start-ups.

## Abstract

The majority of technology start-ups fail during the first two years of operation. Tech start-ups fail mostly by being unable to identify a market that recognizes the value of the product or service and is prepared to pay for it. Tech start-ups that are able to introduce inventions, which are created based on ideas, in a higher tempo manner, have a better chance of surviving since they learn faster what works and what doesn't. Employees are one of the key providers of these inventions, as they arise from ideas the employees provide. When an employee thinks of ideas, proposes them or implements an idea, it is defined as innovative work behavior and comprises several phases (IWB). Certain leadership styles play a significant role in fostering IWB as previous research indicated. Yet, previous research incorporated one leadership style and has overlooked the search for specific leadership mechanisms that foster IWB. To date, it is not entirely clear how specific leadership styles affect the different stages of IWB within the Dutch tech start-up landscape, which has led to the following research question: ***How do the entrepreneurial and transformational leadership styles of founders within Dutch tech start-ups influence the employees' innovative work behavior?*** The research was conducted through a qualitative multiple case study approach. 4 tech start-ups participated as cases and per start-up three employees were interviewed through semi structured interviews. A blended coding process has been used to analyze the data. The results suggest that the transformational and entrepreneurial leadership style influence IWB in different ways. Different mechanisms are employed per phase and the leadership styles may be present simultaneously. This suggests that founders can apply and learn different mechanisms to stimulate IWB within Dutch tech start-ups.

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# 1. Introduction

## Introduction

In recent years, technological development, combined with the emergence of new markets and the increasing ease of obtaining venture capital, has contributed to a growth of successful and innovative tech start-ups such as Groupon, Dropbox and Instagram (Giardino et al., 2014). The successful organizations mentioned above, are an exception to the rule. Many tech start-ups fail to survive because of the "high risk high reward" principle they pursue with their innovation (Cantamessa et al., 2018). It is in the nature of tech the start-up itself to pursue this principle; they are built on extreme uncertainty and aim to revolutionize the market (Moroni et al., 2015). Whilst pursuing revolution, they are under a lot of time pressure from the market, and they're up against a lot of competition, all while trying to operate in a chaotic, rapidly changing, and uncertain environment (Gentry et al., 2013).

The majority of tech start-ups fail within two years of their inception (Tomy & Pardede, 2018). The second most important reason for inception is that the start-up is unable to find a market, which sees the value of the product or service and is willing to pay for it (CB Insights, 2021). The start-ups that manage to overcome the high level of uncertainty play a huge role in creating jobs. This is the case for the Dutch start-ups. Together they have created 109,000 jobs, of which 25,000 in the last 3 years. This makes the start-up sector the most important sector in terms of job creation in the Netherlands (Dealroom et al., 2020).

Despite the high probability of failure for start-ups, previous research has shown that innovation is an essential factor, helping to achieve long-term goals and gain competitive advantage (Cefis, 2005; Janssen et al., 2004). An organization's right to exist is largely dependent on how successfully it manages to innovate (Dunne et al., 2016). For tech start-ups, this principle is especially true given the uncertainty in which they operate. Tech start-ups that systematically and methodologically achieve their innovation increase their chances of survival because they learn faster what works and what doesn't (Brown & Ellis, 2017). Those innovations originate from an idea, which is then developed and implemented (Baer, 2012). One of the main sources of these ideas are the employees (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010). Previous research has shown that employees are responsible for 80% of new ideas within the company (Akbari et al., 2020). When an employee introduces novel and useful ideas into a role, group or organization, with the aim of implementing them, we speak of innovative work behavior (IWB) (Janssen, 2000). IWB is characterized by several phases, namely: idea exploration, idea generation, idea championing, idea realization and implementation (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010).

In recent years, several researchers have tried to identify the factors that stimulate employees' innovative work behavior and a key factor that recurs several times is leadership (Rao Jada et al.,

2019). Leadership is defined as " a complex cognitive and behavioral task that takes place in a dynamic social context. Successful leadership involves using social influence processes to organize, direct and motivate the actions of others" (McCormick, 2001, p. 28). An important part of leadership is how employees are inspired, brought together, and empowered to contribute to organizational goals (Akbari et al., 2020). There is a growing consensus in the leadership literature that using one leadership style does not achieve the greatest effect. The relationship between leadership styles and how effective they are, depend on the context in which they are used (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2005).

Previous researchers have studied the effectiveness of leadership styles, such as the entrepreneurial leadership style and the transformational leadership style and their influence on IWB as total construct as well as the effect on specific dimensions in a quantitative way and have found positive relationships (Afsar et al., 2014; Bagheri & Akbari, 2017). For example, Bagheri & Akbari (2017) found that the entrepreneurial leadership style they researched, using four phases for the IWB construct, had the most effect on idea exploration and lesser influence on idea realization. Which implies that the entrepreneurial leadership style would be more beneficial to stimulate idea exploration, as compared to idea realization. Afsar et al. (2014) examined what influence the transformational leadership style had per phase of IWB. They used two phases for the IWB process and have found that the transformational leadership style had the most influence on idea generation, and the least influence on idea realization.

Despite the effects known so far, it is overlooked how the specific dimensions and indicators of the entrepreneurial leadership style and the transformational leadership style are influencing the various phases of IWB and how they are interrelated. Both leadership styles include multiple dimensions with multiple indicators and there is currently little understanding of how and which dimensions and indicators exert influence. Therefore, this research dives into the current known relationships, and seek to identify and describe the relevant dimensions and indicators of the different leadership styles that influence IWB throughout the associated phases, in order to foster IWB. Subsequently, previous research has shown that deploying a single leadership style is not sufficient to stimulate IWB (Rosing et al., 2011). As previous studies investigated a single leadership style on employees' IWB, this study looks at the influence of two different leadership styles. Furthermore, to date, little is known about how the transformational leadership style and the entrepreneurial leadership style influence the IWB of employees in the Dutch start-up sector.

This leads to the following research question: ***How do the entrepreneurial and transformational leadership styles of founders within Dutch tech start-ups influence the employees' innovative work behavior?*** The objective of this study is to identify which leadership styles are deployed by the founders of the Dutch tech start-ups and how they are influencing the employees' innovative work behavior and its respective phases. To fulfill the objective, this research firstly seeks to find what leadership styles have been deployed throughout the IWB process by the founders. Secondly, this research sought to find how the deployed leadership styles influenced the employee's IWB and its

respective phases.

### **Theoretical relevance**

Previous quantitative research described the influence of the leadership styles, but did not describe which dimensions, or indicators, of the researched leadership style explained the effect on the different phases of the employees IWB (Afsar et al., 2014; Bagheri & Akbari, 2017). Hence, this study aims to deepen the current knowledge about how the entrepreneurial and transformational leadership style are influencing the employees' IWB and its respective phases by a multiple case study approach. By finding out which concrete behaviors the founder has used, from an employee perspective, viewed per phase in the IWB process, it is possible to describe which behaviors of the founder contribute to the IWB of the employees. Secondly, this research has the possibility to contribute to the development of effective leadership behavior to foster IWB. The results of this research might lead to a guiding framework regarding effective leadership styles per phase of the IWB process and the behavior's that are associated with it. By discovering effective behavior, it provides the opportunity to develop absent skills, competence and abilities, which form the human capital of the founder (Day, 2000). Thirdly, this study aims to broaden the current knowledge about the transformational leadership style and entrepreneurial leadership style when studied simultaneously as previous research took one leadership into account, which could have altered the found results in prior research compared to including multiple leadership styles (Afsar et al., 2014; Bagheri & Akbari, 2017). This is relevant as past research indicates that an effective leadership style is context specific (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2005) which can be seen in the different effects of leadership styles in prior research in the different phases of IWB. By adding this comparative element, it creates a more complete understanding of effective leadership behavior. Fourthly, this study attempts to broaden current knowledge about the influence of the entrepreneurial leadership style and the transformational leadership style by examining it in the Dutch tech start-up industry.

### **Managerial relevance**

This research seeks to provide insight into how the entrepreneurial and transformational leadership styles influence the IWB of employees, which offer insights in what leadership behaviors positively influence the quantity, quality and implementation of ideas. By doing so, this research tries to contribute to understanding which behaviors foster IWB, which could stimulate the quantity, quality of useful ideas as well as successfully implementing ideas. This creates the opportunity for the founders within the tech start-up to learn as quickly as possible what works and what does not work so that the strategy is adjusted accordingly and resources are not used unnecessarily (Von Gelderen et al., 2000). By examining multiple innovations projects from different companies, this research seeks

to give founders valuable insights regarding what leadership style and associated behaviors contribute to fostering employee IWB.

## **2. Theoretical background**

This chapter provides insight into what IWB entails and the role it plays within the organizational context. It also highlights the phases that IWB consists of and elaborates on each phase what it entails. After that, the entrepreneurial leadership style and transformational leadership style are discussed and the influence of those two leadership styles and their so far known effects on IWB will be elaborated on. Lastly, the two leadership styles will be compared to each other to highlight similarities and distinctions.

### **§2.1 Innovative work behavior**

Successful innovation forms the basis of an organization to be competitive (Abstein & Spieth, 2014) and is described as "a strong driving force for the survival, competitiveness and constant growth of high-tech business" (Bagheri, 2017, p.160). A successful innovation can be incremental, which entails the improvement and reinforcement of existing products, processes, technologies, organizational structure, and methodologies, whereas radical innovation entails fundamental changes in a company's products, processes, technology, organizational structure, and methodologies (Forés & Camisón, 2016). For example, the initial MVP launch of twitter can be seen as a radical innovation. An example of an incremental innovation is the change of a specific function within the system of twitter that already existed. Despite the incremental characterization, the impact of incremental innovation can be considered significant. For example, twitter came to understand that users used the platform more once the users followed at least 30 people. By offering follower suggestions, exponential growth was created (Brown & Ellis, 2017). Even though innovation forms the basis of being competitive, no organization can successfully innovate without its employees (Akram et al., 2016). This is particularly true for founders of high-tech companies since the connection between innovation, science and engineering is challenging and good ideas are valuable (Binnui et al., 2015).

The definition of IWB has been subject to several changes. According to de Spiegelaere et al. (2014), IWB is defined as: *"all employee behavior directed at the generation, introduction and/or application (within a role, group or organization) of ideas, processes, products or procedures, new to the relevant unit of adoption that supposedly significantly benefit the relevant unit of adoption"* (p. 144). The definition de Jong and den Hartog (2007) is consistent with this. They define IWB as: *"behaviour directed towards the initiation and application (within a work role, group or organization) of new and useful ideas, processes, products or procedures"* (p. 43). Both definitions emphasize the three different levels to which a new idea can be applied (role, group or organization). The difference between these two definitions is in the "context" of novelty which is emphasized by de



Spiegelaere et al. (2014), as they explicitly refer to “the relevant unit of adoption”. Janssen (2000) defines IWB as: “*The intentional creation, introduction and application of new ideas within a work role, group or organization, in order to benefit role performance, the group, or the organization*” (p. 88). Which describes which also defines the three levels in which an idea can be implemented, yet it does not define to what specific situation the idea can be implemented on. Newman et al. (2018) describes IWB as the ability of employees to generate and implement new and useful ideas within the organization, which are important to drive organizational innovation and gain competitive advantage. This definition puts more focus on the "external" benefit that can be achieved through IWB at the organizational level. This definition finds alignment with Zhou and Hoever (2014) who describe IWB as an essential component for revitalization and business growth and sustainability for the business. Hence, this research will use the definition of de Spiegelaere et al. (2014) for the definition of IWB because this definition combines the novelty of the innovation with the relevant unit of adoption, which is most suitable for this research as this research will investigate specific innovation projects that are relevant to the researched business context.

Not only has the definition of IWB been redefined several times, but the phases that form the IWB process have also been subject to change (Lambriex-Schmitz et al., 2020). Previous research that has been done on IWB theoretically distinguishes the different phases and tries to link it to the innovation process (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010; Kleysen & Street, 2001). IWB varies from employee creativity in that it focuses on idea discovery and generation. Mumford and Gustafson (1988) defined creativity as a process of generating useful and novel ideas, whereas IWB refers to behavior targeted at recognizing, developing, modifying, adopting, and implementing ideas. IWB is a more defined applied component as it pursues to establish some form of creative output with beneficial outcomes (Afsar et al., 2014). Researching creativity literature is important. The creativity part plays a significant role in the first phase of IWB, in which employees identify possible issues which can be turned into a possibility for launching ideas to establish innovation (West, 2002).

