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The Employees' Entrepreneurial Mindset: The Influence of Perceived Supervisor Effort on the Employees' Entrepreneurial Passion

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Abstract

This paper examines the effect of perceived supervisor effort on the employees' entrepreneurial passion. The study combines theories on emotional contagion, goal contagion, and self-regulation to explain the underlying mechanisms for occurring phenomena. Case-based research delivered the data to investigate the relationship between perceived supervisor effort and the employees' entrepreneurial passion. The data revealed that proximity to the founders, entrepreneurial-relatedness of the employee's tasks, and initial entrepreneurial passion work as antecedents of the combined mechanism of contagion and self-regulation. The findings suggest that employees are affected positively by the perception of high effort and negatively by the perception of low effort in their passion for entrepreneurship when proximity to the founders, entrepreneurial-relatedness of the tasks, and initial entrepreneurial passion are high. However, the perception of high effort can decrease entrepreneurial passion when employees were initially low passionate about entrepreneurship. This work contributes to the literature by providing a theoretical model that describes how perceived supervisor effort impacts entrepreneurial passion on an employee-level outcome.

Keywords: contagion; employee; entrepreneurial effort; entrepreneurial passion; perceived effort

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurial passion is metaphorical "the fire of desire" (Cardon et al., 2009, p. 515) that drives efforts in the context of new venture creation and is therefore essential to research in the field of entrepreneurship (Gielnik et al., 2015). Founders with a high entrepreneurial passion are more creative, motivated, and successful (Cardon et al., 2005, 2013; Chen et al., 2009). Effort is another relevant construct in entrepreneurship as it is considered a driver for successful launches of new businesses (Foo et al., 2009). Scholars insist that effort reflects the purpose of mobilizing resources and energy to achieve the desired objective (Dik & Aarts, 2007). They interpret effort as a signal to pursue goals. Consequently, passion and effort are tremendously substantial constructs for successful entrepreneurship.

There is much research on how passion influences entrepreneurial effort (Baum et al., 2001; Cardon et al., 2009). While the direction of influence seems intuitively correct to start from emotion like passion leading to behavior like effort (Russell, 2003), Gielnik et al. (2015) found a causal relationship for the other direction: entrepreneurial effort driving entrepreneurial passion. Breugst et al. (2012) paved the way for a new literature stream on entrepreneurial passion. They put the entrepreneur's employee into the spotlight and researched the effect of perceived entrepreneurial passion on the employees' commitment toward the nascent venture. They found significant relationships between passion and affective commitment.

Moreover, Hubner et al. (2020) researched the effects of perceiving passion. They contend that entrepreneurs can develop in their employees a sense of passion for their tasks, especially if that passion did not exist previously, and enhance performance by expressing passion. However, the work of Breugst et al. (2012) and Hubner et al. (2020) has shown that there is little knowledge of the effects of the employees' perception of their supervisor in the entrepreneurial context. This research stream, combined with the novel finding of Gielnik et al. (2015) that effort is a factor stimulating

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entrepreneurial passion, reveals a research gap on how employees' emotions are affected by the perceptions of their supervisor's behavior. Therefore, the question arises whether and how the conclusion of Gielnik et al. (2015) holds for the framework provided by scholars like Breugst et al. (2012) or Hubner et al. (2020) with putting the employee in the focus of the analysis.

The theoretical framework of this study merges the theoretical approaches of the respective research streams of Breugst et al. (2012) and Gielnik et al. (2015). Similar to the mentioned academic contributions, I will draw on the emotional contagion theory (Hatfield et al., 1993; Platow et al., 2005) to illustrate the transfer of emotions between two individuals. Besides, I use the self-regulation theory (Bandura et al., 1999; Carver & Scheier, 1982; Locke & Latham, 2002) to describe the within-person relationship of effort and passion in the direction that behavior influences emotion. First, relying on emotional contagion theory explains that displayed positive affect by the entrepreneur can generate affective reactions in the employee. Following this theory, affect can be transferred from entrepreneur to employee during social interactions at work, influencing the employee's emotions. Therefore, perceiving entrepreneurial passion can make employees more passionate about entrepreneurship. Second, applying self-regulation theories explains that effort can trigger positive affect when employees make progress. Progress reduces the discrepancy to the desired goal, which leads to experiencing positive emotions (Carver, 2006). This mechanism indicates that employees can become more passionate about entrepreneurship when they put effort into entrepreneurial tasks. To build the bridge between those theoretical frameworks, I will add the theory on goal contagion (Dik & Aarts, 2008; Palomares, 2013) to point out how perceived effort can trigger the employee's effort. Goal contagion builds on the priming mechanism (Laurin, 2016). It explains that the employee must perceive an external stimulus that activates a mental representation which he or she then accesses later and adapts as his or her own.

Breugst et al. (2012) and Hubner et al. (2020) asked how the perception of entrepreneurial passion can influence employee-level outcomes. Gielnik et al. (2015) questioned the unique direction of passion driving effort while investigating how the reverse effect could occur. As a result of both approaches, I aim to combine both streams and research the effect of perceived supervisor effort on the employee's entrepreneurial passion. This results in the following research question:

> *How does the employees' perception of their supervisor's effort influence the employees' entrepreneurial passion?*

I adopted a qualitative methodology to discover an answer to my research question. This approach is effective in research settings with at least limited theory or knowledge about how a process operates, such as in the current research (Lee et al., 1999). I used a multiple case study approach that helps to develop new insights into a research subject that has not yet been thoroughly investigated (Eisenhardt, 1989). A case study technique is a suitable methodology because there is only limited theory on how perceived supervisor effort influences the employees' entrepreneurial passion. A multiple case study approach helps answer research questions that start with "how" or "why" (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). The unit of analysis I want to investigate is the perception and emotions of current or former employees of small ventures as they are or were in frequent and direct contact with the entrepreneurs (Breugst et al., 2012). Therefore, the best-suited sample for data collection is the actual entrepreneurial employee. I used theoretical sampling to select the appropriate population for this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I video-interviewed eight entrepreneurial employees and used a semi-structured setting that provided flexibility in data collection (Edwards & Holland, 2013). To strengthen the validity of this study, I relied on the triangulation logic (Jick, 1979) and enriched the cases with secondary data.

The study makes several contributions to the literature as the interplay of entrepreneurial passion and effort from the employees' point of view tackles the fields of emotion, behavior, and entrepreneurship. I contribute by using the work of Gielnik et al. (2015) within the framework scholars like Breugst et al. (2012) and Hubner et al. (2020) provided by investigating whether perceived effort can drive passion while focusing on the entrepreneurial employee. My approach results in novel findings for the merged research streams. Besides, this study enriches the research on factors driving entrepreneurial passion as asked for by previous contributions (Cardon et al., 2012; Gielnik et al., 2015; Murnieks et al., 2014). Furthermore, this study contributes to research on leadership as an entrepreneurial task which has not been explored much (Breugst et al., 2012) by showing how the perceived leader behavior can impact the emotions of his employees.

Overall, this paper extends the literature by providing a theoretical model that describes how perceived supervisor effort impacts the employees' entrepreneurial passion and derives testable propositions. The findings suggest that employees' entrepreneurial passion can be affected by the mere perception of supervisor effort. The perception of the supervisor's effort can have a noticeable effect on the employee, depending on factors such as initial passion, proximity to the founders, and the entrepreneurial-relatedness of the employees' tasks. Then, employees perceiving high effort are more likely to put up more effort on their own, which in turn stimulates an increase in entrepreneurial passion. On the other hand, employees who perceive low effort may exert less effort themselves, which leads to a decline in entrepreneurial passion. Additionally, if an employee initially felt less passionate about entrepreneurship, too much effort may cause that passion for waning. Another important finding of this study is that perceptions of strong passion can outweigh perceptions of poor effort, suggesting that perceptions of emotion may significantly impact employees' emotions more than perceptions of behavior.

For practitioners, my findings help current employees and entrepreneurs understand the outcome of entrepreneurial passion with perceived effort as an input factor. Then, entrepreneurs can work on their communication skills and show their efforts the right way to achieve changes in the entrepreneurial passion of their employees. As many firms want their employees to have an entrepreneurial mindset, developing the employees' entrepreneurial passion is highly beneficial. Employees with high entrepreneurial passion could improve innovation, develop inventions, or start a venture inside the firm.

2. Theory

This contribution aims to investigate the effects of the perception of an entrepreneur's effort on the employees' entrepreneurial passion. Current research provides knowledge that paves the way for three different possible paths. Taken together, they can explain how the perception of entrepreneurial effort can affect the entrepreneurial passion experienced by the employees. Two paths are interpersonal as they describe how the transfer of passion or effort from an entrepreneur to an employee occurs. The third path is intrapersonal and describes how passion develops through effort.

Literature found answers to how passion transfers from one person to another via perception and its effects (Breugst et al., 2012; Brundin et al., 2008; Cardon, 2008; Hubner et al., 2020) (Path I). Moreover, another stream of literature focused on how effort and goals transfer between people through perception (Aarts et al., 2004; Breugst et al., 2020; Dik & Aarts, 2007, 2008; Loersch et al., 2008; Palomares, 2013) (Path II). Finally, scholars found out about the counter-intuitive intrapersonal path from effort influencing passion in entrepreneurship (Gielnik et al., 2015; Lex et al., 2020) (Path III). They diverge from the thought that emotions drive behavior (Russell, 2003) but converge on emotions as a feedback system (Baumeister et al., 2007). This system allows us to account for emotion as the output of behavior. Combining these literature streams will bring us closer to answering the research question. In this study, the first path, which describes a transfer of emotion, works without additional considerations. However, the second path, which describes a transfer of behavior, and the third path, which describes how behavior stimulates emotion, act as a unit in this framework.

First, I will define and describe the core concepts of this work: entrepreneurial passion, effort, and the entrepreneurial employee. As this work studies entrepreneurial passion, entrepreneurial effort, and the entrepreneurial employee, it is vital to have a common understanding of them and look at the established knowledge of these concepts and subjects in the literature. Second, I will review the literature on the three paths starting from entrepreneurial effort leading to the employees' entrepreneurial passion and show the current state of research. Third, I will explain the relevant theories for the different paths to understand how perceived effort can develop into entrepreneurial passion.

2.1. Entrepreneurial effort, passion, and the employee

2.1.1. Entrepreneurial passion

Scholars agree on the importance of passion in the entrepreneurial context (Cardon et al., 2013; Gielnik et al., 2015; Lex et al., 2019; Murnieks et al., 2014). However, the definition of passion varies across academics. While Baum and Locke (2004) define passion as the love for one's work, other scholars emphasize the attraction to engage in certain activities in their definitions (Philippe et al., 2010; Vallerand et al., 2003). Literature concurs on the emotional dimension of passion (Chen et al., 2009) and defines entrepreneurial passion as intense and positive emotions felt during entrepreneurial tasks (Cardon et al., 2009; Drnovsek et al., 2016; Hubner et al., 2020). As entrepreneurial passion is affective by nature (Cardon et al., 2009), this paper looks at it as a phenomenon of experience during certain activities than as a trait of an entrepreneur, which is in line with current literature (Cardon et al., 2013; Vallerand et al., 2003). For this academic contribution, I decompose entrepreneurial passion as a strong, positive, and affective emotion toward entrepreneurial tasks. These emotions are not exclusive to the entrepreneur but can be experienced by employees too, which is then called employee passion response (Hubner et al., 2020).

The literature distinguishes between three types of entrepreneurial passion: passion for inventing, passion for founding, and passion for developing (Breugst et al., 2012; Cardon et al., 2009, 2013). Passion for inventing includes identifying and exploring the market for new business opportunities to develop and invent new products, services, and prototypes. Passion for founding arises when passion occurs in creating new ventures to exploit specific opportunities. Expanding and extending a business after its creation is part of the passion for developing.

Entrepreneurial passion is related to different characteristics. For instance, entrepreneurial passion contributes to the success of entrepreneurs (Breugst et al., 2012), precisely their success in starting and managing a business (Cardon et al., 2009), and to the growth and success of startups (Baum & Locke, 2004; Cardon et al., 2017; Drnovsek et al., 2016). Besides, scholars describe passion as a driver for motivation (Cardon et al., 2005; Chen et al., 2009) while having effects on creativity (Baron, 2008; Cardon, 2008) and commitment (Breugst et al., 2012). Furthermore, entrepreneurial passion is connected to evaluations, fundraising (Mitteness et al., 2012), and recruiting essential employees (Cardon, 2008). However, the most relevant characteristic of passion for this paper is that passion is contagious, which is one core assumption in entrepreneurship literature (e.g., Hubner et al. 2020). It means that employees can perceive and catch the passion of the entrepreneur. Emotional contagion theory explains this phenomenon.

2.1.2. Entrepreneurial effort

People say that if someone wants to achieve something, they must put effort into it. Nowadays, people speak of effort as the engine to achieve goals. According to Dik and

Aarts (2007), effort mirrors the intention to mobilize energy and resources to accomplish the desired goal. They see effort as a signal for motivational goal pursuit. In entrepreneurship, this means that people inside an organization work intensively on entrepreneurial tasks to pursue and attain specific desired goals (Foo et al., 2009). For this paper, I define entrepreneurial effort concurrently to literature as intensive work in entrepreneurial tasks to reach entrepreneurial goals. Entrepreneurs and employees can perform entrepreneurial tasks, which is standard practice in startups nowadays.

Effort is often connected to success and confidence. The rationale is that the more effort someone puts into a task, the higher the likelihood of succeeding (Bandura et al., 1999; Lex et al., 2019). If people believe in their skills and abilities to succeed in entrepreneurial tasks, they are more likely to intensify their work and thus be successful (Gatewood et al., 2002). Entrepreneurial tasks embody goals to give the entrepreneurial effort the necessary direction and clarity (Cardon et al., 2009). People who put effort into a particular task to achieve a goal express how important their goals are to them and how much they value them (Corcoran et al., 2020; Dik & Aarts, 2008). Similarly to passion, effort is contagious (Breugst et al., 2020), meaning that, in the entrepreneurial context, effort is transferable from the entrepreneur to the employee. Goal contagion theory, supported by theory on social motivation, can explain this mechanism.