Messmann & Mulder (2012) describe IWB as “an explanatory construct” (p. 44) that describes employees' contributions to the innovation process. The innovation process consists of two phases, where the first part is described as the "creative stage" in which problem recognition and idea generation take place within the employee. The second phase is the "implementation stage" in which support must be created in the organization for the idea to be implemented (Oldham & Cummings, 1996; West, 2002). In, and between these two phases different phases take place in order to achieve innovation and together, these form a non-linear and iterative process in which one phase provides input for the next phase (Messmann & Mulder, 2012).

### §2.1.1 The phases of innovative work behavior

The first phase is **Idea exploration** and is the start of an innovation process and is brought about by a discovery made, a problem encountered or by chance (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010). According to entrepreneurship and creativity research, idea exploration, which is closely linked to opportunity investigation and exploitation and is dependent on contextual factors (Shane et al., 2003). Examples of these circumstances, or opportunities are described by Drucker (1985), namely, changes in the market, changes in demographics, perception change in the market, gaining new knowledge, unexpected success, failed projects and unexpected events. Recognizing and understanding these opportunities form the basis of idea exploration (Messmann & Mulder, 2012).

**Idea Generation involves** getting new ideas related to new processes, services or products or about entering new markets or improving current processes within the company (Flynn et al., 2003; van de Ven, 1986). In order to derive the right idea, the available knowledge is transformed through imagination from different angles and ideas and the judgment ensures that the right ideas are selected (Basadur et al., 1990). The combination of reorganizing new knowledge with existing knowledge seems essential for idea generation (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010).

**Idea championing** occurs from the moment the right idea is selected. Once the right idea is selected, support needs to be gained from the right stakeholders who have the ability to actually implement the idea (Janssen, 2000). Idea championing is described as behavior that is directed to build a support base for the idea. They try to convince others by pushing their ideas forward with zeal and determination, to show the potential of their idea (Jong & Den Hartog, 2010). Creating support is an insurmountable task as it is new within the work group or organization (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010). This is due to the degree of uncertainty that a new idea brings, despite the benefits it seems to be able to achieve (Kanter, 1988). Idea promotion is characterized by getting the right people together, being bold and having confidence in the idea so that support for the idea is built (Howell et al., 2005).

**Idea realization** comprises the implementation of ideas and is the last phase of the IWB process. This implementation entails the process of turning an idea into an actual prototype or final product. By putting it into practice the possibility arises to test the idea and tweaking the new product or prototype (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017) By implementing the innovation, for example in the form of a prototype, provides stakeholders the possibility to make themselves familiar with the innovation and experience the application within the work context (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010; Messmann & Mulder, 2012).

## **§2.2 Entrepreneurial leadership style and innovative work behavior**

Entrepreneurial activities are becoming increasingly relevant in a wide range of situations, as these actions promote innovation and adaptation to changing surroundings in businesses (Renko et al., 2013). The entrepreneurial leadership style is a leadership style that is deemed necessary to deal with obstacles and difficulties at various phases of organizational development (Gupta et al 2004). This leadership style deems leaders to successfully oversee their company and address challenges as the organization faces several difficult stages of development and improvement (Chen, 2007). Several studies have identified entrepreneurial leadership as a successful leadership practice that stimulates and promotes innovation in the very demanding, volatile, and uncertain business climate that SMEs are currently facing (Akbari et al., 2020; Bagheri, 2017; Li et al., 2020).

The entrepreneurial leadership style has been defined by several authors. Ireland et al. (2003) defines the entrepreneurial leadership style as the ability to persuade others to use resources strategically, emphasizing opportunity-seeking as well as advantage-seeking behaviors. Gupta et al. (2004) defines entrepreneurial leadership as developing situations based on vision that are used to gather and organize a group of actors, who become devoted to the pursuing the exploration and exploitation of strategic value creation that arose from that vision. Thornberry (2006) defines the entrepreneurial leadership style as a style that involves having vision, having passion and having focus, and the ability to challenge others. As well as a being mentally skillful enough for identifying, capturing and identifying new business opportunities. A more extensive definition is from Renko et al. (2013) which has built their definition based on the previous definitions: "*Entrepreneurial leadership entails influencing and directing the performance of group members toward the achievement of organizational goals that involve recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities*" (p. 2).

### **§2.2.1 Dimensions of entrepreneurial leadership style and innovative work behavior**

Recent extensive empirical work of Bagheri & Harrison's (2020) captured eight specific dimensions and behavioral indicators that comprise the construct of entrepreneurial leadership which will be used in this research as a guiding framework. The first dimension is framing the challenge and is defined as an entrepreneurial leader's ability to use their exceptional insight and knowledge to define challenging and difficult goals and standards for individual and business performance (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020). Leaders that conduct an entrepreneurial leadership style also try to establish an atmosphere in which the group members experience hope and inspiration, wherein they see innovation as one of their top priorities and demonstrate perseverance in the face of hurdles encountered during the innovation process (Bagheri & Akbari, 2017).

The second dimension is absorbing uncertainty and reflects entrepreneurial leaders' ability to accept responsibility, develop a vision, imagine future possibilities, and build the confidence of the

employees by showing confidence in their capabilities to establish the future based on their vision (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020). Entrepreneurial leaders try to get their employees to think innovatively and to pursue innovation (Thornberry 2006).

The third dimension is underwriting and includes the skills and interpersonal relationships of the entrepreneurial leaders, which they use to convince their employees to follow him. In addition, he motivates employees to rely on themselves. Entrepreneurial leaders realize their vision by discovering and motivating their group members and enabling them to pursue new insights to develop ideas. They also strive to transform behavior, thoughts, and attitudes so that employees will pursue implementing new ideas (Bagheri, 2017).

The fourth dimension includes achieving commitment and setting shared goals. The leader motivates employees to give everything to achieve those goals. The leader displays strong emotions and feelings and tries to convey them so that individual performance is enhanced, and groupthink is increased (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020).

The fifth dimension is defining gravity and refers to the role of entrepreneurs in promoting shared understanding and agreement on goals. The entrepreneur motivates employees to use their intellectual capacity to generate innovative ideas. Also, the entrepreneur shows confidence and quick and firm decisions are made (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020). Entrepreneurial leaders try to release their group members from their traditional ways of performing the work and henceforth focus their energy on performing entrepreneurial and innovative actions based on their functional talents (Li et al., 2020).

The sixth dimension is opportunity identification and exploitation which means that entrepreneurial leaders also look for and identify opportunities to improve their company performance and competitive advantage, and then take action to capitalize on those opportunities (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020). The possibility of introducing original (rather than imitative) goods/services to a market is referred to as an entrepreneurial opportunity (Gaglio, 2004). The recognition of this entrepreneurial opportunity entails seeing the possibility, while exploitation is a different task. Exploitation entails efforts and investments aimed at profiting from such opportunities (Choi and Shepherd, 2004). As a result, the perception the opportunity is about recognition, pursuing is about exploiting, hence entrepreneurial leaders' aims include both (Renko et al. 2013).

The seventh dimension focuses on learning. The entrepreneurial leader is constantly looking for new information and skills to expand upon. Entrepreneurial leaders learn from a variety of sources and seek to help their employees in their professional development (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020).

The eighth dimension is creative collective self-efficacy and entails that the entrepreneurial leader shows confidence that the team is able to solve problems in a creative way and is also confident in the fact that the team is able to produce and develop new ideas (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020).

## **§2.3 Transformational leadership style**

Transformational leaders, according to Dvir et al. (2002), focus on the status quo. They also expect this from employees, and they try to achieve this by challenging them intellectually, thereby subordinating their self-gain to group gain. Transformational leadership is a relational leadership style in which followers believe and respect the leader and are driven to go above and beyond what is technically asked of them in order to achieve organizational goals (Afsar & Umrani, 2019).

Transformational leaders create energetic goals, vision, and values, and they motivate employees to seek entrepreneurial ambitions in order to impact their creative behaviors (Afsar et al., 2014). Due to the high-performance expectations that transformational leaders have of their employees, transformational leaders encourage their employees to achieve organizational innovation (Afsar et al., 2014). One of the first attempts made to define transformational leadership (TL) was by Burns (1978). Transformational leadership, according to Burns (1978), is a process that drives employees by engaging to higher ideas and moral principles. Transformational leaders need to be able to define and explain their organizations' visions, and employees must embrace the leader's credibility. A more extensive definition followed several years later by Bass and Avolio (1990). They defined transformational leadership as follows:

Transformational leaders elevate the desires of employees for achievement and self-development, while also promoting the development of groups and organizations. Instead of responding to the immediate self-interest of employees with either a carrot or a stick, transformational leaders arouse in the individual a heightened awareness to key issues, to the group and organization, while increasing the confidence of employees, and gradually moving them from concerns for existence to concerns for achievement, growth and development. (P. 22)

The transformational leadership idea is to describe how specific characteristics of leaders influence the behavior of their employees, which is built upon four different dimensions. Since then, the notion has dominated the leadership literature to the point where most new and emergent leadership theories are based on it (Amankwaa et al., 2019). The bass model entails four different dimensions (Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1990).

### **§2.3.1 Dimensions of transformational leadership and innovative work behavior**

The first dimension of the bass model is idealized influence. This implies leaders who have a clear vision and pursue a personal mission. They pursue winning the trust of their employees and they count on their employees to promote oneself individual identity. Leaders who use idealized influence are able to get their employees to move so that they are able to achieve the optimal levels of growth and performance as expected of them. (Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1990). They establish a value

system that motivates people to put aside their own interests in favor of group, organizational, or collective objectives (Afsar & Umrani, 2019).

The second dimension is individually considerate, which means that leaders focus on the needs and qualities of their employees. They identify the needs of their employees by listening to them individually. They coach and advise their employees and through feedback, expect the employees to use it for their personal development. They increase the level of self-confidence in their employees so that they grow and can take on more responsibility (Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1990). The ability of transformational leaders to comprehend employee diversity in terms of strengths and limitations is a characteristic that helps foster IWB (Afsar et al., 2014). According to Reuvers et al. (2008), when transformational leaders recognize attributes in their employees, they are likely to accentuate the range of follower talents, and this attention could lead to IWB. The reason for this is that employees become even more aware of their own capabilities and use these personal resources to build the ability to approach work with fresh eyes.

The third dimension is intellectually stimulating which entails that leaders actively offer a fresh perspective on previous issues and old procedures. They encourage creativity and emphasize reconsideration and challenging underlying assumptions in situations. To answer problems, they employ both intuition and more rigorous logic. Leaders that are intellectually fascinating, inspire their people to solve difficulties from their own distinctive and original viewpoints. With or without the leader's assistance, employees become more effective problem solvers. They become more creative in their problem-solving procedures and problem-analysis techniques (Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1990). Transformational leaders aim to find new ways of getting things done, to enhance existing processes and systems so that long-term benefits can be achieved. They help employees make effective use of opportunities. (Pearce and Ensley, 2004). Furthermore, they inspire employees to be more creative and to improve their problem-solving and analytical skills (Afsar et al., 2014). Transformational leaders may increase employees' perceived autonomy by fostering conducive work environments, such as providing them authority and choice over significant activities and decisions (Messmann et al., 2021).

The last dimension is inspirational motivation, which entails that leaders deliver pep talks, boost optimism and enthusiasm, and confidently articulate their views of a reachable future. They create a vision that motivates people to achieve better levels of performance and development (Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1990). Transformational leaders instill in their employees a sense of self-belief and trust, as well as an appealing picture of the future, so that employees may be enticed to engage in novel and discretionary methods of achieving work (Amankwaa et al., 2019). Transformational leaders offer employees with a clear sense of mission, how their work fits with the overarching goals of the organization, a sense of dedication to those goals, and how to urge others to follow in order to achieve success (Hoch et al., 2016).