2.1.3. Entrepreneurial employee

As the operating environment for firms becomes more complex and dynamic, given fast and discontinuous change, the whole organization has to act entrepreneurially (Hitt, 2000). Although employees play a different role compared to the entrepreneur as they have not found the firm, they can also be involved and put effort into entrepreneurial tasks and, therefore, experience passion while engaging them. Employees in new ventures take on entrepreneurial tasks regularly by themselves or collaborate closely with the entrepreneur when working on entrepreneurial processes, for example, during entrepreneurial opportunity development or when contributing with their innovative ideas (Hubner et al., 2020). A relevant research stream tries to understand the phenomena occurring when employees act entrepreneurially inside a firm (e.g., Moriano et al. 2014). Intrapreneurship supports the idea of employees participating in entrepreneurial tasks.

Consistent with previous research, this paper highlights the role of the employee and his perception of the entrepreneur in the context of research on entrepreneurial passion (e.g., Breugst et al. 2012; Brundin et al. 2008; Hubner et al. 2020) and therefore aligns with the call from Cardon (2008) to extend the literature in that area. Researching what employees perceive of their supervisors is essential as this perception may implicate their behavior (Dik & Aarts, 2007). Brundin et al. (2008) argued for the importance of employees who think and act as entrepreneurs as they create new knowledge, products, and services and discover valuable business opportunities

In nascent ventures, employees perceive a close relation to their supervisors and hence feel responsible for and highly involved in entrepreneurial activities while they develop a passion for them (Breugst et al., 2012). As passionate entrepreneurs are crucial to venture success and employees are also vital for the performance of new ventures (e.g., Hayton 2003), Cardon (2008) deducted that passionate employees are beneficial. Furthermore, employees can also benefit from the positive characteristics of having entrepreneurial passion, so passionate employees may be more creative or motivated than employees with less passion who, in addition, are less successful at work tasks (Ho & Pollack, 2014).

2.2. Paths from perceived entrepreneurial effort to employee entrepreneurial passion

2.2.1. Contagion of entrepreneurial passion (Path I)

Cardon (2008) delivered the starting point in research on the contagion of entrepreneurial passion to employees and stated it as “a new area of inquiry in the field of entrepreneurship” (Cardon, 2008, p. 84). She summarized the literature’s opinion on the importance of passion for entrepreneurial success. Cardon further argued that having passionate employees is also relevant and deducted how entrepreneurs could transfer their passion to increase the employees’ passion. She argued that entrepreneurs display their passion and used emotional contagion theory to describe the process of passion transfer.

Brundin et al. (2008) conducted empirical research to explore the connection between the supervisor’s emotional display and the employees’ willingness to act entrepreneurially. Although passion was not explicitly stated and measured as an emotion in that paper, it fits into their category of positive emotions. Satisfaction also finds a place, as positive emotions are typical for passion. For their experiment, they collected data from 91 employees from 31 different small Swedish firms who were in frequent contact with the CEO. Overall, they claimed that displaying positive emotions from the entrepreneur would “put employees in positive moods with respect to their entrepreneurial motivation” (Brundin et al., 2008, p. 238).

Breugst et al. (2012) extended the work of Brundin et al. (2008), participated in the research stream of entrepreneurial passion, and investigated the impacts of perceived entrepreneurial passion on the employees’ commitment to new ventures. They analyzed how the perception of entrepreneurial passion for inventing, developing, and founding affects employee commitment. To explain the phenomenon, they used emotional contagion and goal-setting theory. They argued that perceived passion leads to the experience of positive affect at work and affects goal clarity. Then, the constructs of positive affect at work and goal clarity affect employee commitment. The result showed a positive relationship between passion for inventing and developing with venture commitment, while passion for founding is negatively associated with that construct. They explain this negative association as entrepreneurs who are passionate

about founding may signal their employees that they might leave the firm to start another one again. Besides, they claimed that the affective path showed a higher magnitude than the path via goal clarity through their data which is in line with other scholars who highlight the affective nature of passion (e.g., Cardon 2008). They measured these effects by conducting a quantitative study through a survey, receiving responses from employees from over 100 early-stage ventures. They also found out that the venture stage does not influence the impact of perceived entrepreneurial passion.

Hubner et al. (2020) enriched the literature on the contagion of entrepreneurial passion and its effect on employees. Again, scholars used emotional contagion theory to explain the mechanism of entrepreneurial passion transfer from the entrepreneur to the employee. They were the first to empirically demonstrate the contagion mechanism of entrepreneurial passion using two complementary studies. In the first field study, they matched cross-sectional survey data from German employees with their supervisors, where they received over 200 responses. In the second study, conducted through an experimental design, they hired 321 freelance workers from an online platform and told them that a real entrepreneur hired them. Then, they watched video messages that contained the manipulation for entrepreneurial passion where they got their tasks explained. Their findings suggested that the contagion of passion exists, leading the employees to put extra effort into their tasks and enhance other work-related outcomes. They reasoned that a higher employee passion response makes employees invest more energy into accomplishing entrepreneurial tasks as they connect these tasks to positive emotions, which then results in higher commitment towards the tasks (Breugst et al., 2012; Visser et al., 2013). According to them, entrepreneurs can make their employees passionate about entrepreneurial tasks, especially when they have not been passionate beforehand, and also stimulate their work performance (e.g., effort).

To summarize, entrepreneurship research acknowledges the importance of entrepreneurial passion and its contagious nature. Scholars found out that passion is transferrable between people. In entrepreneurship, passion can transfer from the entrepreneur to the employee. Furthermore, the literature also stated that the perception of entrepreneurial passion or related emotions might also trigger subsequent beneficial behavior, for example, commitment or the willingness to act entrepreneurially. Therefore, employees may perceive their supervisors' entrepreneurial passion and become passionate about entrepreneurial tasks. Emotional contagion theory describes the working mechanism of this phenomenon, which I will explain later.

2.2.2. Contagion of goals and the role of perceived effort (Path II)

Literature on goal contagion assumes that people connect other people's goals to their behavior. Aarts et al. (2004) investigated how and under which circumstances goal contagion occurs. They tested for goal contagion in six different experimental designs in their contribution. They exposed their participants to written scenarios of goals on a computer screen, for example, to make money. Afterward, in a behavioral setting, they tested for the goal contagion of the participants. In that setting, the participants could strive for the goal. However, it required a different behavior than that provided in the written scenario, so they could rule out that the participants mimicked the presented actions. They used Dutch undergraduate students as a randomly assigned control or goal condition group sample. Overall, they provided the foundation for other scholars to build on goal contagion theory as they found strong support in their data for their hypothesis that people unconsciously take on the goals implied by other people. They claimed that people might become more similar in what they want and hence what they plan for the future when goal contagion occurs. Furthermore, they found out that goals pursued under unacceptable ways or conditions or with improper manners become less desirable, and goal contagion becomes less likely to occur.

Dik and Aarts (2007, p. 728) advanced this idea by highlighting the role of perceived effort in goal contagion as a "basic characteristic of motivational goal-directed behavior" that facilitates the occurrence of goal contagion. They see perceived effort as a cue to other people's goals. This cue helps the perceiver to account for the goal-directed behavior and thus helps to discover the specific goals that motivate the acting agent. With the help of a self-produced video that implied the goal of helping, they built an experimental study to test for the impact of perceived effort on goal contagion. The sample for this study consisted of overall 116 Dutch undergraduate students. The video showed a large ball that tried to help another smaller ball to free a stuck kite out of a tree. The ball had to search for a ladder inside a room with four doors. The number of doors manipulated the ball's effort to open to access the ladder. Then, they exposed their participants to a word completion task where they had to come up with the word help to check if the goal of helping was accessed successfully. Additionally, the manipulation check was conducted by asking the participants how much effort the ball had put into searching for the ladder. They later conducted a similar second study, replacing the word completion task with a lexical decision task to ensure that goal inference occurred spontaneously without the participants' conscious awareness. During a third experiment, they wanted to find evidence of changes in actual behavior after watching the animated films. After being exposed to the same videos as in the previous experiments, they asked their participants if they wanted to fill out another questionnaire without getting a reward for their participation. They could freely decide if they wanted to leave the laboratory or if they wanted to volunteer without being asked to help directly. The data on this experiment showed that perceiving more effort led the participants to a stronger pursuit of the goal. All in all, their findings propose a linear relationship between effort and goal inferences. The more effort is shown, the more accessible the goal for the perceiver of this effortful behavior.

In a subsequent study, Dik and Aarts (2008) investigated whether the perception of another peoples effort to attain a goal that might be yet unknown to the perceiver triggers the perceiver's motivation to find out about the goal. They assumed that an effortful behavior signalizes the goal as valuable to the pursuer. To test their hypothesis, they used three experiments where Dutch undergraduate students observed an agent who pursued an unrevealed goal with either low, medium, or high effort. Afterward, they tested the participants' motivation to infer the unknown goal. The two experiments used a text comprehension task and an animated film to demonstrate an agent's effortful behavior and let them self-capture their motivation for goal inference. In the third experiment, they used a clicking task on a computer connected to the animated film of the previous experiment as a behavioral measure to account for goal inference motivation. Thereby, they extended their study by adding actual behavior in a spontaneous manner. They found evidence for the perceived effort to be connected to goal inference: "people become more motivated to find out the goal of an actor's behavior whenever this behavior is characterized by more effort." (Dik & Aarts, 2008, p. 750). They further argue that goal inference is essential in collaborative tasks and that other people's goals are a relevant source of environmental information. For them, the motivation to infer goals is the basis for goal contagion, which is enhanced by the perception of effortful behavior.

In the context of goal contagion, Loersch et al. (2008) investigated the understanding of the role of group belonging. They hypothesized that it is more likely for goal contagion to occur when the actor and the perceiver belong to the same group. In their study, they showed their participants self-created videos of people playing racquetball with either competitive or cooperative behavior. In the competitive version, the actors played more intensely, while in the cooperative version, they played more slowly with less intention to win the game and instead kept the ball up in the air. They labeled the videos so the participants could categorize the actors as joint group members. They did this in the shared group membership version by showing an overlay in the video with the text of the respective university of the participants who were students. Afterward, they measured the goal activation by asking the participants to imagine themselves being a coach at an American football team and devise a strategy to win a game. The researchers categorized the provided strategies by competitiveness. They found a significant relationship between goal contagion and group membership. Those who viewed competitive behavior by members of their group wanted to implement a more competitive strategy than the others, whereas there was no difference in the non-membership group.

Palomares (2013) further validated research on goal contagion as he was the first to study authentic conversations after the effect's examination in written scenarios or videos. He argued for its importance because goal contagion "[is] highly social and rooted in interaction" (Palomares, 2013, p. 76). He let undergraduate students in the US form conversations with each other where one had to perceive what the other had to strive for a goal. The pursuer received a three-level goal to test for goal specificity. Then, the perceiver filled out a questionnaire to test for goal contagion. Overall, he claimed his study to be a successful support and replication of the study of Aarts et al. (2004) but in a more natural and realistic setting.

Breugst et al. (2020) investigated the contagion of effort in new venture management teams, taking the research into the entrepreneurship context. They based their work on social motivation theory, suggesting that effort is contagious. However, they tested the boundaries of social motivation theory to see under which circumstances contagion is hampered or facilitated. In a longitudinal study, they collected data through surveys from 161 cofounders of 64 different teams managing early-stage ventures. In their research, they found out that when a teammate puts effort into the startup, it plays an essential role in triggering the effort of the focal manager. Although they did not find support for contagion to happen automatically, they found effort contagious at the management level of new venture teams when threats emerge. These threats are a low performance of the own venture and environmental hostility.

To conclude, research acknowledges that people put effort into tasks to achieve specific goals, and these goals, as well as their efforts, can be transferred from one person to another. As these effects are more robust if the people belong to the same group, this idea also applies to the entrepreneur and his employee. Literature found evidence that people can infer the goals of others, find them valuable and start to pursue them by themselves and, thus, put effort into tasks. If they already perceive higher levels of effort from the agent, these goals are more likely to transfer. Goal contagion theory explains this phenomenon's working mechanism, which I will present later. In addition to the role of effort in making goal contagion more likely, effort is also contagious. Although scholars investigated this with new venture management teams as the unit of analysis, the arguments presented also hold for the context of the employee-entrepreneur relationship as they often collaborate closely in small ventures. Therefore, perceiving entrepreneurial effort can make the employee increase his or her effort on entrepreneurial tasks through goal and effort contagion.

2.2.3. Impact of effort on entrepreneurial passion (Path III)

When talking about feelings and behavior, it seems intuitive that behavior follows emotion. We often say that people do certain things because they feel a certain way. When Russell (2003) theorized about the psychological construction of emotion, he argued that emotional states influence behavior. Foo et al. (2009) studied how feelings influence effort in the entrepreneurial context. They focused on the affect-effort link because entrepreneurship is an affective process and effort is a significant factor for new venture success. They argued, using self-regulation theory, that negative affect is a sign of slower progress, and thus entrepreneurs will increase subsequent effort. Positive affect, on the other side,

signalizes that things are going well and opens the scope of attention. They hypothesized that positive affect leads entrepreneurs to focus more on the future, which results in them engaging with extra effort in venture tasks beyond what is required immediately. They tested their hypothesis using an experience sampling methodology with a sample of 46 entrepreneurs who had to fill out short surveys on their phones multiple times a week. Overall, they found support in the data for their claims.

Baumeister et al. (2007) contradict the predominant view by arguing that emotions occur in feedback loops where they can emerge as descendants of people's behavior. They assume that all psychological processes (e.g., emotion) exist to influence behavior partly but not directly. They theorized that emotion influences behavior through a feedback system. They used the example of guilt to explain their theory. In the example, they describe a person who causes distress to a friend, so he or she feels guilty afterward. Because of the experienced guilt, the person thinks about what he or she has done wrong to avoid a similar feeling in the future. If there is a similar situation next time, the person may adapt his or her behavior so that it does not cause distress. So, first, there was the behavior, then there was the emotion which resulted in a change in later behavior to avoid this emotion. They argue that emotion as feedback is helpful to modify behavior and, therefore, also valuable for goal pursuit as behavior directs toward a goal. The behavior will be adjusted in goal pursuit to experience more positive emotions as they signalize progress toward a cherished goal.