## ***§2.4 Entrepreneurial leadership style vs. Transformational leadership style***

Some characteristics and behaviors of transformational leaders are shared by entrepreneurial leaders. Entrepreneurial leaders, as well as transformational leaders, aim to find new ways to accomplish things and are most likely not to maintain the status quo as a result of intellectual stimulation (Renko et al. 2013). Transformational leaders, just as entrepreneurial leaders, try to create and shape their environments rather than adapt to the environment (Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam, 1996). They encourage employees by looking at known challenges with a new perspective (Bass 1985), which may lead to the identification of unique opportunities. Entrepreneurial leaders try to accomplish the same by pushing employees to be innovative in how they accomplish tasks, and they aim to create an environment where employees' experience a sense of freedom in trying out new things (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020). Intellectual stimulation is definitely an area where both leadership styles share strong similarities (Renko et al., 2013).

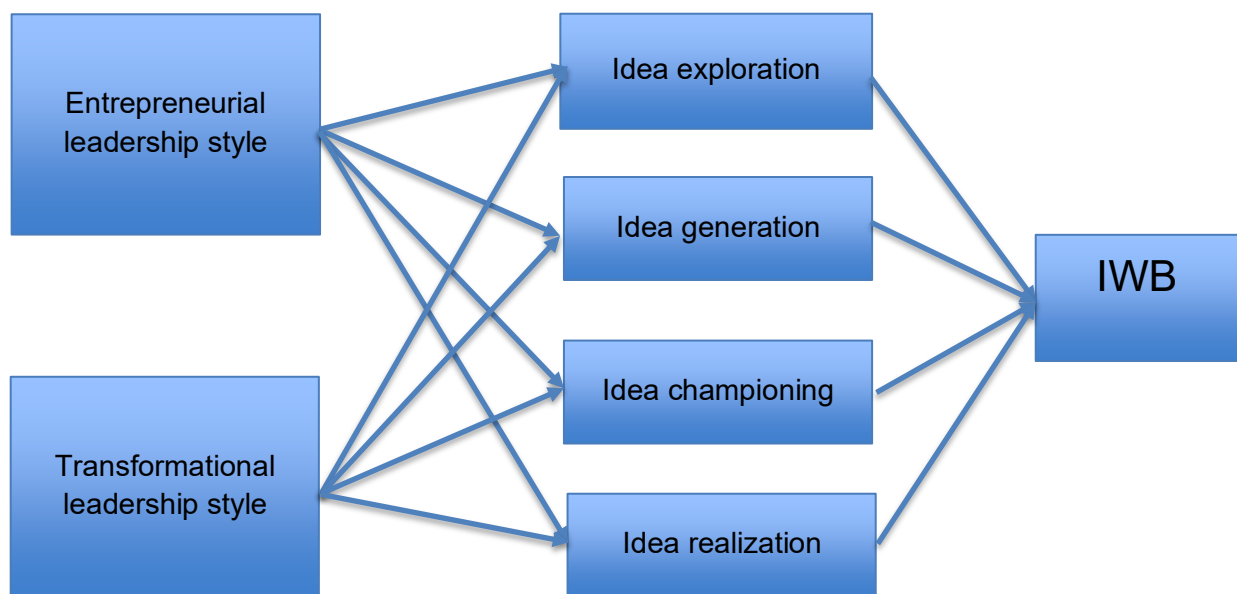
There are, nevertheless, significant distinctions, particularly in terms of idealized influence and inspirational motivation. Entrepreneurial leaders are not characterized as charismatic or inspirational as much as their transformational counterparts, despite the fact that they lead with a clear purpose and goals (Podsakoff et al. 1990). Although a transformational leader provokes feelings of inspiration via impression management such as charisma, inspirational appeals and symbolism. The entrepreneurial leader can be deemed as charismatic, yet they elicit entrepreneurial behavior, by setting an example which results in imitation (Renko et al., 2013).

Furthermore, transformational leaders influence employees through a shared vision, shared values, and a unified mission by “describing” the future and forming together a central component within the transformational leadership style (Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1990), whereas entrepreneurial leaders are strongly focused on opportunity exploration and exploitation, entrepreneurial leaders influence employees mostly by act entrepreneurially and as a result employees act in the same way (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020).

Individualized consideration is an important aspect of transformational leadership, but it is not described as a distinct component of entrepreneurial leadership. Transformational leaders recognize their employees' distinct needs and capacities, create personal relationship with them and treat them as individual persons, so they can understand them and they take their personal skills into account (Renko et al., 2013). Transformational leaders see their employees as individuals with varying needs, which allows them to discover what makes their employees' tick (Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1990). Entrepreneurial leaders prioritize followers based on their entrepreneurial motivation and self-sufficiency (Renko et al., 2013). Entrepreneurial leaders stimulate followers' confidence in their own talents and skills, as well as instill a desire for innovation and creativity (Cardon et al., 2009).

### ***§2.4 Conceptual model***

To summarize, this research tries to find out and explain in what way and how the two different leadership styles influence the different phases of IWB of employees in the Dutch tech start-up industry. By doing so, the current existing knowledge will be deepened by providing insight into which specific behaviors of founders' influence IWB, so that specific behaviors that foster IWB can be derived. At the same time, this study seeks to broaden the current knowledge base by examining two different leadership styles simultaneously and by examining a to date overlooked industry.



***Figure 1: conceptual model***



### **§3. Methodology**

This chapter explains the research design and the unit of analysis. Also, the method of data analysis that has been used will be discussed and in what way the most relevant constructs have been operationalized. Finally, the reliability, validity and ethics of the study will be elaborated on.

#### **§3.1 Research design and unit of analysis**

This research used a qualitative descriptive research method, more specifically a multiple case study approach (Eisenhardt, 1989). Case research investigates a phenomenon in the setting in which it naturally occurs and investigates the phenomenon at one or a few sites. Qualitative tools and techniques have been used to collect and gather the data (Cavaye, 1996). Within this research, the sites, or cases, have been different tech start-ups. The phenomena, as this research used a multiple case study approach, have been the innovation projects that have taken place within the tech start-ups. The unit of the analysis were the employees who have contributed to innovation projects. Only tech start-ups in which at least two founders are active have been included in the study. This will increase the likelihood that the leadership styles to be researched will be present in each case. Furthermore, only employees have been interviewed. Also, only employees who fall directly under the span of control are interviewed, which here refers to the number of subordinates who report directly to each founder via the vertical chain of command (Lee, 2021).

By using a qualitative research method, this research tends to comprehend and reconstruct the individual actors' personal perspectives, experiences, and understandings. This refers to the process of developing meaningful and consistent explanations, understanding, conceptual frameworks, and/or theories based on systematic observation of phenomena (Gelo et al., 2008). By reconstructing the employee's personal perspective, experiences and understandings it offered the possibility to comprehend the influence of the perceived leadership styles displayed by founders, on employees' IWB and the different phases of the process. Doing so, the data that emerged from the qualitative cases approach, created the possibility to find what leadership style behaviors have been deployed by the founders of the Dutch tech start-ups and how they are influenced the employees' innovative work behavior in the different phases of the IWB process.

The reason for choosing multiple case study approaches is that it offered the possibilities to find differences and similarities among the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It created the possibility to capture any possible differences in perception, experiences and comprehension regarding the influence of leadership style behaviors within cases and between cases as perceptions of the employees' perceptions are highly personal. This created the possibility to verify that the results are most likely not a result of chance (Miles & Huberman, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews have been used so that each interviewed employee is asked the same questions, while also allowing for follow-up questions, stories, and interpretations (Blijenbergh,

2015). This research included specifically tech start-ups in the study that includes a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 25 employees. The reason for this is that the employees needed to be directly managed by the founder in order to examine the influence of the leadership style and behaviors. Within this research, three different employees from four different companies have been interviewed, which led to a total of 12 interviews. This means that this research looked at four different cases which is the minimum amount to conduct a multiple case study approach (Eisenhardt, 1989). During the interview, this research looked at the founder's behavior at each stage of the IWB process. The interviews have been recorded with the consent of the interviewees, after which they will be transcribed and coded. Due to the operationalization of the three constructs, which will be elaborated later on, it has been possible to make a distinction between the different leadership styles and it been possible to make a connection between leadership behavior and how they influenced the employees' IWB per phase.

### **§3.2 Data analysis**

The 12 different interviews are transcribed and then coded using a blended coding approach. A blended coding approach includes both inductive and deductive coding (Graebner et al., 2012). For distinguishing the three constructs, IWB, entrepreneurial leadership style and transformational leadership style in the data, the deductive coding approach has been used. Their respective dimensions of the constructs, 16 in total, functioned as the list of predefined codes (Miles & Huberman, 2018). The reason for using a deductive approach is that it focuses on coding topics that are recognized to be essential in the literature (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Also, deductive coding is a helpful approach to establish generalized analytic results across cases due to the predefined codes (Eisenhardt, 1989), which is suitable for the multiple case study approach that is conducted within this research.

The indicators of the entrepreneurial leadership style and the transformational leadership style, which are the specific behaviors, have been used to make a distinction between the two different leadership styles. By doing so, the objective of finding out what leadership styles the founders deployed throughout the IWB process is fulfilled. The IWB indicators that are linked to the different IWB phases have been used to first determine whether an employee has displayed IWB. The fulfillment of the second goal, which is to describe how the deployed leadership styles influences the employee's innovative work behavior at each stage of the IWB process, is done via deductive and inductive coding. The indicators of the leadership styles are used to build linkage with the different indicators of the four different phases of IWB. This has also been done via the deductive coding approach. To describe how the specific leadership style behaviors influenced the employees IWB it has been necessary to describe the feelings, thoughts and experiences of the employees that arise as a response to the displayed behaviors of the founders. By doing so, this research tried to get a deeper understanding of "how" this interaction works. This has been done via the inductive coding process. The inductive coding process is a systematic way that helps this research to notice transparency and

so provide trustworthy interpretations of empirical data (Gioia et al., 2013), so the influence of different leadership style behaviors on IWB can be described. The transparency is established by using the exact wording used by the interviewees (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The answers of the employees are, as a first step, be coded in an open way. Which means that the answers will get a description based on the phrases in the data in the form of a label. By looking into the different interviews, it was possible to compare the descriptions and combine them. Also, axial coding is applied. Here the different codes are added together to create several overarching codes (Vennix, 2019).

### §3.3 Operationalization

This study used 3 different constructs. These are entrepreneurial leadership style, transformational leadership style and IWB. The constructs, their dimensions, and associated indicators are described in this paragraph. By operationalizing the different constructs and the respective indicators, this research has been able to draw connections between the gathered data and prior research.

#### §3.3.1 Entrepreneurial leadership style

For the entrepreneurial leadership style, this research used the empirical work of Bagheri & Harrison (2020) as their research has been able to identify 8 dimensions and relevant indicators of entrepreneurial leadership.

Table 1: entrepreneurial leadership construct

<b>Key concepts</b>	<b>Dimensions</b> (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020, p .13)	<b>Indicators</b> (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020, p .13)
<b><u>Entrepreneurial leadership</u></b>  Definition: <i>Entrepreneurial leadership entails influencing and directing the performance of group members toward the achievement of organizational goals that involve recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities</i> (Renko et al., 2013, p. 2)	Framing challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Spends time on new strategies for organisation development</i></li> <li>- <i>Seeks continuous performance improvement</i></li> <li>- <i>Sets high performance expectation for organisational development</i></li> <li>- <i>Sets task goals according to the staffs' ability</i></li> <li>- <i>Sets a creative plan for the business</i></li> </ul>
	<i>Absorbing uncertainty</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Anticipates possible future events</i></li> <li>- <i>Thinks ahead about new developments that will occur in the sector we are active in</i></li> <li>- <i>Undertakes business risk to reduce the uncertainty in followers' work</i></li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promotes an environment where risk taking is encouraged</li> </ul>
	<i>Underwriting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Negotiates effectively to eliminate the obstacles in followers' work</li> <li>- Shows empathy towards his/her followers</li> <li>- Makes staff enthusiastic for his/her ideas</li> <li>- Inspires emotions, beliefs, values and behaviours of followers</li> <li>- Inspires passion for new idea generation and exploitation of followers</li> </ul>
	<i>Building commitment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recruits team-oriented staff</li> <li>- Acquires followers' identification with organisational change</li> <li>- Motivates followers' commitment to the goals of organisational development</li> <li>- Prioritizes tasks required for organisation's success</li> <li>- Communicates effectively with followers</li> <li>- Listens and acts upon organisation stakeholders' complaints</li> </ul>
	<i>Defining gravity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Integrates people or things into a cohesive, working whole</li> <li>- Makes decisions firmly and quickly</li> <li>- Specifies the business scope of the organisation to suggest what can or cannot be done</li> <li>- Understands limitations of organisational ability to avoid unnecessary resource</li> <li>- Demonstrates the ability to manage time effectively</li> </ul>
	<i>Opportunity identification and exploitation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adjust his/her planning approach when new opportunities arise</li> <li>- Actively identifies, develops and goes after new business opportunities</li> <li>- Has insight into the market and business competition</li> <li>- Points out the competition's weaknesses and how we could exploit them</li> <li>- Often comes up with radical improvement ideas for the products/ services we are selling -</li> <li>- Pushes staff to be innovative in how we do our work</li> <li>- Allots time to helping staff find ways to improve our business innovation and opportunity recognition performances</li> <li>- Creates a climate that encourages continuous</li> </ul>

		<i>innovation and opportunity recognition</i> - Creates an environment where organisation staff feel free to try new things
	<i>Orientation towards learning</i>	- Shows awareness of their strengths and weaknesses - Seeks continuous self-improvement - Leads their followers by serving as role models - Focuses on staff training - Keeps the organisation informed and updated on new educational trends and methods to improve staffs' learning and achievement
	<i>Creative collective self-efficacy</i>	- Has confidence in the ability of the team to - solve problems creatively - Has confidence in the team's ability to produce new ideas - Has confidence in the team's ability to further developing new ideas of others

### §3.3.2 Transformational leadership style

For the variable transformational leadership, Bass's research is used in this study (Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1990). For the variable transformational leadership, four dimensions are used with their corresponding indicators and are described in Appendix 4. The four dimensions and indicators have been used in previous studies for measuring transformational leadership (Amankwaa et al., 2019; Saeed et al., 2019).