Gielnik et al. (2015) followed this view by claiming that it is not only emotion that drives behavior, but it is also behavior that drives emotion. Notably, they investigated how entrepreneurial effort influences entrepreneurial passion and found evidence for effort to predict changes in passion. They draw upon theories of self-regulation, that is, control, goal-setting, and social cognitive theory, to explain the underlying mechanisms. They conducted a field study over eight weeks to find support for their claims. Their sample consisted of 54 German entrepreneurs who had to complete an online survey weekly where they should report their work-related effort and passion. Additionally, they run a laboratory experiment to further investigate the causal chain from effort to passion. Therefore, they took undergraduate students who first completed a questionnaire to capture entrepreneurial passion and the commitment to invest effort. Afterward, they received the task of developing a business idea into a more mature business plan. After completing this task, they had to complete a second and third survey that served as manipulation checks and outcome variables as entrepreneurial passion was measured. To manipulate effort, they varied the working time for the task. Overall, their findings indicate that entrepreneurial effort predicts changes in entrepreneurial passion. New venture progress as a mediator of this effect and free choice as a moderator of the mediated effect provides the underlying causal link.

Other scholars like Lex et al. (2020) based their work on this idea. They accepted effort as an antecedent of entrepreneurial passion while using self-regulation theories to cover new models on the development of passion in entrepreneurship over time. They posit that passion develops in a feedback loop dependent on entrepreneurial self-efficacy and performance. Then, this performance gets cognitively evaluated. To test their model, they used 65 entrepreneurs from Tanzania across their first study's three phases of the entrepreneurial process. They collected data through structured interviews in person as wells as through questionnaires after the interview and a subsequent questionnaire later in the process. Data collection resulted in three different measurements for each participant during the study. Their first study provided evidence of entrepreneurial performance's impact on positive feelings. Their second study aimed to extend those findings. There, they offered an entrepreneurship training program over 12 weeks to simulate all stages and significant tasks of entrepreneurship. The sample consisted of 150 Tanzanian students, and data was collected through questionnaires by the end of each training week. Their results replicated the findings from the first study successfully. They extended them by providing evidence for the influence of entrepreneurial performance on identity centrality, another antecedent of passion, over the more extended 12-week period. They conducted a third study to generalize and extend the present findings to provide evidence for the mediation effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy between the effect of entrepreneurial performance on positive feelings. They used a similar methodology to the second study but adapted the time frame and the questionnaires to account for the mediation effect. They found support in the collected data for their hypothesis. Overall, they found support for their recursive and reciprocal model of the development of passion over time. According to their model, passion develops due to evaluating one's performance, with entrepreneurial self-efficacy mediating this relationship. They would answer the question of what came first, passion or performance, the following: " [...] passion and performance develop jointly and iteratively over time in a circular manner, not necessarily with a starting point inherent to unidirectional relationships." (Lex et al., 2020, p. 26).

All in all, literature has differing views on what came first, the emotion or the behavior. One stream of the literature assumes that entrepreneurial passion influences entrepreneurial effort, while the other stream makes the assumption of the opposite direction valid. The view on entrepreneurial passion as part of a feedback system brings both views together and lets them exist concurrently. Therefore, entrepreneurial passion may influence entrepreneurial effort, but it may also be true that entrepreneurial passion arises through the mere exertion of effort on entrepreneurial tasks. For the employee, this means that while working on entrepreneurial tasks, he may become passionate about those tasks. Theories on self-regulation, namely control, goal-setting, and social cognition theory, can explain this phenomenon.

2.3. Explaining theories: how and why the three paths work

2.3.1. Contagion of goals and emotions

I use theories of emotional and goal contagion to explain two different ways in which the perceived behavior of the entrepreneur effects the employee passion response. Theories on contagion will explain the interpersonal effects from the entrepreneur to the employee. Although both theories are not the same, they describe how either the emotion of passion or the behavior of effort is transferable from one individual to another. Literature defines contagion as "a process in which a person or group influences the emotions or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes" (Schoenewolf, 1990, p. 50). Contagion, therefore, describes that perceived emotions and behaviors of others can influence the own emotions and behavior.

I use emotional contagion theory to explain how the perception of an entrepreneur's passion at work triggers an employee's passion response. I use goal contagion to describe how effort is carried from one person to another through working on goals.

Goal contagion

To understand goal contagion, suppose that the employee and the entrepreneur of a small new venture sit in the same office and close to each other. They frequently interact during the workday and can engage with each other often. The employee and the supervisor work closely together on the same tasks to achieve specific goals to help the firm in making process and succeed. During these close engagements, the entrepreneur will often set the goals or formulate them with the employee in collaboration. Due to the close collaboration, the employee will perceive that the entrepreneur puts effort into the stated goals and will see himself in the same boat as his supervisor. According to goal contagion theory, the employee may see the goals now as his own and will work intensively on the tasks to achieve them. Therefore, effort transfers from the entrepreneur to the employee. Concurrently, everyday life shows us the phenomenon: we get inspired by other people, especially if they have a higher position. When we observe how inspiring people reach their goals, we sometimes try to set similar goals and develop similar behavior to achieve them. When the younger brother perceives that the older brother is writing good grades at school while spending much time studying, the younger brother will likely try to spend more time in preparation to write better grades.

Aarts et al. (2004, p. 24) summarized the definition of the term goal from literature and described it as "a mental representation of the desired state that may pertain to a behavior [...] or an outcome [...]". An example of the behavior can be entrepreneurial effort, and an example of the outcome can be the success of the entrepreneurial firm. They further describe the process of goal contagion as "automatic adoption and pursuit of goals that others are perceived to strive for" (Aarts et al., 2004, p. 24). Automatic means that the process starts without the need for consciousness or intention of the employee. According to them, the perception of behavior triggers goal contagion. Furthermore, Dik and Aarts (2008) supported that idea by theorizing that goals become desirable for a person by observing others working hard on their achievement. Empirical findings of other scholars give additional evidence for this idea (e.g., Corcoran et al. 2020).

The working mechanism of goal contagion is that of a priming phenomenon that needs three conditions to occur (Laurin, 2016). First, the employee must perceive an external stimulus that activates a mental representation. An example of an external stimulus in our case can be that the employee sees his entrepreneur spending much time on product innovation, so the employee will infer that the entrepreneur's goal is to bring a new product to the market to increase firm performance. The external stimulus is the entrepreneur, and the mental representation is the goal. Second, the goal has to remain accessible for a particular duration after its activation, which depends on the motivational relevance (Eitam & Higgins, 2010). In our example, the employee has to perceive the entrepreneur working on the mentioned tasks frequently, and he has to care to some degree about the goals. As the employee is in the same firm as his supervisor, he has a personal interest in the firm performing well. Third, the perceiver must misattribute the accessibility of the mental representation as own desire (Loersch & Payne, 2014). When the employee later tries to investigate how he can contribute to firm performance by doing product innovation, he may misattribute that this was his supervisor's goal and assume that he now wants to pursue his own firm performance goal.

Perceived effort is a catalyst for goal contagion to occur. The literature stated that it is more likely for someone to infer the goal of the other if one sees the other putting more effort into a task (Dik & Aarts, 2007, 2008; Palomares, 2013). The reason is that the perceiver will interpret the goal as of higher value due to the high effort put into the task by the other (Kruger et al., 2004). Furthermore, goal contagion is a highly social process that requires human interaction (Palomares, 2013). Human interaction happens more often between in-group members (e.g., entrepreneur and employee of the same firm) than among out-group members leading to goals being more contagious inside the same group (Loersch et al., 2008).

The theory of social motivation supports the theory of goal contagion inside social groups. It states that individuals in social situations behave reciprocally in collective tasks meaning that if a person does something for someone else, the other feels obligated to return the favor (Breugst et al., 2020; Geen, 1991). Following social motivation theory, first, the employee will engage in social comparison processes with the entrepreneur and thus try to match the invested effort. Second, he will try to comply with the standards set by the entrepreneur and view his behavior as a benchmark for his own.

Emotional contagion

Let us take the example from above again and imagine the hard-working entrepreneur together with his employee in one room. While perceiving the entrepreneur, the employee will not only notice his behavior, but he will also notice the entrepreneur's emotions as he is putting effort into his work. When the entrepreneur is doing well on his tasks and enjoys them, he is likely to express his positive emotions, for example, by smiling or by communicating the successful progress. The employee can interpret these emotions as the entrepreneur's passion for his entrepreneurial tasks. He will deduce that the entrepreneur must be passionate as he spends hours of effort on his work. Due to their close work, the employee will again infer that he is in the same boat as the entrepreneur and will experience similar feelings for his tasks. As the employee can perceive the emotional reaction of the entrepreneur at the workplace, the theory of emotional contagion states that the feeling of passion can transfer from the entrepreneur to the employee, similar to goal contagion. Daily life shows that if you are engaging with someone who expresses his positive emotions, laughs, cheers, and is in a good mood, it is likely that his feeling will catch you.

The literature converges on emotional contagion as a flow of emotions from one person that others can catch. Scholars agree on this process as "the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person's and, consequently, to converge emotionally." (Hatfield et al., 1993, p. 96). Therefore, the common understanding of emotional contagion is that people can "infect" (Elfenbein, 2014, p. 327) other people with their emotions. Hatfield et al. (1993) provide two possible mechanisms for emotional contagion. First, mimicry takes place. The example of yawning can best explain mimicry. When we see another person in the room yawning, we likely start yawning just because we perceive the other doing so. Mimicry describes the human tendency to mimic another facial expression, gestures, and vocal utterances, which starts at an early stage when a newborn mimics its mother. Observing children mimicking their parents is also an early test for autism, as this diagnosis often follows from misinterpreting emotions (Helt et al., 2020). Mimicry can also happen in a very subtle, unconscious, and rapid (less than 21 milliseconds) way, where it is not observable with the human eye but can be tracked with technology as it takes place. Therefore, people can automatically mimic other people's emotional characteristics. Second, feedback occurs. Feedback means that during mimicry, the central nervous system sends signals to the brain, letting people make inferences about their emotions based on their behavioral expressions. Expressions and emotions are linked as when people, for example, express emotions such as being happy or sad with their faces, they are likely to feel the expressed emotion. Therefore, "emotions are shaped by feedback from posture and movement" (Hatfield et al., 1993, p. 98). In our context, an example of emotional contagion is when the employee perceives his supervisor as passionate by smiling. He will automatically mimic the smile leading to the feeling of passion via feedback, which leads to him feeling passionate.

Emotional contagion can also occur consciously through social comparison (Barsade, 2002; Elfenbein, 2014). Social comparison describes the process of comparing own emotions with the perceived emotional states of others in one's environment and responding according to what one finds appropriate. An employee working with the entrepreneur on entrepreneurial tasks and perceiving his supervisor experiencing passion while working is likely to compare his emotional state to his supervisor and experiencing passion himself.

Scholars found emotions more contagious if people are in a close or similar situation with one another (Platow et al., 2005; Sullins, 1991). The employee and the entrepreneur work for the same firm and sometimes on the same tasks. They typically share many values and interests. Employees will perceive themselves in the same group as the founder (Breugst et al., 2012). Furthermore, the occurrence of emotional contagion is more likely, if the expressed emotion of the sender is more intense or energetic (Barsade, 2002). For example, suppose the entrepreneur is highly extroverted and communicates his emotions loudly or shows many gestures and facial expressions. In that case, the employee is more likely to experience emotional contagion because he will focus more attention on the high-energy expressions of his supervisor.

It is important to mention that not all emotions are trivial to interpret for a perceiver or transfer equally. For example, in concordant affective transfer, when a person is happy and expresses that feeling through laughing, the perceiver might also experience this positive feeling (Epstude & Mussweiler, 2009). On the other side, malicious joy describes a situation where discordant reactions are displayed. An example could be that a person laughs about another person falling on the ground. So the experience of pain or suffering made the perceiver feel happy, which is a discordant affective transfer as there was no transfer of similar affect but a transfer of negative to positive affect (Heider, 1958). In the entrepreneurial context, the employee could experience malicious joy when the entrepreneur is not performing well at an entrepreneurial task, for example.

2.3.2. Self-Regulation: Control, Goal-Setting, and Social Cognitive Theory

I use theories on self-regulation to explain the intrapersonal path starting from effort that leads to passion. This framework allows us to think of emotions as an outcome of behavior and not as an input factor. Using this group of theory explains that people become passionate about an activity because they put effort into it. The rationale is that people set goals and try to achieve them by completing specific tasks. Coming closer to the desired goal leads to progress. Progress toward a goal lets people experience positive emotions. These positive emotions are typical of passion. Therefore, people become passionate because they try to reach their goals while putting effort into work tasks.

Scholars used control theory to explain self-regulating systems in academic fields like engineering, applied mathematics, economics, or medicine. Due to the breadth of the appliance, it developed into a general theory for self-regulation systems, and finally, Carver and Scheier (1982) used control theory to describe human psychology. They argued that people act in a negative feedback loop. Negative means that people try to diminish a disequilibrium between the current and desired state. People start this loop by perceiving the current and initial conditions in the present. Then, they compare the current state with the desired goal state. If the comparison results in inequality, they initiate a behavior to close the gap between the as-is and the to-be state. If people put more effort into their tasks, they will likely close the gap between the current state and the desired goal state with a higher rate of progress. Carver (2006) stated that reaching a goal at a higher rate will develop the experience of positive affect. These positive feelings mean that "you're doing better at something than you need to (or expect to)" (Carver, 2006, p. 106), and as explained earlier, positive feelings are typical for passion (Chen et al., 2009).

The theory of goal-setting supports the presented idea. Locke and Latham (2002) believe that goals provide the following mechanisms: First, setting goals enables a clear direction for attention and effort. People tend to put more effort into what is relevant for goal achievement than goal-irrelevant activities. Second, goals energize people. The higher the goal, the more effort people put into their tasks. Third, goals increase the persistence of people working on a task meaning that more challenging goals lead to a more extended period in which people can direct their effort. Finally, goals are connected indirectly to the knowledge created that is relevant to the task. Furthermore, setting goals creates a discrepancy between a current state and a reference value desired to attain (Locke & Latham, 2006), which goes hand in hand with control theory. Besides, Locke and Latham (2006) found out that achieving goals is connected with the experience of positive emotions toward the task, as goals determine how satisfied people are with their work.