Table 2: Transformational leadership construct

<b><u>Transformational leadership</u></b>	<b><i>Dimensions</i></b> (Bass & Avolio, 1990, p. 22)	<b><i>Indicators</i></b>
<i>Transformational leaders elevate the desires of followers for achievement and self-development, while also promoting the development of groups and organisations. Instead of responding to the immediate self-interest of followers with either a carrot or a stick, transformational leaders arouse in the individual a heightened awareness to key issues, to the group and organisation, while increasing the confidence of followers, and gradually moving them from concerns for existence to concerns for achievement, growth and development (Bass &amp; Avolio, 1990, p. 22).</i>	<i>Idealized influence</i>	- Communicates important values and beliefs - - Expounds a strong sense of purpose - Considers the moral and ethical consequences of decisions - Creates and communicates a unified mission

	<i>Individually considerate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Utilizes time to teaching and coaching</li> <li>- Treats all employees as individuals</li> <li>- Understands that all individuals have varying needs</li> <li>- Assists others in developing their strengths</li> </ul>
	<i>Intellectually stimulating</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examines assumptions to questions to verify accuracy</li> <li>- Seeks varying perspectives when solving a problem</li> <li>- Gains input from others in solving a problem</li> <li>- Suggests new ways to completing assignments</li> </ul>
	<i>Inspirational motivation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicates positively about the future</li> <li>- Excited about the tasks at hand</li> <li>- Articulates a unified vision of the future</li> <li>- Conveys a confidence that goals will be accomplished</li> </ul>

### §3.3.3 IWB

For the variable IWB, this research used the four different dimensions and associated indicators of the research of de Jong and den Hartog (2010). The four different dimensions and corresponding indicators have been used in previous research for measuring IWB (Afsar et al., 2014; Bagheri & Akbari, 2017; Li et al., 2020).

Table 3: IWB construct

<b><u>IWB</u></b>	<b><i>Dimensions</i></b> (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010, p .13)	<b><i>Indicators</i></b> (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010, p .13)
Definition: <i>IWB includes all employee behavior directed at the generation, introduction and/or application (within a role, group or organization) of ideas, processes, products or procedures, new to the relevant unit of adoption that supposedly significantly benefit the relevant unit of adoption</i> (De Spiegelaere et al., 2014, p. 144).	<i>Idea exploration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pay's attention to issues that are not part of his daily work.</li> <li>- Wonder how things can be improved</li> </ul>
	<i>Idea generation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Search out new working methods, techniques or instruments.</li> <li>- Generate original solutions for problems</li> <li>- Find new approaches to execute tasks</li> </ul>

	<i>Idea championing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- make important organizational members enthusiastic for innovative ideas</li> <li>- attempt to convince people to support an innovative idea</li> <li>- systematically introduce innovative ideas into work practices</li> </ul>
	<i>Idea realization</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- contribute to the implementation of new ideas</li> <li>- put effort in the development of new things</li> </ul>

### §3.4 Validity and Reliability

Reliability and validity are two essential aspects of research to ensure quality (Brink, 1993).

One risk with qualitative research are the personal opinions that can influence the research (Morse et al., 2002). This is countered by using the deductive coding process, since the codes are already pre-defined. It is also important to show exactly what steps were performed so that transparency is offered in the process (Sandelowski, 1993). This has been done through providing insight through the inductive coding process. Through the transcripts and various categories and labels, the steps in the research can be followed. Furthermore, it has been important to present the similarities and differences in the data to present the research from multiple angles (Morse et al., 2002). As this research used four different cases, it offered the possibility of the creation of a more solid theory since the insights are gathered from 12 different employees. As a result, several examples allowed for a more in-depth examination of the perception and influence of leadership behavior on IWB, which enhanced the reliability of this research. Furthermore, due to the multiple cases approach, it has been possible to analyze data both within and across the different cases (Yin & Campbell, 2002). The research used the contrasts and similarities between cases and is therefore considered more reliable (Vannoni, 2014). Furthermore, reliability has been increased by allowing the interviewees to comment on the interview transcripts, in order to be more certain that studied phenomena are representative of reality (Sandelowski, 1993).

### §3.5 Ethics

In qualitative research, there are several difficulties that can be overcome through various ethical principles. These are beneficence, autonomy and justice (Orb et al., 2001). Autonomy includes the right to receive information about the study, to be able to decide for oneself whether to participate in the study, and to be able to stop at any time during the study (Orb et al., 2001). This is done by informing the interviewee before starting the interview what the research is about. Obtaining informed consent and allowing the participant to stop whenever he or she fulfills the autonomy principle.

Beneficence is defined as: “doing good and preventing harm” (Orb et al., 2001, p. 95). Since it looks at how the supervisor's behavior affects the employee, it is important that the responses are anonymized and cannot be traced. This has been ensured via providing the transcripts to the interviewee and by offering the interviewee the opportunity to change answers or keep answers out of the study. The last principle is justice and entails that the research is conducted in a fair way, without wronging anyone (Orb et al., 2001). This means that if a particular insight is reached through the contribution of the interviewee(s). This is done via informing them what will be done with the research.

## **§4. Results**

In this chapter the main results are described that emerged from the interviews. Each phase of the IWB process will describe how the entrepreneurial or transformational leadership styles affected the IWB of the employees. First the idea exploration phase will be described, then the idea generation phase, after that the idea championing phase and finally the idea realization phase. Also, for each phase it will be described if, and what differences were found in and between the different cases.

### **§4.1 Influencing idea exploration**

Within the idea exploration phase, the interviewees predominantly indicated that the founders used entrepreneurial leadership mechanisms in the form of building commitment mechanisms as well as transformational leadership mechanisms in the form of idealized influence mechanisms.

#### **The transformational leadership perspective**

Founders that exhibit transformational leadership mechanisms seem to influence idea exploration behavior by involving employees in organizational goals and missions through one-on-one connections or in a central distributed way. When they do so, they evoke a sense within the employees of inclusiveness. When founders proactively ask employees to contribute, it evokes a certain awareness that they can contribute to those goals, which motivates them to exhibit idea exploration. Together this forms the label of **motivational inclusiveness**.

One employee named Sara, from organization Tech Dynamite, told that within the organization the founders periodically gather the employees together and talk about where the company currently is at, but more importantly what the future plans are and in what way the organization will achieve its future plans. Within those sessions, the founders articulate their views of the mission and talk about a reachable future:



*“There are a number of meetings that we have where they both try to be present and communicate to us the direction, what's coming up and what's in development [...] And because of that I always get an idea myself about the company, that we are already a number of steps ahead. It makes me believe in the company and the merits that we deliver and allows me to think a little more myself about what's possible in that area.”*

What Sara shows here is that when the founders bring employees together to talk about the current situation within the organization and what direction the organization is going, it drives her to think about opportunities in different areas of the organization. As the founders educate her on the mission of the organization, her confidence in what the company is doing is stimulated and it evokes new perspectives. It is evoking a sense of inclusiveness and identification with the organization and is a motivating factor that seems to stimulate idea exploration behavior.

Erica, from another tech start-up called Tech Nuclear, told very enthusiastically how the founder sits down with her every month to look at what could be done better within the organization. The founder takes her through the possibilities for the future, their mission, and together they develop a certain direction on both an organizational level, as well as a personal level. In this particular case it was the marketing department they talked about:

*“Once a month we have a conversation with X about how things are going. Today the conversation was mainly about marketing, and how we can lift that to a higher level and also about how we can expand it. [...] Then it's nice to be included in how you can continue and grow further, then you also have an image of; this is what you do it for and that is motivating.”*

The founder not only includes her, as was the case in the company of Sara, but the founder really asked for her personal input and what ideas she has to make it happen. Erica demonstrates that once the founder involved her in the mission of the organization and in what direction the marketing department of the organization he asked; “what do you think”. This approach that the founders used, seems to evoke a feeling of inclusiveness within the organization and identification with the organization. By doing so it opens a wider framework of different possibilities within the organization and seems a motivating driver to think about how she can continue to contribute to the organization's mission and goals.

Mike, from the tech start-up Tech Alpha, talked about his experience of how the founders engage him in where the organization stands and where the organization wants to go. The founders expose themselves in a more public setting, which differs from Erica. Yet they reach their employees in the

same manner as within Sara's organization. They engage employees to flesh out their ideas while they challenge their own ideas.

*"They inform us. They tell their employees about what they're thinking about where the company will go and how it will grow, let's say, as a company. And yes, they include us. And they ask us [...] That helps me to ... makes me motivated and to say, "What is that? Why is it happening here? What?" And search after myself and then I can discuss it with them."*

As Mike shows, being involved in the organization's goals, mission, and being asked to contribute is not something that leaves one untouched. The fact that the founders involve Mike, while the founders make themselves vulnerable, makes Mike feel part of a bigger picture within the organization and makes him feel involved. He seems to identify himself with the organization. By doing so, it seems to provoke a feeling of being able to make a difference, which in turn motivates him to wonder how he can contribute himself.

### **The entrepreneurial leadership perspective**

Whereas transformational leadership shows a particularly strong emphasis on making the connection between missions, goals, and the commitment of the two of those, entrepreneurial leadership seems to be primarily concerned with influencing idea exploration through pursuing purely organizational goals as a goal in itself. They do so by influencing idea exploration through committing employees via calling on employees to suggest improvements for the organization, by involving employees in strategic discussions and by being in close contact with them. Together they form the code **inclusive deployment**.

Floor, who is employed in the tech start-up Tech Dynamite, provided a different example as her colleague Sara did. Floor told that one of the founders within the organization frequently called on the employees within the organization to think about how the organization could improve itself on various topics:

*"X made a point to gather feedback from everyone in the company about their role, feedback about their role, about the company itself, things that we could improve. And then he followed up on that with all the heads of department to discuss in more depth. And I had, in my particular case, my main feedback was about us needing to establish better processes for the company, for the teams to work together especially the sales and the technical teams."*

As Floor describes, the founder's call focused on organization-wide aspects. The founder seems to aim to encourage employees to be committed to the organization's development goals, by directly

appealing to them. Yet, floor emphasized that it is very much an incitement to action where it is expected to be acted upon. At the same time, the founder takes the input seriously. This creates a certain degree of inclusiveness with the organizational goals and stimulates idea exploration because it calls for thinking about how things can be improved.

Peter, from organization Tech Alpha, described how the founder involved him in meetings with an external partner with whom they work. Within the meeting strategic subjects are discussed, with the aim to drive the collaboration forward and to deem it more effective.

*“I am in the meeting to check, it is not only marketing related, but for me it is at least checking how things are going. I am more of a thinker, I try to absorb information and often I need some time to see: this is the situation, maybe we can do it better this way. I am really a thinker and therein lies the difference between me and x. He says it immediately and I have to think about it first. I'm more of a strategist, I need a little more time to check how something is and what the roadmap is then.”*

Not only does directly questioning employees to think about improvements influence idea exploration. The founder realizes through involving Peter in the external strategy meeting, that Peter is involved in organizational goals. As Peter described, it influenced his way of thinking about how things could be improved in the company because it creates a bigger picture of what is happening within the organization. It is not so much an identification with the goals, but a means of being aware of goals and therefore stimulating how to act on them.

Berry, from organization Tech Alpha, talked about how he is working on getting the organization to meet its goals. He also told what his cooperation looks like with the founder, that they discuss a lot together and that they can always reach each other when the business demands it:

*“We all sit at the same table, or at least X and I do. And I always know how to reach him. He always knows how to reach me, after hours, weekends, whatever is needed [...] There are no ifs and buts. Every day is just a unique challenge. So I think if the focus is there, then how do you guys make things happen day to day? Because these things are ... like tickets, right? If it's one thing one hour, the other thing the other. So you power your way through the organization's needs throughout the day.*

As Berry describes, personal contact seems to be an important mechanism to encourage idea exploration. The founder plays a major role in this because of the level of personal contact, which encourages Berry to be committed to achieving the organization's goals. He feels strongly connected to the founder and involved to achieve the goals of the organization. Because of his commitment, he is

engaged every day with new challenges and thinking about how to make things better. Still, the focus was mainly on "how" the goals could be met rather than "why".

## **§4.2 Influencing Idea Generation**

The idea generation phase included dimensions of both the entrepreneurial in the form of opportunity identification and exploitation and transformational leadership in the form of intellectually stimulating. There was also a combination of the two present in the form of intellectually stimulating and opportunity identification and exploitation.

### **The transformational leadership perspective**

Founders who demonstrate transformational leadership, seem to primarily influence idea generation behavior through recognizing employees' ideas through taking one's ideas into account, following up with them and through recognizing another's qualities. Together they form the code of **feeling valued**.

For example, Jim is an employee at tech alpha and talked about how the founder looks at idea's that arise from his employees. He said that the founder listens when someone has an idea. The founder also establishes an environment in which employees are offered to discuss things together to get to the right output and build alignment with each other.

*"Everyone is free to come up with ideas, that way it makes it much easier. You also feel like you're being heard. It's not that you come up with an idea and it's not looked at but everyone is free to come up with and if it's a good idea you can talk about it with the whole team to check that all noses are pointing in the right direction."*

Because the founder engages in dialogue to discuss any ideas and then provides space within the group to discuss them, Jim feels in a way that he is taken seriously because the founder does something with his ideas. It seems essential that a founder provides space for dialogue and shows that the founder follows up on ideas and. By doing so, he shows that he values one's ideas, which stimulate idea generation.

Kevin, from Tech Beta, described how the founder proactively is encouraging the employees to consider old challenges in new ways and is counting on their input. He described that the founder communicates openly with the employees and shows them that he counts on the employees finding proper solutions from their expertise:

*“And after that it's also, at least that's how I experience it, X you know you are the programmers. You guys build this, so if you guys say this is good or this is not good, that's the advice we go by. If you guys think we should go find a different hosting provider because it works better, that's what we should do. Or if you guys think we can or can't deliver certain services on a technical level, then that's what we go with.”*

Like Kevin described quite strongly, the founder emphasized that he challenges the employees to be open to new perspectives and to find the right solutions. Because the founder makes a strong public statement to the employees, showing that he needs their input and trust his employees, Kevin feels taken seriously. Being acknowledged and being recognized for the expertise of oneself, invites him to pursue idea generation behavior.

### **The entrepreneurial leadership perspective**

Where the transformational leader is acknowledging one's ideas and proactively engages the employees to display idea generation, entrepreneurial leadership influences ideas generation by creating a climate that encourages continuous innovation and opportunity recognition. This seems to result in **self motivation** and forms the second code within the idea generation phase.

For example, within Tech Dynamite, Sara said that she experiences that the founders give her structurally a certain direction of where she should head to and a certain amount of freedom while pursuing creative solutions:

*“They direct me more in a direction or they point in a direction and then see if I go that way [...] They need people who can solve their own problems. Who does not need so much guidance from them in any case. just give someone the feeling that, how you just described it, that there are no tools but that they actually do something with you which makes you self-starting. [...] Then it often takes a while before it is picked up or that we can start working on it, but it is at least nice that the possibility exists.”*

As Sara shows, the founder expects her to try new things from her own initiative, with little guidance and shows trust that she will manage to do so. The founder appeals strongly to her ownership and contribution within the organization. The founder's approach is distant, individualistic, and focuses primarily on "getting the job done" which stimulates her to pursue idea generation behavior.

Darren from Tech Alpha described how the founders, like Sara, also gave him the space to try new things. However, from the founder's point of view, a little more room is given to learn from mistakes as he searches for new solutions:

*“Usually I will say that they're doing it through ownership. So when I have something, they want me to have ownership of it, and they trust me that I will have the space ... I have the space to ... excuse me. I have the ownership, that I will study about it, I will be certain about it. And they trust me that I will do the right thing and so they don't have it in my mind. So, they show me trust, they show me that I can have ownership. So I think for me that gives me the space to research new ways and create however I want to this time and the next thing I will create it like that, so I get to experiment. So I think through ownership mostly.”*

The founder influences the ideation generation for Darren by showing him confidence through the space he gives him to discover new things along the way. He experiences this approach as positive and triggers him to look for new solutions and appeals to Darren's self-starting nature.

### **The interaction effect**

Whereas the transformational leader influences idea generation by proactively letting people know that all ideas are welcome, and the entrepreneurial leader does this through an appeal to be self-starting, the combination of the two does this by being personally accessible, sparring together and being a role model due to providing creative solutions themselves. Which forms together the code of **openness toward novelties**

For example, within the organization Tech Nuclear, Stacey described in the interview that she has close relationships with both founders and that she experiences them open to discuss things with and are very easy to approach when needed to. When she approached one founder, she experienced that through that personal dialogue, she found better solutions herself.

*“They are the same in that though, are always approachable and are always ready to help you if you are having a hard time, if you need them for feedback or if you want to discuss something. X always has very good and open ideas. He often comes up with an idea and a plan and that works very well because I learn from that. Like: oh yes, you can use that too.”*

Stacey describes a certain interaction here. Because the founder is easy to approach for conversation, she feels inclined to go to him for conversation more quickly. The founder makes time for her, listens to her and gets into a dialogue with for solutions in which he himself also shows that he has good ideas. He seems to act as a role model, as he shows to be open towards novelty himself and by showing so, it influences idea generation.

Erica experienced more or less the same thing. Yet the founder shows a more proactive approach by approaching her directly and asking how her progress was going. A personal dialogue then ensued in which they shared ideas which subsequently helped her to gain new insights.

*“Especially at the beginning, that tip of the week, that was actually kind of created because I came up with something, he gave feedback on it and then you get into a conversation. You talk to each other and then you come up with ideas. Sometimes I run out of content and then X knows something to suggest. He's also quite creative himself, he comes up with ideas easily, it's just a matter of rolling them out. That makes my ideas better too.”*

Erica also describes a particular interaction here. Because the founder approached her, she felt the openness to engage in the slide dialogue. The founder then made time for her, listened to her and engaged in a dialogue for solutions where he himself showed that he had good ideas. He seems to be open towards novelty himself and by showing so, it influences idea generation.

### **§4.3 Influencing idea championing**

The idea championing phase included dimensions of the entrepreneurial leadership in the form of collective self-efficacy mechanisms, opportunity identification and exploitation mechanisms and underwriting mechanisms. The transformational leadership was present in the form of individually considerate. The interaction effect was present through the above mentioned except for underwriting.

#### **The transformational leadership effect**

Founders who demonstrate transformational leadership in the phase of idea championing, demonstrate this primarily by creating a safe environment where ideas are valued. Employees feel that they can say anything without any value judgments attached, which together form code **safety**.

For example, Berry, from start-up Tech Beta, tells how he sees the founder working to let employees know that there is no right or wrong in an idea and encourages them to step forward and share insights.

*“By making everything negotiable. So, there are no stupid ideas. There may be ideas that are not going to work, but no stupid ideas. He knows how to make that very clear, everything is allowed on the table. And that's why people dare to say anything, and sometimes there are very good things among them. If you don't create a safe environment, it won't happen. You can be yourself and can and should say anything.”*

As Berry demonstrates, he experiences the founder as someone who works hard to provide a safe environment and he also shows that he shares this perspective. In this, the founder seems to see everyone as valuable and thus the opportunity to make a difference within the organization. By expressing himself in this way, the founder shows that he is undoubtedly open to other people's perspectives and tries to stimulate idea championing behavior.

Also within Tech Beta, Kevin described how his relationship looks like with the founder and that there is little that he can't say. Whereas the above-mentioned experiences are derived from seeing the founder appealing to employees from more a central way, Berry experienced it through a one-on-one connection:

*“Contact with X is I will say something, he will take like three or four seconds to think about ... it's something like this. And then he will tell me straight away. And then if I'm confused or if I think that not everything has been thought through or, you know, usually he'll make us think of something else [...] I've never felt that I couldn't approach the guy for whatever reason.”*

As Kevin described, the founder has created an environment where anything should be said. The founder does this by giving Berry the feeling that there is no right or wrong, which seems to provoke a sense of security in Berry, making him dare to share his ideas. In this way the founder shows that he is open to other perspectives and sees Berry as an individual with his own ideas.

### **The entrepreneurial effect**

Whereas founders that demonstrate transformational mechanisms influence idea championing by creating a safe environment, founders that deploy entrepreneurial mechanisms do so by showing trust in them to come up with creative ideas, defining a scope of freedom in which employees can operate freely if they contribute to organizational goals. This forms the label **contributational freedom**.

For example, within Tech Dynamite, Lisa explained what she can and cannot do once she has an idea and wants to share it. She reveals that within the organization, the founder provides Lisa freedom, if she makes sure to show that she is trying to contribute to the organization's goals:

*“It's really the nature of the idea we have. Sometimes we don't even ... we don't ask for approval from x, we just inform him that we are going to do something. And he's very open to that as long as you see that we are trying to drive the product forward. Again, I mentioned, they do like their teams to be independent. And as long as they see that we are trying to go in the right direction they are all for it and they don't put any halt to it.”*

As Lisa shows, the founder trusts her to contribute to organizational goals with an idea she wants to create support for. The founder ensures that the scope of what can and cannot be done is clear within



the organization. She experiences this as a signal that she is taken seriously and that she knows where she stands, which makes it easier for her to move within the organization and get ideas moving more quickly, so she experiences lesser boundaries in her idea championing behavior

Also, Mike from Tech Alpha, outlined what he can and cannot do if he has an idea and wants to share it within Tech Alpha. He says that one of the founders within the company gives him a lot of leeway if he shows that she's attempting to help the company achieve its goals:

*"Especially with big changes, it's good to discuss it with each other, to discuss it with your colleagues, to go to x and see what he thinks about it. But if it's something that has to do with customers, then I have the freedom to say: I think this is easier for customers, because I notice that the customer finds it irritating that they only hear later that they have to pay 30 euros extra for a tailgate. It's easier for the customer to communicate that to them earlier. Then I am just free to suggest that, without having to go to x first."*

The founder trusts Mike to contribute to organizational goals with an idea he wants to get support for, as Mike demonstrates. Within the organization, the founder guarantees that the extent of what may and cannot be done is clear. This signals to him that he is being taken seriously and that he understands his position, making it simpler for him to move across the company and get ideas flowing more rapidly and in a more efficient way.

### **The interaction effect**

The founders who demonstrate both transformational mechanisms, in the form of recognizing personal desires and being personally outreach, and entrepreneurial mechanisms in the form of freedom to try out new things, seem to share a degree of gratitude and respond to personal aspirations. Together this forms the code of **appreciative stimulation**.

Inside the tech start-up Tech Nuclear, Erica described how the founder reacts once she comes to him with an idea. She describes that she feels she can always reach one of the founders and that he is very open to being approached for new ideas.