Similarly, social cognitive theory supports the described idea and links to control and goal-setting theory. The rationale of social cognitive theory is that the more effort people put into their tasks, the more progress and success they will make, which stimulates their experience of positive feelings toward their tasks (Bandura, 2001; Bandura et al., 1999). Stimulation occurs through a higher level of self-efficacy, which leads people to anticipate success and progress on their work tasks (Bandura, 1988). Social cognitive theory suggests and substantiates the causal chain from effort to passion.

A noteworthy mention is that not only the fulfillment of the final goal is associated with progress and thus experiencing positive emotions but also the completion of subtasks (Gielnik et al., 2015). Weick (1984) noted those complete sub-tasks as "small wins" that help reach the ultimate goal. The accomplishment of sub-tasks indicates that there is substantial progress towards the goal, which leads to a positive effect on the emotions of the people involved. Concerning my study, an ultimate goal could be the overall success of the new venture in terms of financial performance. A small win could be a positive call with a potential investor securing a follow-up interview.

In our context, the startup employee will elaborate with the entrepreneur on specific entrepreneurial goals and tasks to work on them. This collaboration will start the discrepancy-creating process as after they identify the tasks, the employee has a goal state to achieve. To close the discrepancy between the as-is state and the to-be state, which is completing the tasks, he must mobilize effort. As entrepreneurial goals are higher-level goals, the employee will increase his effort. He will progress and succeed during his work, experiencing positive feelings typical of passion and becoming passionate about entrepreneurial tasks. This process is valid for accomplishing the ultimate goal but for every successful subtask, including small wins.

2.3.3. Combined theoretical framework

Reviewing the literature leads to the necessity to combine theories of contagion and self-regulation to explain the relationship between perceived supervisor effort and entrepreneurial passion. Figure 1 summarizes the theoretical framework provided in this paper. This framework combines different research fields to capture how the mere perception of entrepreneurial effort affects the employees' entrepreneurial passion response.

The starting point of this system is the displayed supervisor effort. As he works on entrepreneurial tasks, he displays his passion, which others can perceive. This process resembles the first path of this theoretical framework: the interpersonal transfer of entrepreneurial passion (Path I). With the theory of emotional contagion, scholars explain that employees can become passionate about entrepreneurial tasks if they perceive the passion displayed by their supervisors. The second interpersonal path of this framework describes the bridge between the entrepreneur's and employee's efforts (Path II). Goal contagion theory explains that employees can infer the goals of their supervisors and pursue them by themselves. Perceived effort acts here as a catalyst that enhances the likelihood of this phenomenon, but there is also evidence that effort is contagious itself and can transfer directly. The third path of this framework is intrapersonal, as it describes how entrepreneurial effort can trigger entrepreneurial passion (Path III). It is essential to mention that this mechanism works for both the employee and the entrepreneur. Path III can therefore initiate and explain the connection of entrepreneurial effort to Path I as entrepreneurs become passionate while working effortful on their tasks and thus display higher levels of passion. The same is valid for employees. They can develop an entrepreneurial passion when they put effort into entrepreneurial tasks. The theory of self-regulation illustrates this phenomenon.

To conclude, this theoretical framework provides the interplay of three different research streams to deliver possible

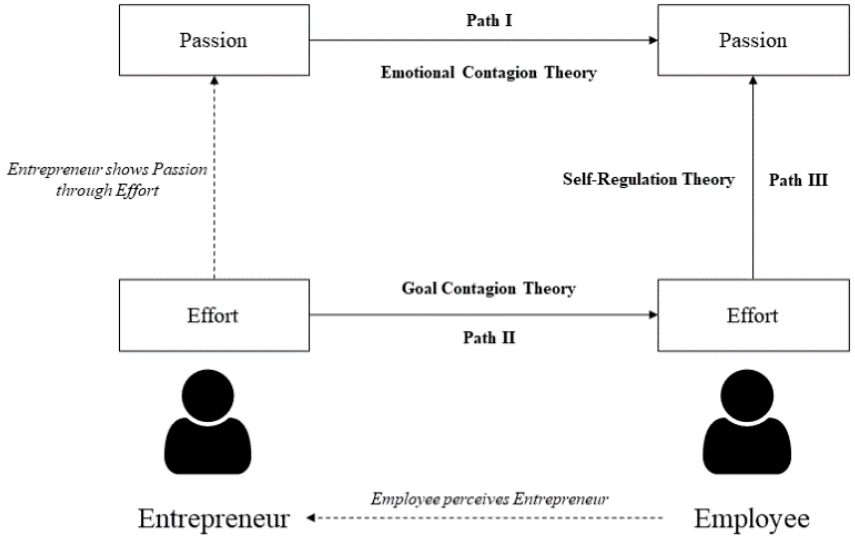

Figure 1: Combined theoretical framework of contagion and self-regulation

explanations of how the employees' passion response is affected by the perception of their supervisor's effortful behavior. The current study aims to extend this framework. Past academic contributions on this topic have mainly focused on experimental or quantitative approaches to find evidence for causality for their claimed hypotheses or to measure changes in the mentioned variables. With an explorative approach, this study intends to close a research gap and put the entrepreneurial employee into the focus of analysis to find support for the provided framework, discover alternative paths or further factors, and investigate boundary conditions for the presented relationships.

3. Methods and data

3.1. Research design

I used a qualitative approach to answer my research question. Qualitative research is a set of field-based methodologies with the participant at the center. Qualitative research aims to generate or develop a theory rooted in first-hand observations. It appears in natural settings, is flexible, reflexive, unstandardized, and the data emerges from the participant's perspective (Lee et al., 1999). Lee et al. (1999) describe qualitative research as a method of data reduction that concurrently improves the significance of the data. According to them and other academics (e.g., Pratt 2009), besides solely describing and documenting what is occurring, qualitative research can explain the how and why to understand the big picture of a process in reality. Therefore, this approach is effective in environments with at least limited theory or knowledge of how a process works, like in this current research. As previously described, there is already existing theory explaining independent mechanisms in the researched process. However, there are still gaps in how and under which circumstances these components work together. Furthermore, there are no formal propositions present. Therefore, this paper aims to further develop a theory on this stream of research in entrepreneurship resulting in specific research propositions (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Lee et al., 1999).

I utilized a multiple case study approach that helps to gain new insights into a less-investigated research subject to add novel insights and observations about the academic topic to the current state of research (Eisenhardt, 1989). Since there is limited theory and evidence on how perceived supervisor effort influences the employees' entrepreneurial passion, a case study approach is well-suited as a methodology. Furthermore, the advantage of using multiple cases compared to a single case study for developing theory is that a multiple case study approach establishes a more robust theoretical foundation with higher richness and accuracy of theory (Yin, 2018). The theory that has emerged from several case studies follows a replication logic and is therefore "more grounded, more accurate, and more generalizable" (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 27), which is supported by other scholars too (e.g., Gehman et al. 2018). A multiple case study approach can also respond to questions that start with "how" or "why" (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Gehman et al., 2018), and it is also appropriate when there is a process-related research question and when variance emerges throughout the data (Langley & Abdallah, 2015). In order to investigate similarities and differences across my cases, I performed a series of case studies to obtain a variety of data.

To gather data, I conducted semi-structured interviews. According to Edwards and Holland (2013), semi-structured interviews offer flexibility for both parties. They resemble a typical tool in qualitative research to get the most out of interviewees. Compared to more conventional experimental or survey approaches, interviews better match the study's theoretical question and analytical context (Lee et al., 1999). Semi-structured interviews allow for more spontaneous inquiries and a more narrative discourse than structured in-

terviews, which are composed of questionnaires with a set order of questions that must be asked one after another (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Additionally, fluid dialogues that include interactions are appropriate for semi-structured interviews (Mason, 2017). The semi-structured interviews enabled the employees to freely share their perceptions and experiences while also allowing me to compare the results with those from later interviews and form conclusions. These factors led me to conclude that semi-structured interviews were the best strategy for collecting rich data for the research topic.

I employed a theoretical sampling strategy to concentrate on developing existing theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This strategy is ideal since I want to gain the most theoretical insights possible for my study topic by selecting the appropriate population (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p. 27) stated that "theoretical sampling simply means that cases are selected because they are particularly suitable for illuminating and extending relationships and logic among constructs," which is the goal of this study. Additionally, a theoretical sampling strategy is helpful in the search for data with high information content (Patton, 2009).

Even though most academics connect qualitative research to inductive approaches and quantitative research is connected to deductive approaches, other researchers claim that qualitative research can be either inductive or deductive or a combination of both (Pratt, 2009). The presented knowledge from the literature concerning this research question does not propose an already investigated tested mechanism of how exactly perceived supervisor effort affects the employees' entrepreneurial passion. Instead, it combines different research streams and forms a temporal theory. Therefore, the study has to test the proposed framework with the data gained. According to Bitektine (2008), case studies are applicable to test for theory as they can be seen as similar to single experiment tests. As the combined temporal theory on contagion and self-regulation derived from the literature does not intend to fully describe the effects of perceived effort on the employees' passion for entrepreneurship, I seek to extend the current theory for this specific body of research. However, the data must confirm whether the assumed relationships and constructs can occur in the described setting. As case studies help build, develop and test theories (Eisenhardt, 2020), they are valuable for this study because some of the applied theories must be confirmed before developing new relationships.

As I worked inside a theoretical framework and wanted to develop this framework further, I started initially with a top-down coding approach. I deduced some codes from the research question and theory and worked inside these boundaries as openly as possible. At the same time, I kept an eye on leaving the boundaries when new knowledge appeared outside the current framework. Then, I mainly used an inductive approach recognized in qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I could look for differences and similarities in the data gathered by using this coding strategy which gave me a clear direction in the data analysis process.

3.2. Sample and data collection

I took numerous steps to guarantee proper sampling and adequate variation between the cases and the selected interview partners. I used theoretical sampling to interview participants currently or previously employed at a startup. Besides, they should have worked closely with the founders to gain a proper perspective for perceiving entrepreneurial effort. With this careful case selection, I increase the probability of observing the "focal phenomenon, mitigate alternative explanations, and enhance generalizability" (Eisenhardt, 2021, p. 149).

Additionally, specifying the population constrains the extraneous variation for the phenomenon and sharpens external validity. By working closely with the founders, I mean that I looked for employees who were either at a high hierarchical level inside the firm or joined the firm instead in the early stage (less than 100 employees and five years old). The latter is because when startups have few employees, they often tend to have shared workspaces in small offices with the founders, and so they perceive them intensively. Interviewing participants who used to work for startups but are not employed in small ventures anymore allowed me to draw deeper inferences about the outcome of the process rather than the process itself, which is also essential to this study as this leads to "better grounding and external validity" (Bingham & Eisenhardt, 2011, p. 1440). Also, combining retrospective and real-time cases mitigates bias as they efficiently enrich the cases by quantity and depth (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). I chose to keep my sampling strategy open to various sources to incorporate different employees. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p. 28) explained the importance of "using numerous and highly knowledgeable informants who view the focal phenomena from diverse perspectives. To limit bias, these informants can include organizational actors from different hierarchical levels, functional areas, groups, and geographies [...]". With this sample selection strategy, I could control external variation while paying attention to the instructive variation of interest.

My sample consists of eight different startup employees who gained experience mostly in firms founded in the south of Germany. These eight interview partners serve as foundations for my cases. They are the primary data sources, consistent with using the multiple case study approach (e.g., Breugst et al. 2015). With eight cases, I am in line with the typical number of cases used for multiple case study research design (Eisenhardt, 1989, 2021). I approached the sample through my network, references from people in my social network, and suggestions from the interview partners at the end of the conversation. I had been acquainted with five out of eight interview partners before the interview already. Two participants work for the same startup, which allowed me to compare their perceptions of their supervisor's effort. Except for one firm that produces hardware for the medical industry, all other firms develop software for different industries, for example, gastronomy, construction, and logistics. Seven out of eight participants were native German speakers, so I translated the interview questions for them and conducted these

interviews in German. Table 1 shows an overview summary of the sample cases.

After approaching the interview participants initially, primarily via phone or messaging via LinkedIn, I got their agreement to participate as interview partners in my study. Then, I made an appointment for the interview within the next 14 days while letting my participants choose the exact time and date. I did this to ensure that they had enough time for the interview and no tight schedule or other appointments that applied pressure to the interview timeframe. Besides, I wanted to ensure that the interviewee's responses were not affected by these factors due to this flexibility in time and location through the video call (Lee et al., 1999). Throughout the initial approach, I asked their permission to video-record the interview and ensured confidentiality and anonymity for the presented data in the final paper. This promise enhances the honesty and integrity of the participants (Huber & Power, 1985). Then, I sent them an email invitation for their calendars with the corresponding link to enter my virtual video room. I blocked one hour for the interview to account for any delays and have enough flexibility to arrange the conversation within this timeframe. The only information I exposed about the study to the participants was that in my research: "I investigate relationships between employees and entrepreneurs within new ventures.". Therefore, they were not biased or primed by exposing too many details about my research or knowing the research question.

After starting the video call, I reminded them about the video recording to ensure transparency and reminded them again that all personal data would be anonymized. Additionally, I promised them to stop the interview whenever they did not want to continue. I encouraged my interview partners to speak out as openly as possible and told them there were no right or wrong answers as I was interested in their experiences and opinions. In the end, I asked whether I could contact the interview partners afterward in case of any questions. Additionally, I asked if they could suggest someone else who would fit into my study. This approach led me to five recommended interview partners, two of whom further agreed and participated.

As previously stated, the research builds on semi-structured interviews that I performed using the technique of Eisenhardt (1989). I based my methodological approach on qualitative studies addressing entrepreneurship using the same scientific methodology (Breugst et al., 2015). I was able to extract the most information possible from the cases thanks to the ability to modify the interview questions based on the progress of the interviews. Sometimes I got quick responses to the questions I had meant to ask. By asking more detailed questions or focusing on particular episodes in the participants' stories, the semi-structured setting of the guideline allowed me to go deeper into these cases. Recall bias from the interviewees was a common concern prior to conducting interviews. I tried asking interviewees about specific incidents or memories rather than their general perceptions to prevent this bias (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Event tracking was a crucial aspect of the data gathering, in addition to avoiding bias, because explicit statements about events helped me find patterns in the data.