*"They are always open to it and will never say; oh you again. So they are very approachable. Sometimes it is nice to be able to spar about new ideas, so that I can call him and ask: what do you think? He often says: just do what you think. They give you a lot of confidence and freedom. You also learn by making a mess now and then."*

As Erica demonstrates, having the founder listen to her does something to her. As soon as she approaches him with an idea, the founder puts her personal wishes first and then gives her the

confidence to go ahead with the idea. The founder reinforces her trust by acknowledging her wishes and seems to create a reinforcing mechanism through which she feels she can always come to him with new ideas.

Stacey, also from Tech Nuclear, provided the exact same insight when it comes to one particular founder she most often works with. Stacey describes that she feels she can always reach one of the founders and that he is strongly open to being approached for new ideas:

*“If you come to him with a plan, there has to be room/opportunity for it, but if you see an opportunity, he says; okay is good, lets go. That's how it went for me with marketing. I told him I wanted to do more with it, he said I could try and I came up with a plan. And he really likes that, he appreciates it and you get rewarded for it. So it is encouraged. But then you have to have a plan or an idea.”*

As Stacey shows, having the founder pay attention to her influences her. When she approaches him with an idea, the founder prioritizes her personal wants before giving her the courage to pursue the concept. By accepting her needs, the creator appears to build a self-reinforcing process in which she thinks she can constantly come to him with fresh ideas.

#### **§4.4 Influencing idea realization**

The idea realization phase included several dimensions of the entrepreneurial leadership style. Interviewees described how the founders influenced idea realization by showing confidence in the team to solve problems creatively. Also, founders specify the business scope of the organization to suggest what can or cannot be done through prioritizing tasks required for organization's success and based on personal abilities. Together this forms the code of **ownership**.

Lisa from Tech Dynamite described what frameworks are given by the founders when they want to implement an idea. She shows that she enjoys a high degree of freedom and that she knows exactly what she can and cannot do within the organization.

*“We present it back to x, but in that sense we have a lot of independence. Sometimes we don't even have to present it to x, it's just we have an idea, we implement it and that's it. [...]I have all the independence to implement it when it comes to ideas for projects or things that I know how to implement. More company-wide things like a delivery process or an HR idea, those require, of course, more than me and require a bigger discussion.*

As Lisa describes, the founder influences idea-realization behavior by giving freedom in making independent choices. He seems to do this by creating a defined area that is based on her personal abilities. She experienced a high degree of freedom based on her abilities and found that she was

given the confidence to make her own choices within the framework, which she felt was necessary to contribute to the organization.

Mark from Tech Dynamite described pretty much the same thing as Sara, like that the founder shows a lot of confidence in him and has the freedom to solve problems as he sees fit. However, he doesn't have any degree of constraint.

*“Basically, I can just do whatever I want. I will never have to ask for justification for it. Then if I ever go to X or X, it's more like; hey, I came up with this and this, what do you think about it? But basically I'm completely free to conceive and implement as I want.”*

As Mark explained, the founder provides Mark full ownership of his behavior. He seems to do so by making sure that Mark, in the most literal sense, has no boundaries when it comes to making his own decisions. By doing so, the founder shows a large amount of trust in him, which seems to provoke his feeling of ownership based on how sober he talked about that in his eyes it is only natural that one is given so much freedom.

Kevin from Tech Beta, like Lisa, described a Mark that he also has a lot of freedom to decide what to develop or not, as long as he is sure that the implementation of the idea is beneficial and within the scope set by the founder:

*“And in many cases, look, there are also many things that we simply do ourselves. If we think it's useful to carry out certain refactorings because they make us more stable or safer or whatever, then I'm not going to bother X with that, so to speak. If it has consequences for the customers or other stakeholders. If things are actually going to change, then I'll at least inform him of course.”*

As Mark indicated, the founder gives Mark a high degree of control over his actions. He appears to do this by ensuring that Mark has a small set of limitations, which are set by the founder, when it comes to making his own judgments. By doing so, the founder expresses a great deal of faith in him, which appears to elicit a sense of ownership to contribute to organizational goals in him that seems to provoke idea realization behavior.

## §5. Conclusion

This study sought to answer the question: "*How do the entrepreneurial and transformational leadership styles of founders within Dutch tech start-ups influence the innovative work behavior of employees?*" To do this, a qualitative multiple case study approach within tech start-ups was conducted. It emerged that the transformational and entrepreneurial differ in how they are influencing IWB within Dutch tech start-ups and can be solely present, or via an interaction effect, at the same time.

Founders that influence idea exploration behavior through a transformational style lens, do so by involving employees in the organization's mission and allowing them to have a say in how to accomplish the organizational mission, and thereby making employees feel a part of a bigger picture. They provoke and build identification with the mission. Whereas founders who influence idea exploration from the entrepreneurial style do so primarily by committing employees to organizational goals through actively asking them to contribute to the roadmap of the strategic targets. They operate via a means to an end approach.

Founders who display transformational behavior, influence the idea generation by recognizing the value of employee ideas, following up on them, and recognizing the talents of others, all of which contribute to the feeling of being valued which forms a driver of displaying idea generation behavior. Whereas founders who influence idea generation behavior from the entrepreneurial style primarily do so by creating a climate that encourages continuous innovation and opportunity recognition. Which triggers employees' self-sufficiency to realize suitable ideas. The interactional display of both leadership styles is seen through founders being personally accessible for the employees to reach out to. They make time for their employees to hear them out and offer the solutions to spar with each other. They provide guidance and proper creative solutions and act as role models in creative problem solving.

Transformational leadership influences idea championing by fostering a secure atmosphere where ideas are recognized. They stimulate employees to step forward with ideas, without fear of being judged. Whereas founders who display entrepreneurial mechanisms, influence ideas championing behavior primarily by creating awareness of what the scope is of their influence within the organization and pave the way for the idea to be followed up. The interaction of both styles, through understanding of personal ambitions, being personally engaged and offering the possibility to try out new things appear to provoke a sense of appreciation from the employee which influences idea generation behavior.

For the idea realization phase only the entrepreneurial leadership style is present. Founders influence idea realization behavior by providing employees the freedom they need to effectively contribute to idea realization. They do so by letting employees know what they expect from them,

showing them the trust that they will be able to contribute to the organization and what the boundaries are so that employees experience a sense of ownership that stimulates idea realization behavior.

## **§6. Discussion**

This chapter discusses the validity of the study and interprets the results. It also discusses the practical and theoretical implications arising from the study. Likewise, the various limitations are shared, and recommendations will be given for doing follow-up research.

### **Validity**

In this study, three different operationalizations were used from previous research and were used within the semi-structured interview guide. Through these three different operationalizations, it was possible to create a semi-structured interview guide and ask targeted questions during the interview and let room for asking relevant follow up questions which made the results obtained as useful as possible for answering the main question. The operationalization of the three main concepts also made it possible to use deductive coding to stay as close as possible to the original meaning of the indicators and dimensions and to compare them with the respondents' answers within the specific context. This allowed the differentiate between the two different leadership styles as they overlap in certain areas and therefore subtle differences were to be found.

### **Interpreting result**

Despite the growing interest in the influence of leadership style on IWB (Afsar et al., 2014; Afsar & Umrani, 2019; Amankwaa et al., 2019; Bagheri, 2017; Bagheri & Akbari, 2017; Bagheri & Harrison, 2020), few researchers have attempted to investigate the effect of specific leadership styles on the various dimensions of IWB (Afsar et al., 2014; Bagheri & Akbari, 2017). Despite the established effects, how the precise mechanisms of the entrepreneurial and transformational leadership styles influence the various phases of IWB and how they are connected, has been overlooked. This study is the first one that sought to look at how both leadership styles influence IWB within the Dutch tech start-up domain. The results suggest that the transformational and entrepreneurial differences in how they are influencing IWB within Dutch tech start-ups, also differ throughout the phases and can arise at the same time. This research deems that the interaction effect would be most suitable to deploy, as a singular leadership style cannot considerably enhance employees' IWB (Rosing et al., 2011).

The results found that transformational leadership influences idea exploration by getting employees to identify with the mission of the organization. This identification with the mission has been previously described by Afsar & Umrani (2019) and this research was able to link it as a dominant mechanism within the idea exploration phase. The result seems to indicate that this identification forms the specific driver to idea exploration behavior. One could argue that motivation

could be a more effective driver for idea exploration, compared to the entrepreneurial perspective which is influencing idea exploration through building commitment mechanisms that were not described as being motivating.

Within the idea generation phase, the two leadership styles play a separate role, as well as an interaction effect. Transformational behavior seems to provoke a feeling of being valued, as transformational leaders take one's perspective into account, which has been described by Bass (1985). Whereas entrepreneurial behavior seems to strongly evoke the feeling of self-motivation, which is also previously described by Bagheri & Harrison (2020). The interaction effect of both leadership styles seems to create a mix between employees who feel valued, as well as being motivated. The personal approach and being a role model could be argued to be most effective for increasing idea generation behavior, as well as for employees who are stuck in their idea generation process.

Within the idea generation phase, the two leadership styles also play a separate role, and are also displayed at the same time. Transformational behavior seems to provoke a feeling within employees of safety. A finding that is in line with previous research by Renko et al. (2013). Providing a safe environment in which employees' opinions are perceived as significant. Letting proactively employees know that there is no right and wrong, could be argued as an effective way to influence employees who are perhaps a bit cautious in sharing their ideas. Entrepreneurial founders, on the other hand, impact idea championing behavior by raising awareness of the breadth of their influence inside the firm and paving the way for the concept to be pursued. They seem to trust in the entrepreneurial drive and self-efficacy, which has also been described by Cardon et al. (2009). The combination of both methods appears to induce a sense of gratitude from the employee, which seems to influence idea championing behavior and could be argued as the strongest method to drive idea championing behavior because it recognizes that the employee's "I" matters and can evoke reciprocity toward the founder.

For the idea realization phase founders solely through entrepreneurial mechanisms. They do so by letting employees know what they expect from them and showing them the trust that they will be able to contribute to the organization, which is also described by Cardon et al. (2009). The fact that the transformational approach is not present, could be because this phase is characterized by actual execution and for this a degree of freedom must be given in the form of resources.

### **Theoretical and practical implications**

The current study adds to the current knowledge, theory and practices. The first theoretical contribution is the identification of mechanisms by stage of IWB. Because the different dimensions of both transformational and entrepreneurial leadership styles are linked to the different dimensions of IWB, this research assists in the identification of relevant mechanisms to stimulate IWB within the Dutch tech start-up landscape. The second theoretical contribution includes the insight gained from the perceptions of employees. Because insight has been gained from employees' perceptions, the feelings and thoughts associated with it, lead other researchers to suggest that singular leadership style be named as most effective (Rosing et al., 2011). The results also have several practical consequences that might be drawn from them. It is critical for founders to understand what encourages employees to engage in IWB. Especially within the Dutch tech start-up landscape, as tech start-ups are operating in a highly uncertain environment. To stimulate idea exploration, founders should include employees with the organization's mission and ask them proactively to participate in thinking about how the mission can be achieved so that employees feel motivated and included. Founders can stimulate idea generation by acting as coaches and being easily accessible. Within the personal contact they can choose to spar about the content together and show how they see things in order to create new perspectives. They can stimulate idea championing by listening carefully to the needs of the employees and showing that they take their personal wishes seriously. Founders can also emphasize that every idea is welcome in order to create a safe environment. Idea realization can be stimulated by giving founders ownership of certain tasks and projects in which employees are given room to make mistakes.

### **Limitations and future research**

The current study is not without limitations. Firstly, the degree of IWB depends on the role of the interviewee and the duration that an employee is involved within the organization. The employees interviewed were not all employed within the organization for the same length of time. As a result, the degree of IWB may have differed, as employees need to get used to working within the organization to be able to show themselves and therefore may have altered the outcomes. Secondly, the interviews were conducted in the perspective of how they perceived the founders. Because this gets into the personal sphere, there is a certain degree of biasness to give certain answers since they do not want to put their founders in a bad perspective. Thirdly, only the employees were interviewed so only one perspective is incorporated in the results. For follow-up research, it would be valuable to include founders, employees, and peer ratings in the study to increase the richness of the data by incorporating multiple perspectives. Fourthly, the research cannot demonstrate causal relationships. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore causal relationships through quantitative studies to test the findings. Fifthly, it would also be good to concentrate on the influence of transformational and entrepreneurial leadership on team-level behaviors and their impact on IWB, as previous research indicated that IWB

also occurs on team-level (Hulsheger et al., 2009). Certain results indicated that the founder sought interaction with the group and some employees indicated that IWB is a team effort. Lastly, the results were obtained by focusing on tech start-ups. For follow-up research, it would be interesting to do a longitudinal study where tech start-ups are followed and re-examined in the scale-up phase. This would allow to see if the results are the same, or if the size of the organization evokes different leadership behaviors and changes employee perceptions.