In order to prevent bias in the composition of the questions, I created the interview guidelines for the semi-structured interviews before obtaining or considering concrete employees as participants. According to how the conversation developed, I only utilized pertinent questions that were largely interchangeable, even within sections (Edwards & Holland, 2013). I adjusted the number of questions for relevance to the interview partner. Generally, the interview guide contained 34 questions, with 11 mandatory and 23 optional. I structured the guideline into five main sections, with a 3-level hierarchy starting each section with opening questions I asked on the first level. The second level was about to specify the opening question further. The third level was mainly on a yes-or-no level to get a more profound and precise understanding of the interviewee's response. I asked the first-level questions in every interview. Level 2 and 3 questions were possible follow-up questions to guide the conversation in a more directive way and were more or less optional to the conversation.

In the first section, I asked for a brief and general introduction of the employee and the startup they currently or formerly worked in. This opening question helped each participant familiarize himself with the interview environment and let me learn more about the participants' experiences. It also gave me an overview and a preliminary understanding of how the employee sees himself and his business. Additionally, this assisted me in my data analysis since I was getting to know the different stories. The second section of questions concerned the participants' entrepreneurial passion and effort. I asked them to capture the employee's general level of entrepreneurial passion and effort, as these are core concepts of this study. The third section was about the relationship between the entrepreneur and the employee to better understand their interactions and communication. The fourth and fifth sections contained questions about the perceived passion and effort of the entrepreneur and the possible effects of perceived effort on the employee's entrepreneurial passion, as this is the core question of this study.

The final interview guideline helped me with the following: First, I verified that every interview partner fulfills the necessary criteria to participate in this study, for example, if they have or had enough interaction with the founders to have an accurate perception. Second, I tested some essential theoretical assumptions, for example, if employees perceive to be in the same boat as their founders. Third, I gained new knowledge by asking about concrete effects and possible explanations for the phenomenon. To provide transparency, I attached the complete interview guide in Appendix A1 and the German translation in Appendix A2. I explained every question and referenced literature when applicable to enhance internal validity.

The interviews were conducted via video calls using the software Zoom, which allowed me, together with the approval of the participant, to record the video sessions. Therefore, I gained richer data due to not only having the audio

Table 1: Summary of sample cases

Employee name	Employment status in small venture	Role	Period of employment	Industry	Founding Experience	Known from personal network
JG	Prior employment	Legal Consultant	2017-2018	Data Security	None	Yes
GD	Current employment	Software Developer	2018-today	Healthcare-Hardware	Prior venture founded	No
RB	Current employment	Venture Developer	2022-today	Construction-Software	Prior venture founded twice	Yes
MS	Current employment	Software Developer	2021-today	Logistics-Software	Prior venture founded	No
CH	Prior and current employment	Customer Success Representative	2018-2019	Identity Management	Subsequent venture founded	Yes
JK	Prior employment	Product Manager	2017-2022	Gastronomy	Subsequent venture founded	Yes
LL	Current employment	Chief of Staff	2022-today	Construction-Software	Prior venture founded	No
AW	Current employment	Business Development Representative	2021-today	HR-Management	None	Yes

files but the corresponding visual data. Recording helped me a lot since I could omit taking notes frequently while doing the interview and focus on the conversation, which made the interviews more authentic and enabled me to establish more trust with my interview partners. With the video recordings, I accounted for peoples' gestures, facial expressions, and emotions. Consequently, I better understood the conversation afterward and enriched the spoken word by further interpreting and perceiving visual data. Having video data of the conversation is, therefore, superior to recorded audio only, which increases the reliability of this study.

Before starting with the regular interviews, I conducted a pilot interview with a close colleague to check if the technical setup was working correctly, without connection or audio issues and if the exported files were processable for me afterward. Additionally, I tested if the questions were understandable without explaining them deeper. Finally, I could use the pilot interview to get used to the setting, account for good light and audio conditions, and have more confidence in asking the questions after testing them once. The regular interviews benefited much from the pilot interview since no significant troubles or disturbances occurred.

Regarding the duration of the interviews, I set a goal of approximately 30-45 minutes because I believed this was required to glean insightful information and to follow academics' recommendations to make prior decisions to the wished interview duration (e.g., Lee et al. 1999). The recordings contain 273 minutes of video data. Transcribing the interviews resulted in 71 single-spaced pages. For transparency reasons, I included the transcripts of all interviews in Appendix A4. Within the next 24 hours of doing the interviews, I transcribed them. As a result, there should be a better assessment of the cases and a deeper engagement with little loss of significant interview-related memories. On average, the interviews took 34 minutes.

I stopped seeking new interview partners and collecting further data as I began to receive the same information that only added little benefit to the study, which researchers call the point of reaching theoretical saturation (Lee et al., 1999). Also, as I iterated between data analysis and collection, I anticipated no new codes for the final coding scheme after conducting the eighth interview, suggesting that theoretical saturation had occurred (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019).

In addition to gathering information from interviews, I also looked for secondary data to back up the collection and corroborate the triangulation method (Jick, 1979). After finding agreement across the interview data, triangulation in qualitative studies can show "agreement among different sources or types of data" (Lee et al., 1999, p. 179) and further validate the gained results. Edmondson and McManus (2007, p. 1157) describe the strategy of triangulation as a "process by which the same phenomenon is assessed with different methods to determine whether convergence across methods exists.".

Therefore, I gathered information from the startup websites and CrunchBase, watched videos, and read articles

about their teams and products on YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Besides, I looked at the supervisors' and interviewees' educational and professional backgrounds on LinkedIn and other material I found about them, like their websites or blogs, publications, articles in certain magazines, or interviews they conducted to enhance my understanding of their personalities. Additionally, the participants showed me presentation decks of their respective companies, which I was allowed to take notes on but not to use afterward in my data analysis as a separate file. Finally, I looked on the internet for further interviews with employees of the respective firms for deeper insights and validating statements. To collect these data, I utilized Google as a search engine and applied a keyword strategy using operators such as "and" and "or" to account for aspects and synonyms. Then, I created a matrix for defining and tracking search terms to combine different wordings and languages to create specific search queries. To form a search term, for example, I took the name of one of the ventures and added the words interview and employee with the connector "and" to look for employee interviews of this firm. I used a webpage-to-pdf converter (Print Friendly & PDF) or the print function of the Google Chrome web browser to scrape the information from the different sources and make it usable for data analysis software later in the process. For video or audio material, I used a software named Trint which delivers artificial intelligence-based transcripts with a sufficient accuracy rate to save time in the data collection process and make it usable for further analysis.

This kind of data collection technique is commonly accepted and used by scholars (e.g., Gehman et al. 2018). Secondary data helped verify the interviewees' self-reported claims and the characteristics of their entrepreneurs and increased the overall confidence in the accuracy of the findings. It supported me in understanding the participants' working environment as they sometimes needed help to give certain information on a specific topic because they could not remember or did not mention it during the interview, although I asked them. Table 2 summarizes which data source I used for every case.

3.3. Data analysis

Although I knew I wanted to identify patterns relating to how perceived effort affected employees' entrepreneurial passion while coding, I tried to approach the data with an open mind and no preconceived notions (Suddaby, 2006). I could therefore find notions that were related to the research issue. When reading through the transcripts and secondary data for the first time, I decided against immediately starting the analyzing process because I wanted to become more familiar with the data and get a better sense of the big picture. It was necessary because one challenge was avoiding bias while processing the collected data (Eisenhardt, 1989).

In order to make sure I did not miss anything, I started coding as soon as I finished reading through the data for the second time. To confirm the codes, I coded each unit of data twice. I mixed bottom-up with top-down coding as I do not generate new theory but work in existing theoretical frames and want to allow the narrative to emerge inside this frame from the raw data. Therefore, I anticipated some codes derived from the research question and the theoretical framework I work in that I might use later for building my model and started with the most core concepts of my research: perceived entrepreneurial effort, perceived entrepreneurial passion, entrepreneurial effort, and entrepreneurial passion of the employee. Then, I organized the data inside this categorization with an open coding strategy (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). I coded each statement I believed to be helpful to deepen the insights and subsequently be grouped with other statements and secondary data. By identifying and grouping text units belonging to the same concepts, I allocated codes to statements.

Labeling statements produced numerous first-order codes. The first-order codes' complex narratives are the foundation for a more theoretical and analytical view of the data than just a descriptive one. To organize the first-order codes which emerged from open coding, I followed an axial coding approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to find differences and similarities between the categorized data parts. I processed this by connecting the first-order codes and grouping them into categories that produce a logical whole. It reduced the number of codes and resulted in a better overview of the information pieces. In this step, I sought to aggregate codes into higher-order concepts to pave the way to the corresponding literature and theory. It resulted in the creation of second-order codes. An investigation of this kind enables the discovery of potential underlying dimensions or patterns in the data. Next, I used selective coding to the emergent patterns in the data to extract the theoretically explanatory dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and build the bridge back to my initial coding scheme considerations. The final phase of my analysis started with abstracting themes into higher-order theoretical dimensions. I iterated back and forth between my interpretations and the data to ensure the former held.

I iteratively worked on the data coding using MAXQDA (Version: Plus 2022, Release 22.3.0) as my comprehension of the research issue grew and deepened (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As a result, whenever I developed new insights into the material, I had to re-check the coding scheme. It involved renaming first-order codes and re-clustering my codes into subcategories. This process follows the replication logic for the multiple case approach, as every single case can be observed independently and not as an additional data point (Eisenhardt, 2021). Therefore, I tested every case for the emergent theory's occurrence, which helped me gain familiarity with data and preliminary theory development. It also helped to identify patterns across the cases. Observing every single case on its own encouraged me to look past my first impression and consider the evidence from various angles, to form relationships and investigate the underlying mechanism. I updated the codes regularly during the analysis following this procedure. It means I added new codes while dropping other codes in the process. During data analysis, I

Table 2: Overview of used data types for the sample cases

Case	Interview Data	CV	CV Founders	Website Information	Other Employee Interviews	Articles	Founder Interviews	Other information
JG	8 pages	Yes	3 CVs	37 pages	28 pages	-	-	-
GD	8 pages	Yes	4 CVs	35 pages	-	4 pages	-	6 pages
RB	10 pages	Yes	3 CVs	8 pages	12 pages	6 pages	-	64 pages
MS	10 pages	Yes	3 CVs	13 pages	-	-	13 pages	18 pages
CH	8 pages	Yes	4 CVs	17 pages	-	-	16 pages	26 pages
JK	10 pages	Yes	3 CVs	9 pages	-	11 pages	-	1 page
LL	10 pages	Yes	3 CVs	8 pages	12 pages	-	-	4 pages
AW	7 pages	Yes	2 CVs	47 pages	-	7 pages	3 pages	-

regularly iterated between the emergent theory and the data to compare existing knowledge with new information to close the research gap, as recommended by Eisenhardt (2021).

Overall, the coding and analysis process was done iteratively and repeatedly before ending up with a final scheme and analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This strategy helped me gain new insights from the data I might have missed if I had only gone through it once. Besides, I asked a colleague to check and agree on the meaning of the codes and the correspondent data. Double-checking enhanced the accuracy of my findings. Together we re-evaluated the data, committed to discussions, and converged interpretations if there were discrepancies over specific codes. As the last step, I compared all data to the final coding scheme at the end of the analysis process. Figure 2 shows an excerpt of the data structure scheme. The complete list of codes, with explanations and examples for every code, and the code structure, is shown in Appendix A3.

4. Findings

To assure the promised anonymity and confidentiality for the interviewed people and their respective firms and founders, I replaced their names with acronyms of randomized names, for example, JG derived from John Grey. When I write about the company that JG works for, I refer to it as JG_Company, adding an underscore and the word company to the respective name. The same holds for the founder of the respective firm, who will be referred to as JG_Founder if there is only one founder, and if there are multiple ones, I will add a number suffix to the name, for example, JG_Founder_1 representing one founder and JG_Founder_2 representing an additional founder. The numbers resemble an order of proximity to the founder, meaning that JG worked closer with JG_Founder_1 than with JG_Founder_2. I used this naming convention for every data related to the correspondent interview partner.

4.1. Case descriptions and within-case analyses

4.1.1. The case of JG

JG is 28 years old and studied computer science and business administration in his bachelor's and master's programs at a large university. During his studies, he wanted to explore the everyday life of a startup and joined a young venture for one year overall as his first job. The firm operates in data security. They consult within these topics as and offer small software solutions to provide the regulatory standards that small and medium-sized companies need. The firm was founded by another firm that hired three experienced CEOs to build and grow the startup. As JG joined the company in its first year after its foundation in 2017, his tasks were broad. His primary focus was working in sales and generating as many leads as possible to acquire new potential customers for the firm securing a deal with them. Because of his IT background, he could support requirements analysis for software selection, processing incoming trouble tickets, and even programming. Overall, he acted additionally as an assistant to the CEOs as he supported them with their daily work and even had to search for another office as the firm started to grow. JG cooperated mostly with JG_Founder_1. She brought in much working experience as she had previously worked as a business analyst in consulting and as a head of corporate sales for another startup in the food industry. In the end, JG left the company to explore another challenge at an IT consultancy, where he still works nowadays and is enjoying his job. After working for the startup, he never got in touch with other small ventures.

Before working for this company, JG had no touching points with startups or entrepreneurship. He mentioned that generally, he would like the idea of founding his own company one day if he finds an appropriate IT-related product and could imagine taking the necessary tradeoffs like not earning much in the beginning. All in all, he started with a low passion for entrepreneurship in comparison to the other participants.

JG perceived his founders to put high effort into their tasks and the venture. He reported that his founders always were willing to go the extra mile "without exception" and that he has "never seen them going home or coming to work ever" due to the long working hours he perceived. Besides, he received emails and task descriptions on the weekends and estimates for his supervisors additional "12 hours or 8 hours normal working time on Saturdays and Sundays". He perceived high entrepreneurial passion from his founders. He

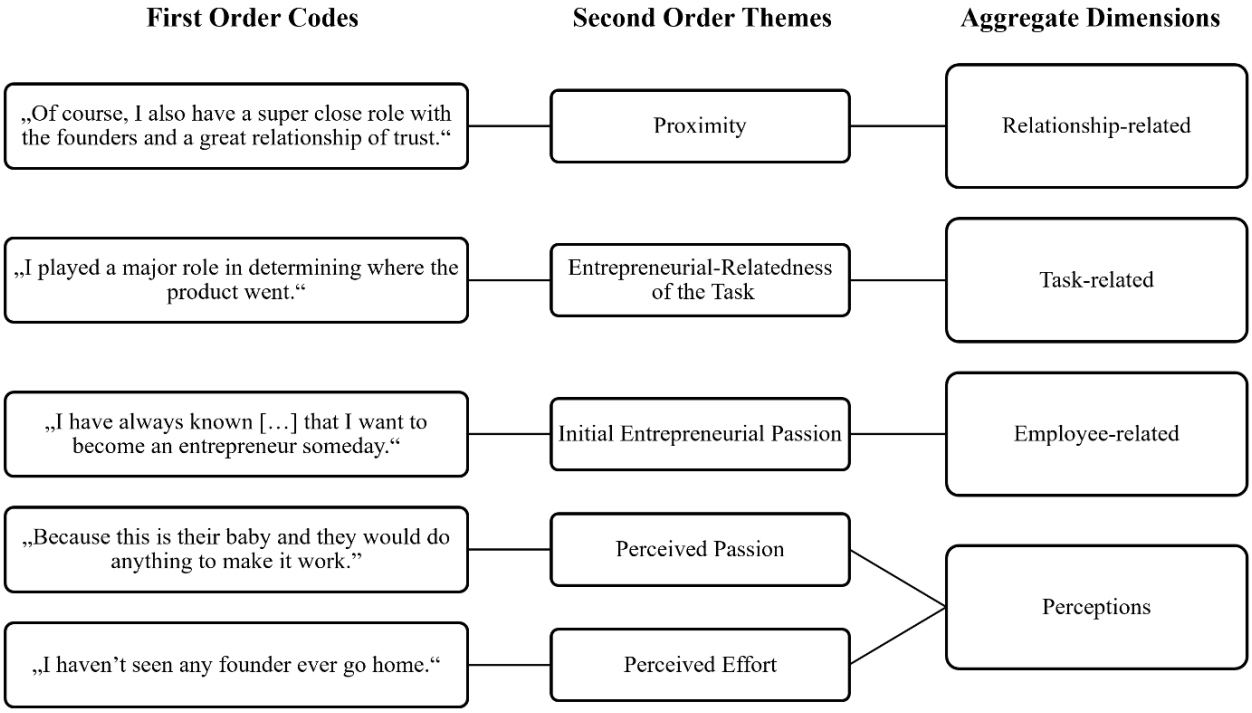

Figure 2: Excerpt of data structure

described JG_Founder_1 as “very passionate and very extroverted” who always had to “drop and leave everything else aside” when she had an idea and pushed for immediate implementation as she “really fell in love with her ideas and pushed them towards the end.”.

JG claimed that this behavior influenced him as he “therefore stayed often longer in the office” to collaborate with JG_Founder_1 on her ideas. He reasoned that he increased his effort because of his passion for the tasks. He also mentioned that progress made his supervisor happier, and “she seemed to be very interested in this progress. That was actually the passion that made [him] stay longer because [he] knew that it was very important to her and that she was extremely happy when there was progress.”. Overall, JG increased his level of effort while working for JG_Company as he “was almost always willing, if [he] had no other obligations […] to go the extra mile and also stay late at the office.”. However, he did not enjoy this amount of effort after a few months because he either “wanted to do other stuff,” and “had other interests than sitting in the office with the founders after 11 pm” or disliked the expectancy of “continuously staying until 11 pm the next day too”. He realized that this is not the working schedule that fits in his life and therefore chose to join a firm where he had a stable 40-hours-week. He described that this experience “brought [him] further away from founding a venture” which fits the fact that he never showed interest to the entrepreneurial process afterward. To sum up, JG perceived much entrepreneurial effort and passion, which made him increase the effort he put into his tasks while working with the founders. However, this amount of effort decreased his passion for entrepreneurship.

4.1.2. The case of GD

GD is 29 years old and was referred to this study by JG from his network. GD earned a degree from a Turkish university in computer engineering. Her long-term goals, which she also mentions on her social media accounts, are to start a business, become a strong tech woman, and create cutting-edge technology. After working as a software developer for a Turkish company, she moved to Germany four years ago to start working for the GD_Company, a startup operating in the medical sector. There, she is still working as a software developer. She joined the firm as one of the first ten employees. GD saw the startup grow to 450 employees, but a Swedish company acquired the company during this period. The initial founders dropped out after the acquisition and got replaced by two managers. GD_Founder_1 and GD_Founder_2 founded the firm in the first place with more than 30 years of combined working experience in relevant fields and sectors. In comparison, GD_Founder_2 brought expertise in business for the medical industry, and GD_Founder_1, as CTO, was the primary contact person for GD discussing relevant technical topics with previous experience in relevant research fields. GD_Founder_3 and GD_Founder_4, who bring equivalent experience to the firm, replaced the founding team.

GD had her first touching point with entrepreneurship before working for GD_Company. She participated in a programming competition where she won. By winning the competition, she got a sponsorship to build her own company, which she tried to start. According to her, the later business failed because the sponsorship was insufficient, and the government refused to support her further, making her look out for international opportunities. She discovered an opportu-

nity for support in Germany, but at the same time, she got a job offer from GD_Company, which she ultimately took. Nevertheless, GD started her job with a high initial passion for entrepreneurship as "it was [her] main idea to found a startup.". She reported that when asked during her job interview where she sees herself in 5 years, GD said she wanted to have her own business then.

GD enjoyed working with the initial founders before they left the firm. From GD_Founder_1 and GD_Founder_2, she perceived a high level of effort. She had never seen them leaving the office before herself and perceived them to invest extra effort beyond what was immediately required. If there was a problem at work, "they had to solve it today.". After the initial founders left the firm and the new managers took over, she perceived a decline in effort: "so the founder team, I would say they were more invested as the current ones.". She described the initial founders, GD_Founder_1 and GD_Founder_2, as "the creative minds" who brought the ideas in and worked intensively to improve the product. However, after the change, she saw GD_Founder_3 and GD_Founder_4 "working the same as us - 40 hours" per week, not being committed to improving the product as they "don't bring the ideas" and leaving the office regularly before herself. Additionally, she perceived low passion from the new supervisors. According to her, they focus on profitability, company benefit, and delivering a minimal valuable product. Instead, the initial founders were able to create and improve the product and cared more about the customers as they traveled more to customers in person to solve their problems.

Perceiving different levels of effort and passion by the two different managing teams led to different effects on GD. Perceiving the effort of the initial founders increased her level of effort while they worked in "challenging" times and solved problems together. They enhanced her in gaining responsibility for more entrepreneurial tasks when she traveled to customers for specific tasks even though "normally, software developers do not travel." Especially the effort they put into their product affected GD as she said, "[. . .] if your employers are more focused on entrepreneurship or they are spending more effort on the product that they have created, you see that, and you also get more motivation as well.". This effect changed to the opposite after the new managers were in charge, and GD perceived little effort. Now, she is considering reducing her working hours from 40 to 35 and tracking her working time to avoid substantial overtime. She will not increase her effort if she does not benefit personally from it. Concurrently, her entrepreneurial passion decreased as she now feels "that I kind of lost that mindset as well. But with the founders, I was so much searching to do the stuff, and I was so really focused on the idea of having a business, but right now, I lost it. Not fully lost it, but it is definitely decreased. So, there is a huge effect.". She also perceived this effect in her last job when she worked solely on solving daily problems and lost the drive to continue on entrepreneurial tasks. Narrowing down her effort solely on daily tasks was "kind of affecting" for her, "even though you don't realize it.". She feels the same as she had felt in her previous job: "Being a normal employee that's just saving the day as I had in Turkey."

To explain this effect, she used a metaphor related to the contagion effect described in the theory section: "In Turkey, we say if you want to know the person you should ask the friends. You look at the friend to understand the other person. So, if you are working with a colleague who is entrepreneurship-focused, you will be mirroring yourself one day. As soon as you get closer, you communicate, you discuss, so you get some ideas from your friend. So, this is what I feel. So, if you have a friend who is up there, it pulls you up." In addition, she said: "I mean even for the children. If you look at the children, they are the copy of their families. It is the same. You are so close to your family, so you become a copy of them. And the same with friends. You only become friends with people who are like you, or they will affect you in a way that you will look like them at some point. So same for colleagues as well. If they are so motivated and have nice ideas that will bring value to you. At some point, you will be like them. So, it is mirroring or pulling each other to the same level, like this.".

Overall, GD started her journey with a high initial entrepreneurial passion. While working with the initial founders of GD_Company, she perceived a high level of passion and effort, which increased her level of effort and passion. However, after the change in management, she perceived less passion and effort, which decreased her effort and entrepreneurial passion.

4.1.3. The case of RB

RB is a 27-year-old serial entrepreneur who has founded two companies in the past five years. He studied Management & Computer Science in Germany after living in Turkey and Dubai in his teenage years. During a working student job for a cloud service provider for compliance and investor relations, he started his first company, an information platform for cryptocurrencies, with the help of his former CEO after discussing this opportunity with him. RB, therefore, became an intrapreneur. After running out of money during the covid pandemic, he left the firm. Then, he started a mental health company focusing on building a learning and communication platform for people with mental and psychological issues. He reduced to part-time work on this project as he realized that investors were unwilling to invest the money he wanted to launch the product successfully and make the firm grow. He then decided to gain experience in an established young venture to learn from others' experiences.

Since the beginning of 2022, he has worked for a construction-tech startup in northern Germany, which recently secured a Series B investment. The goal of RB_Company is to unite all participants in the construction sector and transform their collaboration through software and customer service. RB started as a venture developer, but he was recently promoted to the interim head of marketing, operating in close contact with the founders. The founding team consists of three people who are still at the company. Together, they bring in more than 25 years of professional experience

in different ventures and gained insights into working for other startups before becoming entrepreneurs.

RB started his position at RB_Company with a high initial entrepreneurial passion as he previously founded two firms. He mentioned that he enjoys working in entrepreneurial environments because of the different impressions he gained during that time. Also, learning new things and being independent "triggered this passion" in the first place, and he believes this passion increases the longer he works in this environment.

RB reported a mixed perception of effort. On the one hand, he recognized the high effort behind the venture by saying: "Even when I look at RB_Company now, for example, I notice how much hard work is behind it, even more than before.", reporting that his founders are "24/7 available" and receiving messages after midnight. On the other hand, he emphasized that his founders try to maintain a balance for their mental health. About RB_Founder_1, he said he "[...] is super athletic and eats a super healthy diet, pays attention to his sleep, and is rather meticulous and disciplined about ensuring he gets enough balance. When asked whether he feels that his founder works too much or too little on his tasks, he answered, "well, that's super different. Right now, I feel like he's taking on a management task more than he's taking on the task. So, he's trying to create more pressure on the people, that it's prioritized properly among them, instead of him doing the task himself.". Compared to the other cases, RB perceived a neutral level of effort. Concerning the entrepreneurial passion he perceived, he was clearer in his statements as he described RB_Company as the founders' "[...] baby for which they would do anything to make it work.". Additionally, he recognizes in every meeting that they show how important the tasks are to them and how much of the "fire" they have. As he also reported feeling the passion spread by the founders, overall, RB perceived a high level of entrepreneurial passion.

As RB founded two ventures before working for RB_Company, it was not surprising that he reported that he constantly works many hours and is willing to go the extra mile "whenever there is a chance to go the extra mile." There was no evidence in the data that his level of effort changed during his time at RB_Company. Neither was it influenced by the perception of the founders' efforts. Concerning the development of his entrepreneurial passion, he reported: "My passion has basically not changed. [...] I simply realized that it was more difficult than I thought. It's more complex than I thought. There are so many problems that you have to manage at the same time." Later during the interview, he once again mentioned that his passion for entrepreneurship stayed the same.

To conclude, RB started his role at RB_Company with a high initial entrepreneurial passion. Although he perceived high entrepreneurial passion and neutral entrepreneurial effort, there is no notice in the data that his level of effort and passion changed while collaborating with the founding team closely.

4.1.4. The case of MS

MS, 25 years old, is a software engineer who holds a master's degree in computer science from a German university. Throughout his studies, he gained working experiences in different company sizes, from small to large corporations, from consulting to production. After graduating, he acted as a Co-Founder and CTO of a software startup in the video stream business for six months. He left the company after the lack of success and personal differences with the other founder. Then, he joined MS_Company, where he also worked during his studies as a working student and intern as a software engineer. There, he builds the foundation for the product together with the CTO. MS_Company is a software-as-a-service company that helps customers connect their systems and platforms. His responsibilities contain the technical onboarding of new customers, maintaining the infrastructure of the software, and working on the integrability of different systems. The founding team consists of three entrepreneurs. MS_Founder_2 and MS_Founder_3 met while working for a large consulting firm after graduating for a few years. MS_Founder_2 started another venture before starting MS_Company, which was acquired just before the new venture creation, and is, therefore, a serial entrepreneur. MS_Founder_1 completes the founding trio and acts as CTO and CPO, whom MS works close with due to his technical background. MS_Founder_1 is highly experienced, with more than 20 years in the industry, and had already former roles as CTO, CPO, and VP in other software firms. MS could imagine trying to found another startup one day.

Because MS founded a startup before joining MS_Company, he can be considered highly passionate about entrepreneurship even before working for his current employer. He reported that he is highly passionate about inventing when talking about entrepreneurial passion. He enjoys creating new products, especially "[...] creating something that other people will use.". According to him, his main drive for his professional career is the "creation of things." He also explained that the startup environment would fit his interest in creating new things best. Hence, he joined MS_Company, where he feels to get exceptional support for his passion.