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## **Appendix 1 Interview guide**

### **Aim of the interview**

To discover what kind of leadership style is conducted by the founder and in what way concrete behaviors of the entrepreneurial and transformational leadership style influence innovative work behavior of the employee throughout the different phases. The leadership style concepts are covered in an open perspective with the goal of letting the interviewee think about how he or she perceives the founder. The follow up questions will reveal insights that can be deductively coded. IWB questions will be generated in a way it reveals past behavior, so linkages can be built

### **Concepts to cover**

#### **Concept 1: leadership styles**

##### **Entrepreneurial leadership**

Entrepreneurial leadership entails influencing and directing the performance of group members toward the achievement of organizational goals that involve recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities (Renko et al., 2013, p. 2).

##### **Transformational leadership**

Transformational leaders elevate the desires of followers for achievement and self-development, while also promoting the development of groups and organizations. Instead of responding to the immediate self-interest of followers with either a carrot or a stick, transformational leaders arouse in the individual a heightened awareness to key issues, to the group and organization, while increasing the confidence of followers, and gradually moving them from concerns for existence to concerns for achievement, growth and development (Bass & Avolio, 1990, p. 22).

#### **Concept 2: Innovative Work Behavior**

IWB includes all employee behavior directed at the generation, introduction and/or application (within a role, group or organization) of ideas, processes, products or procedures, new to the relevant unit of adoption that supposedly significantly benefit the relevant unit of adoption (De Spiegelaere et al., 2014, p. 144).

## **Introduction**

What is your role within the organization?

How did you come into this role?

What is your background?

### **Concept 1: Leadership style**

How would you describe your working relationship with the founder?

How would you describe your day-to-day contact with the founder?

How would you describe x as a leader?

How do you see x managing the company?

In what way does x try to guide you from his role as a leader?

How do you see x trying to stimulate innovation within the organization?

### **Concept 2: IWB**

#### **Idea exploration phase**

What is the last time that you saw an opportunity for improvement within the company?

How did you get to this opportunity for improvement?

How would you describe the role the founder played in your discovery?

#### **Idea generation phase**

What is the last time you had an idea?

How did you come up with this idea?

How did you determine if this idea was going to be useful?

How would you describe the role the founder played in this idea?

#### **Idea championing phase**

What was the last time you tried to get support for an idea?

How did you try to create support for this/these idea('s)?

How would you describe the role the founder played in you getting support?

#### **Idea implementation**

What was the last time you contributed to the development of something new?

What did you contribute to?

How would you describe the role the founder played in your contribution?

## Appendix 2 Codebook

Theme: Idea exploration	Deductive code	Open code	Axial code
Ik zit in de meeting om te checken, het is niet alleen marketing gerelateerd, maar voor mij is het in ieder geval checken hoe het ervoor staat. Ik ben meer een denker, ik probeer vooral informatie tot mij te nemen en vaak heb ik dan even de tijd nodig om te zien: dit is de situatie, misschien kunnen we het beter zo doen. Ik ben echt een denker en daar zit het verschil tussen mij en x. Hij zegt het direct en ik moet er eerst even over nadenken. Ik ben meer een strateeg, ik heb iets meer tijd nodig om te checken hoe iets zit en wat het stappenplan dan is.	Building commitment	Including in strategic meeting	Inclusiveness
Er zijn een aantal meetings die we dan hebben waar zij dan ook allebei proberen bij te zijn en ons die richting mede te delen, wat er allemaal gaat komen en wat er allemaal in ontwikkeling is. Maar omdat het een tech bedrijf is, is dat natuurlijk helemaal niet echt tastbaar, dus weet je eigenlijk nooit hoe ver iets is of hoe ver achter of vooruit we lopen. Dus dat is vanuit x hoe ik dat zie. Vanuit x ook vergelijkbaar, maar hij is ook wel.. x moet het ook verkopen, dus die kan het op een andere manier aan ons mededelen. En daardoor krijg ik zelf ook altijd een idee over het bedrijf, dat we al een aantal stappen vooruit zijn. Dat we iets al op een bepaalde manier kunnen leveren of niet. Dat we hard onderweg zijn, dat gevoel krijg ik altijd. Het zorgt er in ieder geval voor dat ik geloof in het bedrijf en de verdiensten die we leveren en dat ik ook wat meer zelf kan nadenken over wat er allemaal mogelijk is op dat gebied. Want dan weet ik wat te adviseren met betrekking tot bepaalde projecten. Dus op die manier trekt het je wel mee.	Idealized influence	Sharing development plans of company future	Motivational Inclusiveness
x made a point to gather feedback from everyone in the company about their role, feedback about their role, about the company itself, things that we could improve. And then he followed up on that with all the heads of department to discuss in more depth. And I had, in my particular case, my main worries or main feedback was about us needing to establish better processes for the company, for the teams to work together especially the sales and the technical teams. And right now we are in a moment where both technical and the sales teams and client teams are working together with x as a proxy and coordinator to achieve that process. And we work together in the sense that x counts on us to give him inputs and also help with new ideas for that process	Building commitment	Asking for feedback for improvement within organization	Inclusiveness
We hebben 1x per maand gesprek met X. Vandaag ging het gesprek voornamelijk over de marketing, en hoe kunnen we dat tillen naar een hoger level en ook over hoe we het daarna kunnen uitbreiden. Dat vind ik persoonlijk heel leuk omdat het echt een toekomstbeeld geeft. Ik ben iemand die gedreven is maar vind het ook	Idealized influence	Including and challenge development of company future	Motivational Inclusiveness

leuk om te bedenken wat de volgende stap is en wat de volgende stap binnen het bedrijf gaat zijn. Dan is het wel leuk om te worden meegenomen in hoe je verder kan en verder kan groeien, dan heb je ook een beeld van; hier doe je het voor.			
They inform us. They tell their employees about what they're thinking about where the company will go and how it will grow, let's say, as a company. And yes, they include us. And they ask us ... they tell us about that. And usually, it's not like, we can say no or yes, but they say; "We're going like that. Think about it. If you have any objections, ideas or any questions that you need to ask?" That helps me to ... makes me motivated and to say, "What is that? Why is it happening here? What?" And search after myself and then I can discuss it with them	Idealized influence	Including and challenge development of company future	Motivational Inclusiveness
And I'll be writing like so many lines of code and then they have to be kept up. So we just do that constantly by instinct. And also, of course, the requirements. I mean, if the business logic gets asked for a certain feature, well, you have to just go ahead and do it. There are no ifs and buts. Every day is just a unique challenge. So I think if the focus is there, then how do you guys make things happen day to day? Because these things are ... like tickets, right? If it's one thing one hour, the other thing the other. So you power your way through the organization's needs throughout the day.	Building commitment	Powering through organization's needs	Inclusiveness
As he says on the profile page, if you go to the x, he's like the father goose, he's like the good guy that will take care of you and like, "No, I made thing." "No, you're not, you're good, you can do it." He's always cheering for you and making you push to the limits and do things. And he's great at that. That's why I think of him like a mentor also, because he's really good to push you and make you learn new things and he always explains. He's very good.	Individually considerate	Personal stimulation	Improving
Ik denk dat het deels bewust is, wat ik zeg ik denk dat het geen idioot is, we staan voor dezelfde missie waar we met het bedrijf naartoe willen en daardoor ben je gemotiveerd en wil je het beste voor het bedrijf. Aan de andere kant deels onbewust gebeurt want het is simpelweg je werk en je hebt er niks aan als je bedrijf er niet beter van wordt.	Idealized influence	Identifying organization with mission	Motivational inclusiveness
Ik probeer altijd te kijken naar hoe we ervoor kunnen zorgen dat het voor hen makkelijker wordt gemaakt want dat is ook onze missie. Logistiek zo makkelijk mogelijk te maken voor onze klant en als het makkelijker kan probeer ik ook veel feedback te ontvangen van klanten.	opportunity identification and exploitation	Trying to improve things	Solving challenges
Nee dat is dus eigenlijk niet zo. Of ja, dat hebben ze aan het begin van het jaar aangekondigd. Ik weet dat dat gebeurt en dat met allerlei dingen heeft dat natuurlijk te maken. Op dit moment werd dat niet getriggerd door zo'n opmerking. Het is alleen meer dat je ziet die verandering een beetje aankomen door wat ik net beschreef. En ik heb dan om me er op kunnen voor te bereiden, dus ik ging er zelf over nadenken en ook met	Idealized influence	Being informed about future developments	Inclusiveness

betrekking tot mijn functie hebben we de laatste paar maanden ook steeds vaker gesprekjes gehad over welke kant wil je zelf op en hoe zie jij jezelf over vijf jaar en dat soort dingen.			
So imagine they come up with a new project or they come up with a bunch of new ideas, and they are very high level and I need to understand ... they say that everything is top priority because it's really important for business. I know that I have ... the environment in the company allows me to put them in check and say, "How important really this is? And why do you want to achieve this? What are the goals? What is the strategy here?" And I know that I can discuss with them that I don't think the same way, that that should not be the priority because of X, Y, Z. And they listen, and ... well, if they are really that sets on that particular idea they just drive it forward. But they are open to discussion.	Intellectually stimulating	Asked for opinion	Inclusiveness
<b>Theme: Idea Generation</b>	<b>Deductive code</b>	<b>Open code</b>	<b>Axial code</b>
Ze zijn daarin wel hetzelfde, zijn altijd benaderbaar en staan altijd klaar om je te helpen als je het lastig hebt, als je ze nodig hebt voor feedback of als je iets wil bespreken. Dat kan wel heel goed met beiden. X heeft altijd hele goede en open ideeën. Hij komt vaak met een idee en een plan en dat werkt heel fijn omdat ik daar van leer. Zo van: oh ja, dat kan je ook zo inzetten.	Intellectually stimulating  And  opportunity identification and exploitation	Discussing ideas for change	Openness towards newness
Zeker aan het begin, die tip of the week, dat was eigenlijk een beetje ontstaan omdat ik met iets kwam, hij er feedback op gaf en dan kom je in gesprek. Je praat met elkaar en dan kom je op ideeën. Soms is mijn inhoud ook op en dan weet X wel iets om voor te stellen. Hij is ook zelf best wel creatief, hij komt makkelijk met ideetjes, het rolt er makkelijk uit. Dat maakt mijn ideeën ook beter.	opportunity identification and exploitation  Intellectually stimulating	Discussing ideas for change	Openness towards newness
Dat is eigenlijk wat ik net ook al aangaf omdat die lijnen zo kort liggen eigenlijk, dat ik dan bepaalde vragen bij X weg leg en dat we er samen naar gaan kijken en samen voorbereiden hoe we die zaken gaan inrichten. Dus dat kan over een mailcampagne gaan, of als ik eventjes een klant heb die een message campagne wil doen op de huidige doelgroep, hoe gaan we die dan inrichten? Dus die begeleiding die ligt er eigenlijk dat we samen even gaan sparren hoe we die zaken gaan inrichten wat helpt me om problemen op te lossen. En daarna laat hij mij vrij om die klanten te doen en als ik hem nodig heb dat zit hij ernaast. Wat dat betreft laat hij mij volledig mijn eigen ding doen en mocht ik ooit ergens op vastlopen, dan weet ik hem te vinden.	opportunity identification and exploitation  Intellectually	Discussing ideas for change	Openness towards newness