MS perceives a high level of entrepreneurial effort and passion from his founders. While talking about MS_Founder_1, he mentioned that he could not remember a moment when MS_Founder_1 was not at work. MS perceives MS_Founder_1 to give "1000%" to his company. Besides, he perceives that the boundaries between his founder's work life and private life become blurred since he perceives a high likelihood of getting responses to questions after 11 pm. When I asked MS about how passionate his founders are, he replied: "I think more is almost impossible. That would be my perception.".

While working for MS_Company, both the entrepreneurial passion and effort of MS increased. He described himself as a high performer who puts a lot of passion, time, and energy into his tasks. Also, he is sure that one day he will try the step again to start his own company. He also mentioned that his level of effort is higher than initially expected by his

supervisors, which they also communicated to him. Besides, he estimated that, on average, he works harder and with more effort than other people with similar tasks inside and outside his company. He reported that even in his private environment, people perceived that MS increased his level of effort, for example, when he refused to go out on a Friday evening and chose to work instead. While telling that story, MS revealed notions of contagion as he reported trying to think in the context of the venture and therefore adapted to think entrepreneurially. Furthermore, when asked about the effects of perceiving the behavior of his supervisors, he stated: "I would say rousing and motivating rather - to show that you can do it.", which indicates a contagion effect.

All in all, MS joined MS_Company with a high initial entrepreneurial passion. He perceived highly passionate entrepreneurs who work on their tasks with high effort. Working for his founders increased his level of effort and entrepreneurial passion.

4.1.5. The case of CH

CH is a 28-year-old bachelor's graduate in Management and Computer Science. He gained his first working experience in customer success for a startup called CH_Company, where he worked for one and a half years. He joined the firm during the phase where they secured their Series B round. CH_Company produces software for digital identity recognition and management. CH supported the aftersales process inside the customer success department. The founding team consisted of two co-founders. CH interacted most with CH_Founder_1 and had fewer touching points with CH_Founder_2. Both founders are highly experienced, with more than 40 years of combined working experience. They have already founded and exited a startup in the past successfully together. As a multi-serial entrepreneur founding several firms in their collaboration, CH_Founder_1 has more experience in the field of entrepreneurship, with more than five new ventures created. During his time at CH_Company, he experienced a change in the CEO role. CH_Founder_1 dropped out of the daily operative work and took the role of a chairman supervising the company's business while CH_Founder_2 stayed.

After his time at CH_Company, CH was selected for an entrepreneurship scholarship and founded a startup. With a young team of four people with different backgrounds, he tried to establish a digital education platform. His company created an MVP, secured investments, and hired multiple people for sales, marketing, and software development. After one and a half years, they quit this project due to a lack of perceived market acceptance by potential customers. Afterward, CH remained in the entrepreneurial ecosystem for finance solutions and joined a Southern European startup focusing on a platform for sustainable investing for a half-year project. Later and until today, CH started working for another startup in northern Germany with a product idea similar to the one he tried to create.

Before joining CH_Company, CH did not consider becoming an entrepreneur one day. Even after he started his position there, "it was never within realistic reach to found a venture." Despite some lectures at university, the topic of entrepreneurship never crossed his path. Therefore, CH started to explore the entrepreneurial world with a low initial passion for entrepreneurship.

Considering CH's perceptions of his founders' effort and passion, CH reported different perceptions. On the one hand, he perceived his founders to be low-passionate and to put low effort into their tasks while working for CH_Company. For example, CH described that his founders felt attached to other projects during their time at CH_Company and that he assumes that they are people who always enjoy trying out new projects. Therefore, they did not express or show passion for their current venture but already looked at other projects. Concerning their effort, CH estimated their average working hours for the startup by "far below 40" hours a week because they "did many other things" in parallel. He observed CH_Founder_1 reduce his operative involvement step by step until he only held supervising tasks. He explained his understanding of his supervisors' behavior as they had to split their attention to engage in other projects. On the other hand, he perceived them to be highly passionate about other projects outside CH_Company because they tend to initiate multiple projects in parallel. CH reported that his founders worked on building a platform for entrepreneurs and establishing a venture capitalist firm while they ran CH_Company. CH perceived his founders as "creative people who always want to let off steam in new projects.". He was impressed by the entrepreneur's high passion for founding which impacted him highly.

Perceiving the behavior of his supervisors had a considerable effect on CH as he got inspired by them. CH participated in an entrepreneurship program which CH_Founder_1 did as well in the past, and started his venture afterward, which indicates an increase in entrepreneurial passion. Additionally, he reported that after his time at CH_Company, he developed a high passion for being creative, finding solutions, and creating things himself which are all types of entrepreneurial passion. It is mainly his passion for inventing that increased as he reported that "[...] creating something is something that I really enjoy because it's kind of 'your baby' [laughing]. And be it somehow a product, a website, or anything else." His effort level shows parallels to the behavior of his founders as he put "inconsistent" effort into his venture where "there were probably also weeks where [he] really worked full-time on it, and there were also weeks [...] where [he] worked very little and only a few hours on it.". When I asked what had to be different so he would have spent more effort, he replied, "fewer distractions, fewer side projects. So, it's just that I was doing quite a lot in parallel at the time.". It resembles the perceived behavior of his supervisors. Concerning effort, he also mentioned that perceiving a high level of effort impressed him. However, it also made him feel intimidated, that he needs his work-life balance in working environments and that he is currently not ready to go the effort commitment needed to start another venture again.

Overall, CH started with a low initial passion for entrepreneurship. He perceived low effort and low passion from his founders while working for CH_Company, but simultaneously, he perceived high passion from them while they were working on other projects. Inspired by the founders, his entrepreneurial passion increased while his effort lowered.

4.1.6. The case of JK

JK is a 25-year-old German business computer science graduate who worked for a startup called JK_Company that has been operating in the gastronomy sector for more than four years. He worked in distinct roles as a customer success manager and product manager for the company and was one of the first employees hired. He supported developing an app enabling customers to order food, pay, and collect points. The company had to shut down during the pandemic because most restaurants and cafes were not allowed to operate, resulting in a shortage of money. Consequently, JK left the firm. However, the company was acquired mid-2022 and now runs under new leadership.

Since he was the first employee, he frequently communicated with the founding team. It consisted of three young and inexperienced students who met during an entrepreneurship program at their university. They barely gained working experience outside of internships and working student jobs. During the time of the company's foundation, they had an overall full-time working experience of fewer than three years combined, mainly in consulting. All three came in with different academic backgrounds graduating in business, psychology, and computer science in their master's programs. After his time at JK_Company, JK continued their idea with new developments in his startup. He developed an MVP of an app and hired some employees to grow the venture. Currently, he is looking for investors to expand the firm and gain market share. On social media, he describes himself as an open-minded person willing to go the extra mile.

JK developed a high initial passion for entrepreneurship before joining JK_Company, as he was born and raised in a family of many entrepreneurs. His grandparents and some of his uncles and aunts had owned businesses and showed their passion for entrepreneurship. His family affected him, as he explained: "[...] I think that rubbed off relatively early on because I saw how freely they could move around, how much fun they had [...].". Subsequently, he thought about owning a business himself one day, which he fulfilled later.

While working for JK_Company, JK perceived high entrepreneurial effort and passion from his founders. He reported that they never worked less than 80 hours per week. He described their effort as the "prime example of going the extra mile within those years.". He felt that his founders "only live for this project," which led one to join a retreat because of burnout symptoms. JK highlighted the founders' love for their product, as they might even be the people who used it most. He explained that passion was very influential during his time at JK_Company.

Working for JK_Company increased JK's level of effort. He said that "there were extremely many weeks where I didn't get out of the office with less than 60-70 hours, and I really pushed things through on the weekends because I had the feeling that it was necessary." and that "it has often gone beyond, very often gone beyond" a regular working framework. Additionally, he took on extra tasks and responsibilities to help the firm. For example, he independently invested additional effort in learning in-app design to support the founders in this task, as they could not hire someone for that. Also, his passion for entrepreneurship increased as he reported working with a high passion for JK_Company. He argues that one of the main reasons for his effort was his "passion for this topic." He described that this passion emerged and grew with the increase of his involvement in entrepreneurial tasks. For example, he said, "Personally, I would say that this entrepreneurial passion has definitely increased due to the responsibility I got in the product area.".

While analyzing the interview with JK, it became clear that he was highly affected by his founders as he rooted his decision to start a venture in perceiving his founders. For example, he explained: "That is to say, this bridge, this connection, between what I had with the founders, what was now in retrospect, of course, very unfortunate that it did not work, but was crucial and determining for my decision to say I will now found a company myself.", or "I think maybe the bottom line of why I personally made this decision to say I'm willing to do this myself was actually the - I would call it - the rise and fall of what the founders themselves have gone through.". This effect goes in line with the mentioned contagion mechanisms.

To summarize, JK started to work for JK_Company with high initial entrepreneurial passion and became acquainted with a founding team that he perceived to be highly passionate and high in effort. This perception increased his passion and effort, resulting in him becoming a startup founder.

4.1.7. The case of LL

LL, a holder of a master's degree in finance and management from a German university, is 25 years old and has always wanted to become an entrepreneur. He developed an entrepreneurial mindset early on during school as he started to buy different consumer goods on the internet and sold them to his former classmates, friends, and family. During his bachelor studies, he co-founded a management service for serviced apartment providers in a big German city, which operated for one year but closed due to a lack of demand and the focus on other projects. LL has gained experiences in several European firms, such as banks, consultancies, startups, and venture capitalists. He was also a member of an entrepreneurial network. After finishing the bachelor's program, he got an offer to work for a big consultancy firm. However, he rejected it because it would not be relatable enough to entrepreneurship. Parallel to his master's, he worked for a venture capitalist where he intensively collaborated with early-staged ventures in the entrepreneurial opportunity development processes. Then, after graduating, he tried to start a venture with two colleagues. Later, to establish a business plan and a business case and pitch their ideas to

several investors, they delayed the final commitment to start operating for several reasons. However, the main reason was that they wanted to become more experienced before taking the risk of creating a serious business themselves.

LL finally signed as chief of staff for a construction-tech startup in northern Germany. It is the same company where RB works. RB referred LL for this study. They know each other from entrepreneurial networks. LL started half a year earlier than RB at this company. To stick to the naming convention and for simplicity reasons, I will refer to the firm as LL_Company, although it is the same as the RB_Company. In this role, he acts as the right hand of the founders and collaborates closely with all of them. Additionally, he acted as interim head of people for the company during the time of the interview. LL joined LL_Company with a high initial entrepreneurial passion. As already described, he started to gain interest in entrepreneurship when he was a child, gained several working experiences in the entrepreneurial environment, founded a venture himself, and pursued an entrepreneurial career.

LL perceived low entrepreneurial effort from his founders compared to the other cases. He reported that "they're already stepping on the gas. But I think at a healthy level and could still be a bit more." when I asked about their level of effort. According to him, other entrepreneurs put more effort into their ventures. Additionally, he sometimes feels they want to delay specific tasks or decisions, although, in LL's opinion, they could tackle them the same evening, implicating a lack of perceived effort. Suitably, LL described them as focused on "having a healthy lifestyle" when he talked about the perceived effort and that they suggested he should step down sometimes. Concerning their entrepreneurial passion, he perceived a low level of passion. He described that they do not express their passion "Jordan Belfort-like" because they are somewhat "restrained," and overall, they "don't show their passion that often to the outside." As an example, he described their company meetings where the "speech from them, that doesn't appeal to [him] so much. [They] could make it more emotional.".

While working for LL_Company, LL's level of effort at the starting point was very high, but lately, he questioned his effort level and thought about decreasing hit. Usually, he works "clearly over 40 hours" a week, completes tasks on weekends, and has projects where he worked for multiple weeks "until the middle of the night." He claimed that stepping on the gas even more, would not be possible. In situations where his founders express a low level of effort, he said, "yes, that annoys me extremely because I think I give 110% here, and I want to tear the thing down. [...] And then, of course, you question yourself in one situation or another. Is it worth it? Shouldn't you also slow down a bit?" and "It just gets on your nerves, and you think that they're not there today with the right attitude, and that drags you down. So, I would definitely agree that this influences my attitude.". This led him to question his level of effort or, as he said: "I often ask myself the same question. Whether it would be right to make 'piano,' because they advise me with their experience and say go a little slower.", resulting in actually decrease the effort due to a low perception of effort: "And when you realize, okay, the boss doesn't have the drive or doesn't have the energy, then you think, why should I put in the energy?". When asked about the impact of this perception on his passion for entrepreneurship, his answers diverged. On the one hand, he told that "the fire still burns" and that he still wants to found himself again. On the other hand, he mentioned that "[...] there is the negative impact of 'well, you see how it actually works in reality." and that it is not that easy and "[...] glorified, as it is just always presented from the outside [...]". Subsequently, he concluded about his development of passion: "So I'd have to say it reduced, but on a different basis, because now I have more experience and more knowledge and skills and so on.".

To summarize, LL started his job at LL_Company with a high entrepreneurial passion. He perceived his founders to invest a low level of effort with low passion, which resulted in him questioning his level of effort and reducing his passion for entrepreneurship. In the case of LL, the contagion mechanism became evident in the negative manner in which he described himself by saying: "But of course, if you just think, yes, the founder isn't working too hard, and the company isn't successful either, then that's just frustrating. Then you think, what am I actually doing? If he's not up for it, I'm not up for it either, and then maybe you don't feel like founding a company anymore if you've had such a negative experience.". That statement indicates that his level of effort and passion dropped.

4.1.8. The case of AW

AW is 25 years old and works as a business development representative in the sales area for a startup in south Germany that develops a communication app for other businesses. She holds a degree in fashion management from a business school. AW has several experiences as a working student for industry and fashion firms in HR. However, she had no touching points with entrepreneurship prior to working for AW_Company in her current role. Neither did she ever want to become an entrepreneur herself. As a business development representative, she does not share collaborative tasks with the founding team. However, due to the venture's early stage, she perceives her founders daily at work.

The founding team consists of AW_Founder_1 and AW_Founder_2. AW_Founder_1 is a business management graduate who worked for four years as a project leader for a big German production firm before founding AW_Company. In parallel, he is a member of the advisory board of another venture. On his social media profiles, he claims he is very passionate about the firm and the product he creates. AW_Founder_2 is a serial entrepreneur who graduated in media management and enterprise communications. He worked for several firms for nearly four years before founding his first firm, a web design consultancy. Then, he came together with AW_Founder_1 to create AW_Company.