	stimulating		
That's what we strive towards. When you're in a part of the product team you send out a digital product into the metaverse, if you will, and then you just try to iterate constantly to see where ... you A/B test, you do all kinds of things to improve it so that the end user or the customer has the experience that they do.	identification and idea exploration	Pushing staff to be innovative	Self-motivating
And after that it's also, at least that's how I experience it, X you know you are the programmers. You guys build this, so if you guys say this is good or this is not good, that's the advice we go by. If you guys think we should go find a different hosting provider because it works better, that's what we should do. Or if you guys think we can or can't deliver certain services on a technical level, then that's what we go with. Basically we have a lot of trust towards each other I think.	Intellectually stimulating	Openness to discuss solutions together	Feel valued
Iedereen is vrij om met ideeën te komen, zo maakt het het veel makkelijker. Je hebt ook het gevoel dat je gehoord wordt. Het is niet dat je met een idee komt en er wordt niet naar gekeken maar iedereen is vrij om met ideeën te komen. En als het een goed idee is kun je daarover spreken met het hele team om te checken of alle neuzen de juiste richting op wijzen. Dus je bent wel vrij om met nieuwe ideeën te komen.	Intellectually stimulating	Openness to discuss solutions together	Feeling valued
Usually I will say that they're doing it through ownership. So when I have something, they want me to have ownership of it, and they trust me that I will have the space ... I have the space to ... excuse me. I have the ownership, that I will study about it, I will be certain about it. And they trust me that I will do the right thing and so they don't have it in my mind. So, they show me trust, they show me that I can have ownership. So I think for me that gives me the space to research new ways and create however I want to this time and the next thing I will create it like that, so I get to experiment. So I think through ownership mostly.	opportunity identification and exploitation	Feeling free to do new things	Self-motivation
They direct me more in a direction or they point in a direction and then see if I go that way. I think. But generally not that much, actually on their own initiative. They're always open to that too. It's actually rare that I'm given something to hold on to. They need people who can solve their own problems. Who does not need so much guidance from them in any case. just give someone the feeling that, how you just described it, that there are no tools but that they actually do something with you which makes you self-starting	opportunity identification and exploitation	Feeling freedom to try new things	Self-motivation
X initieerde het, maar ik heb het samen met X opgepakt en gekeken hoe we dat het beste konden doen, en kunnen zorgen dat het lekker loopt. We hadden iemand die data analyses deed maar we kwamen er samen op van; hoe kan het anders en beter?	opportunity identification and exploitation and	Discussing solutions together	Openness towards newness

	intellectually stimulating		
<b>Theme: Idea Championing</b>	<b>Deductive code</b>	<b>Open code</b>	<b>Axial code</b>
Ze staan er altijd voor open en zullen nooit zeggen; oh app je weer. Dus daarin zijn ze heel benaderbaar. Soms is het ook fijn om te kunnen sparren over nieuwe ideeën, dat ik hem kan bellen van; wat vind jij ervan? Hij zegt dan vaak; doe maar lekker wat jij denkt. Ze geven je veel vertrouwen en vrijheid. Je leert ook door af en toe een smakker te maken.	Individually considerate  And  Creative collective self-efficacy  And  opportunity identification and exploitation	Experiencing freedom and trust	appreciative stimulation
Als je bij hem komt met een plan, dan moet er ruimte/kans voor zijn, maar als jij een kans ziet, dan zegt hij; oke is goed, lets go. Zo is het bij mij ook gegaan met de marketing. Ik vertelde dat ik er meer mee wilde doen, hij zei dat ik het mocht proberen en ik kwam vervolgens met een plan. En dat vindt hij heel fijn, hij waardeert het en je wordt er voor beloond. Het wordt dus wel gestimuleerd. Maar dan moet je wel een plan of idee hebben.	Individually considerate  and  Creative collective self-efficacy  And  opportunity identification and exploitation	Experiencing freedom	appreciative stimulation
ik vind het altijd leuk om te puzzelen en om te kijken hoe je lijntjes zo kunt laten lopen zodat het nog beter op elkaar aansluit zegmaar. Dus dan zit ik zelf te denken; hoe kan het beter? En dan denk ik; ik kan heel goed met excel enzo overweg, dus dan heb ik gewoon snel iets in elkaar geflanst. Dan zeg ik; kijk X, zo werkt het veel beter en dan zegt hij; oh inderdaad, ja doe maar. Waar ligt het dan aan? Ik denk gewoon mijn interesse in die zaken en die vrijheid krijg je volledig en ze zien aan mij dat ik dat leuk vind en dat ik er goed mee overweg kan.	Individually considerate  and  Creative collective  and	Experiencing trust	appreciative stimulation



	<p>opportunity identification and exploitation</p>		
<p>It's really the nature of the idea we have. Sometimes we don't even ... we don't ask for approval from x, we just inform him that we are going to do something. And he's very open to that as long as you see that we are trying to drive the product forward. Again, I mentioned, they do like their teams to be independent. And as long as they see that we are trying to go in the right direction they are all for it and they don't put any halt to it. So basically, that's for us, for ads, which is, of course, easier. And that's basically it. It depends on the nature.</p>	<p>Creative collective self- efficacy</p> <p>And</p> <p>Defining gravity</p>	<p>Experiencing freedom to propose things accordingly</p>	<p>contributational freedom</p>
<p>Vooraf voor grote veranderingen is het goed om met elkaar te bespreken, dat je het even met je collega's bespreekt, dat je even naar x toe gaat en kijkt wat hij ervan vindt. Maar als het iets is wat gerelateerd is aan klanten, dan heb ik de vrijheid om zoiets te hebben van ik denk dat dit makkelijker is voor klanten want ik merk dat de klant dit irritant vinden dat ze pas later te horen krijgen dat ze 30 euro extra moeten betalen voor een laadklep. Dat is makkelijker voor de klant om dat al eerder naar ze te communiceren. Dan ben ik daar gewoon vrij in om dat voor te stellen, zonder daar eerst voor naar x te hoeven gaan.</p>	<p>Creative collective self- efficacy</p> <p>Defining gravity</p>	<p>Experiencing freedom to propose things accordingly</p>	<p>contributational freedom</p>
<p>yeah, well, contact with X is I will say something, he will take like three or four seconds to think about ... it's something like this. And then he will tell me straight away. And then if I'm confused or if I think that not everything has been thought through or, you know, usually he'll make us think of something else. <i>I've never felt that I couldn't approach the guy for whatever reason</i></p>	<p>Individually considerate</p>	<p>Be able to discuss everything</p>	<p>Safety</p>
<p>Nou, ik krijg gewoon echt super veel vrijheid, dat vind ik sowieso heel erg belangrijk. En gewoon het idee dat het niet zo heel veel uitmaakt waar je in die structuur staat om een goed idee te kunnen inbrengen.</p>	<p>Creative collective self- efficacy</p>	<p>Freedom to propose suggestions</p>	<p>Freedom</p>
<p>Zoals ik zeg, ik ben vrij om daar dan mijn mening over te geven van deze feature vind ik goed maar ik denk dat we het beter zo kunnen aanpassen. Ik ben daar ook dagelijks mee bezig omdat ik er zelf ook mee wordt geconfronteerd als de klant een bepaalde vraag heeft en zelf ook iets ziet. Dan probeer dat ik dat ook mee te geven aan ons development team of we dat kunnen aanpassen.</p>	<p>opportunity identification and exploitation</p>	<p>Freedom to propose new suggestions</p>	<p>Freedom</p>
<p>En gewoon suggesties geven en aangeven wat voor ons het handigst zou zijn, want Rick of Reinder en Roland hebben daar eigenlijk ook niet zo veel zicht op. En die rekenen daar ook op. Dat wij aangeven wat er voor ons nodig is om aan hun verwachtingen of plannen te kunnen voldoen.</p>	<p>opportunity identification and exploitation</p>	<p>Expecting input from employees</p>	<p>Freedom</p>
<p>Door alles bespreekbaar te maken. Dus, er zijn geen stomme ideeën. Er zijn misschien ideeën die niet gaan werken, maar geen stomme ideeën. Dat</p>		<p>Be able to discuss everything</p>	<p>Safety</p>

<p>weet hij heel goed en duidelijk te laten merken, alles mag op tafel. En daardoor krijg je dus dat mensen alles durven te zeggen, en er zitten soms hele goede dingen tussen. Als je geen veilige omgeving maakt, dan gebeurt dat niet. Je kunt jezelf zijn en mag en kan/moet alles zeggen. En dat is uiteindelijk wat leidt tot innovatie, omdat je dat gesprekken krijgt over een probleem. Daarmee zet je de deur open voor innovatie. Dat betekent niet per se dat er geïnnoveerd wordt. Wat er zijn allerlei soorten innovatie. Ik denk dat je, omdat je heel snel kunt schakelen en alles met elkaar kunt bespreken, dat je in het proces een soort innovatie doorvoert. Maar het leidt ook tot briljante ideeën.</p>	<p>individually considerate</p>		
<b>Theme: Idea Realization</b>	<b>Deductive code</b>	<b>Open code</b>	<b>Axial code</b>
<p>We present it back to x, but in that sense we have a lot of independence. Sometimes we don't even have to present it to x, it's just we have an idea, we implement it and that's it. And yeah, that happens a lot of times, having ideas for demos or flows, implementing them and going forward with them. But for me, once I have an idea I have mostly ... I have all the independence to implement it when it comes to ideas for projects or things that I know how to implement. More company-wide things like a delivery process or an HR idea, those require, of course, more than me and require a bigger discussion.</p>	<p>Creative collective self- efficacy</p> <p>And</p> <p>Framing challenges</p>	<p>Independence in decision making with scope</p>	<p>Ownership</p>
<p>I will say that they give you the space to try things on your own, make mistakes, learn from them and try something. From there ... and as you learn, the process of learning, you find something new or something different or a new way of approach in general. One project that I'm currently the owner of and I have the ownership of is the website which from coding we did another web app with a CRM workflow. Anyway, it doesn't matter. So I created the whole website, I had to create the whole website, I had to contact an outsourcing company that we have for some reasons. And I did the whole thing myself and I was the leader of that. And they also liked that they took the ownership and they had it like it's my baby project.</p>	<p>Creative collective self- efficacy</p>	<p>Independence in decision making with scope</p>	<p>Ownership</p>
<p>In principe kan ik gewoon doen wat ik wil. Ik zal er nooit verantwoording voor hoeven vragen. Als ik dan ooit naar X of X ga, dan is het meer van; he, ik heb dit en dit bedacht, hoe denk je erover? Maar in principe ben ik volledig vrij om te bedenken en implementeren zoals ik wil.</p>	<p>Creative collective self- efficacy</p>	<p>Choosing what to do or not to do</p>	<p>Ownership</p>
<p>En in veel gevallen, kijk er zijn ook veel dingen die we gewoon zelf doen. Als wij vinden dat het handig is om bepaalde refactor uit te voeren omdat we daarmee stabiel worden of veiliger of wat dan ook, dan ga ik X daar dan verder ook niet mee lastig vallen zeg maar. Als het consequenties heeft voor de klanten of andere stakeholders. Als er dingen daadwerkelijk gaan veranderen, dan informeer ik hem op zijn minst natuurlijk.</p>	<p>Creative collective self- efficacy</p> <p>And</p> <p>Framing</p>	<p>Freedom to decide within scope</p>	<p>Ownership</p>

	challenges		
<p>A couple hours ago I was working with one of our senior developers, we had a pre-existing pricing logic that didn't meet the business logic anymore and we just evolved that, wrote about 250 lines of complex functions to get it to where it needed to be. That was before this call.</p> <p>Everyone has to contribute every day. And so when you have those two baselines and people who fulfill them, like people who work as contracted, hopefully beyond, but they're contributing, right? So you see someone is ... you say that they're going to do it, when they're going to do it - they do it. they're going to do it, when they're going to do it - they do it.</p>	Creative collective self- efficacy	Contribute with freedom	Ownership
<p>What you notice is, if you give people confidence, they take ownership. in such a small start-up as we are, you don't have those rotten apples yet. You have to be able to let people make mistakes. I think X is very good at that.</p> <p>There is a lot of autonomy, we have things at the front that are really close and we are a bit more careful there, there is more overview. At the back end is also important, for the riders, but that input comes from within them.</p>	Creative collective self- efficacy	Freedom and autonomy	Ownership
<p>Then there was a certain structure in it but then X came later that it was still not good enough, so then we were going to expand it even more. We just now have a plan for that, how to make sure that I'm primarily responsible and that X can hand it over. X was very much like; okay, what do you need?</p>	<p>Creative collective self- efficacy</p> <p>And</p> <p>Framing challenges</p>	Offering ownership	Ownership