AW described herself as someone who "honestly didn't have such intensive thoughts" about entrepreneurship before

joining AW_Company, which actually "was a bit random." She mentioned that passion for entrepreneurship was not her "main focus or main reason for taking the job." Therefore, AW joined the startup with a low initial entrepreneurial passion.

AW perceives her supervisors to work with much effort and passion. She described her founders as "crazy working" and that she "would assume that their life is our company. So, there is no separation either spatially or in terms of time. There is no separation between private life and AW_Company, so they live for it and are absorbed in it. It's crazy how much they invest in it.". Additionally, she perceives her founders to be "very passionate," that "they live for it," and that "they really put their heart and soul and their time into it.".

Perceiving her founders working with high effort on their tasks has neither changed AW's effort nor her passion for entrepreneurship. She reported that she works less than other people in her firm, which she is happy about. Besides, she said about the effect of the perceived effort: "It doesn't affect me so much that I now say I have to adapt there; I have to work just as much.". She describes the workload related to founding a firm as a "deterrent" and concludes that a founder would "not have a private life anymore," which would not suit her way of life. Although she was "within a very short time [...] inspired by the construct of a startup" and that she sees "how cool it can be to have your own startup because you can fulfill your dreams," she does not feel the willingness to found a firm one day because of the high amount of effort needed.

All in all, AW started her position at AW_Company with low entrepreneurial passion, which has not changed during her working period until today. AW perceived high effort and passion from her entrepreneurs. According to her, that perception had no noticeable impact on her passion and effort.

Table 3 shows a summary of the findings from the within-case analysis. It captures the initial passion, development of passion and effort, and perceived passion and effort for each case. As GD's perceptions and own developments changed with the dropout of the original founding team, the results altered over time. I marked it in the table with an arrow meaning the first entry represents the state before the dropout, and the second entry represents the state after the dropout. In six out of eight cases, I assigned the same level of perceived effort and perceived passion. It supports the initial assumption of the combined contagion and self-regulation framework that employees concurrently perceive passion while perceiving effort and that these constructs are associated. Therefore, I propose the following:

> *Proposition 1a: High perceived entrepreneurial effort increases the likelihood of perceiving high entrepreneurial passion.*

> *Proposition 1b: Low perceived entrepreneurial effort increases the likelihood of perceiving low entrepreneurial passion.*

4.2. Case patterns and between-case analysis

In the cases of MS, JK, and until the point when the founders left the company in the case of GD, all three cases showed positive synergies concerning entrepreneurial passion while perceiving high effort. The case of LL and the case of GD after the dropout of the founding team showed a negative effect on entrepreneurial passion while perceiving low effort. The mentioned cases align with what I expected as an outcome according to the combined theoretical framework on contagion and self-regulation that explains how perceived effort could affect the employees' passion response. MS, JK, and GD, with her initial founders, reported that they perceived high effort by their supervisors. These perceptions, in turn, triggered an increase in their effort, which the mentioned contagion theory can explain. Then, explained by self-regulation theory, the higher level of effort positively impacted their passion for entrepreneurial tasks. Therefore, working for their corresponding firms made them more passionate about entrepreneurial tasks than they were prior to their employment. The opposite happened in the case of LL, and the case of GD after the new CEOs took over. Both perceived their corresponding supervisors to work on their tasks with little effort. This perception led GD to decrease her effort and LL to develop a tendency to reduce his effort. In turn, their entrepreneurial passion declined as both wanted to become entrepreneurs before their employment, and now they are questioning that plan. In addition, the high-effort cases also showed that the participants perceived high passion from the entrepreneurs, and the low-effort cases showed a low passion perception by the employees. Therefore, perceiving effort might covariate with perceiving passion, with both going in the same direction.

In the cases of RB and AW, the data revealed that the perception of effort did not influence their entrepreneurial passion. The data in the cases of JG and CH showed counterintuitive results according to the temporal theoretical framework. JG perceived high effort, which increased his level of effort but instead of his entrepreneurial passion increasing, it declined. CH perceived a low level of effort by his supervisor that lowered his level of effort, which impacted him even after leaving the firm. Instead of his passion for entrepreneurial tasks declining, his passion increased as he later founded a firm, where, according to him, he failed to succeed due to his low level of effort.

4.2.1. Proximity to the founders, entrepreneurial-relatedness of the tasks, and initial entrepreneurial passion

All cases that went along the expected outcome, speaking of MS, JK, and GD for observing high effort, which increased their entrepreneurial passion, and speaking of LL and GD for observing low effort, which decreased their passion followed a pattern. All these employees have high proximity to their founders, their tasks are highly entrepreneurial-related, and they had high initial entrepreneurial passion before starting the role in their corresponding startup. This finding indicates that a particular involvement of these three factors is a possible requirement for the initiation of the proposed effects of

Table 3: Summary of within-case analysis

Case	Initial Passion	Perceived Effort	Perceived Passion	Effort development	Passion development
JG	Low	High	High	Lower	Lower
GD	High	High → Low	High → Low	Higher → Lower	Higher → Lower
RB	High	Neutral	High	Neutral	Neutral
MS	High	High	High	Higher	Higher
CH	Low	Low	High	Lower	Higher
JK	High	High	High	Higher	Higher
LL	High	Low	Low	Lower	Lower
AW	Low	High	High	Neutral	Neutral

the combined mechanism. In the cases where the mechanism worked as expected, these three factors were above a specific boundary compared to the other cases where the observation did not follow the expected way.

Proximity can be understood broadly in the employee-entrepreneur relationship. It can include the employee's feeling of a close connection to the supervisors, frequent communication, spatial proximity with sitting next to each other in the same office, and a role-based close collaboration as being the head of a particular department, for example. Having high proximity between the entrepreneur and the employee increases the frequency and intensity of the contagion effect as both subjects have more and deeper points of interaction which facilitates the effect's occurrence. It aligns with other scholars' assumptions that employees feel being in the same boat as their founders (Breugst et al., 2012). Higher proximity to the founder at work helps to get richer perceptions of the entrepreneurial effort. It is because the employee perceives the entrepreneur more often, evaluates his level of effort more reliably and draws more accurate inferences about how effort leads to progress for the venture, which is necessary for effort contagion to occur. Table 4 shows examples of statements about proximity to the founders from the interview participants.

Having tasks that are rich in entrepreneurial content is also essential for observing the expected effects. These tasks can typically include acts of inventing or developing the firm. Usually, these tasks have a high degree of decisional freedom, high creativity, deep product involvement, high hierarchy levels, or high responsibility. Working on these types of tasks with the entrepreneur facilitates the contagion effect as these tasks are more similar to the actual tasks of the entrepreneur and, therefore, closer related to entrepreneurial passion. It increases the likelihood for the employee to perceive a goal that is more accessible and eases goal contagion. Putting effort into entrepreneurial-related tasks helps the self-regulation mechanism affect the passion for entrepreneurial tasks. Table 5 displays the comments of the interviewed employees on their tasks. The found patterns in effort perception lead to the development of these propositions:

Proposition 2a: A high proximity to the founders increases the likelihood that perceived effort triggers the combined contagion and self-regulation mechanism, where high perceived effort increases entrepreneurial passion and low perceived effort decreases entrepreneurial passion.

Proposition 2b: A high entrepreneurial-relatedness of the employee's task increases the likelihood that perceived effort triggers the combined contagion and self-regulation mechanism, where high perceived effort increases entrepreneurial passion and low perceived effort decreases entrepreneurial passion.

Proposition 2c: A high initial entrepreneurial passion increases the likelihood that perceived effort triggers the combined contagion and self-regulation mechanism, where high perceived effort increases entrepreneurial passion and low perceived effort decreases entrepreneurial passion.

4.2.2. Effort-Passion discrepancy and the perceived effort-passion antagonism

Suppose proximity to the founders, entrepreneurial-relatedness of the employee's tasks, or initial entrepreneurial passion are low. In that case, this might change the expected effect of perceived effort on the employee's passion response, as in the cases of JG and CH. As shown in the case of JG, he had high proximity to his founders, but his tasks were low in entrepreneurial-relatedness, and he had low initial passion. Concurrently, the temporal model did not deliver the expected outcome. He reported perceiving high entrepreneurial effort by his supervisors, which triggered his effort and increased it. Instead of his entrepreneurial passion increasing like in the other cases, it declined as he did not enjoy the effort, which distanced him from an entrepreneurial career, as he explained. Although the supervisor's effort successfully transferred from JG_Founder_1 to JG, the self-regulation mechanism did not occur. The turning point in his case might be his initial entrepreneurial passion which was relatively low compared to other cases. JG had no touching point with entrepreneurship prior to his role at JG_Company.

Table 4: Interview statements about the degree of proximity

Employee	Subjective degree of proximity	Statement about proximity
JG	High	In fact, there were two of us at one table, which was intended for one person, because the company has grown extremely quickly, and we had to hold the microphones shut. That's how close we were sitting to each other. That means I was able to hear a lot of how she did it, and that's why I can say that she did it very well.
GD	High	Yeah, especially for the technical-based founder. We were working together; we had this normal agile methodology. You have to do daily meetings.
RB	High	Right now, I'm working closely with the founder, or rather I'm in close coordination with him, but it's also because, at the moment, my project is being taken over by the founder.
MS	High	In general, you also have to say MS_Founder_1, the CTO, is super transparent. You can approach him at any time directly via Slack. He will always answer, and he will always take time, no matter what concern you have.
CH	Low	He was always sitting around the corner from me, but somehow, I didn't have that much to do with him. So, we have not chatted so much.
JK	High	So, I was like the fourth or the fifth person in this company.
LL	High	Sure, I also have a super close role with the founders and a great relationship of trust.
AW	Low	Personal contact is rather rare. I don't have any meetings or anything like that. What I did have a month ago, which I thought was really cool, was that our founder, our CEO, set up a meeting for me for a lunch date over two hours, and then we just had a random chat.

The discrepancy between his low initial passion and the high perception and development of effort may prevent the development of positive entrepreneurial passion in a way that this discrepancy has a deterrent effect, lowering the level of entrepreneurial passion. One could say that the demanded effort was too big compared to his passion for entrepreneurship. Metaphorically spoken, too much firewood is bad for a fire, so too much high perceived effort may be bad for passion, "the fire of desire" (Cardon et al., 2009, p. 515).

CH had low proximity, low entrepreneurial-relatedness in his tasks, and low initial passion. He perceived low effort by his supervisors, which decreased his effort. Instead of his entrepreneurial passion declining, it increased to a level where he started a venture and became an entrepreneur. However, his founders were highly involved in other venture creation processes, making CH very passionate about founding. Consequently, a high discrepancy between CH's effort and the perceived entrepreneurial passion emerged. Therefore, perceiving high passion might overcome the negative effect of perceiving low effort if the discrepancy between low effort and high perceived passion is big enough. It indicates that perceiving high passion might impact the employees' passion response more than perceiving low effort. Spoken in metaphors again, when trying to make a fire, the low perceived effort might resemble wet firewood, but perceived passion might resemble the gasoline. The low perceived supervisor effort infected him through effort contagion, and he reduced his effort. However, the positive passion transfer through emotional contagion had a more significant effect on his entrepreneurial passion. Overall, using the combined mechanism of contagion and self-regulation, I did not expect the outcome of the two mentioned cases. These findings lead to the development of the following propositions:

> *Proposition 3: A high discrepancy between initial entrepreneurial passion and perceived effort triggers a decrease in entrepreneurial passion.*
>
> *Proposition 4: A high discrepancy between high perceived passion and decreased effort triggers an increase in entrepreneurial passion.*
>
> *Proposition 5: Perceived passion has a stronger effect on entrepreneurial passion than perceived effort.*

4.2.3. No influence under certain conditions

The cases of RB and AW showed that under certain conditions, it might be that perceiving effort does not influence the employee's behavior and emotion at all. In the case of RB, the employee had high proximity to the entrepreneurs, his tasks were rich in entrepreneurial content, and he had a high initial passion for entrepreneurship. However, he reported perceiving a neutral level of entrepreneurial effort. Consequently, there is no observable change in the data concerning his effort or passion for entrepreneurial tasks. It induces that neither a contagion nor a self-regulation effect occurred when RB perceived neither a low nor a high level of effort from his supervisors. Therefore, there must be a boundary in the perceived effort level in both directions, low and high, to be crossed so that effort contagion occurs.

Table 5: Interview statements about the degree of entrepreneurial-relatedness of the tasks

Employee	Subjective degree of entrepreneurial-relatedness of tasks	Statement about entrepreneurial-relatedness of tasks
JG	Low	I worked as a bit of a jack-of-all-trades because we were deep in customer acquisition, and I was partly in sales.
GD	High	I mean, I always wanted to see the whole startup cycle. From product creation to programming to bringing to customers and startup companies are mainly giving you that option. So it was cool for me to have conversations with the customers and sometimes go to onsite visits and help them instead of just programming in a closed room.
RB	High	There are founder topics that we are working on, strategic topics.
MS	High	All of this actually gives me a lot of entrepreneurial freedom, but I also have to say, I think it's also a special environment because it's just super encouraged, and if you take responsibility on your own, that's more than welcome.
CH	Low	I think I would rather look at experiences outside of CH_Company because at CH_Company; I was rather less entrepreneurially active myself.
JK	High	I played a major role in determining where the product goes.
LL	High	I've been there since the beginning of the year as Chief of Staff. Which is ultimately the role in which you are kind of like the right hand of the founders. You are also the sparring partner or strategic resource and can then always act like a kind of firefighter then in the individual teams and departments to help there and to work with them then also with the management there.
AW	Low	And my job is to maintain the initial contact. Bringing all the leads into the sales process. As I said, all of my tasks involve acquiring the first customer and then passing them on to our account executives, who then follow the rest of the sales process.

In the case of AW, the employee perceived high entrepreneurial effort and passion. However, the data did not show that this impacted her effort or her passion for entrepreneurial tasks. AW has low proximity to her founders and low entrepreneurial-relatedness in her tasks. Compared to all other cases, she had the lowest initial entrepreneurial passion as she never had a touching point with entrepreneurship besides one course at university. She never thought or showed interest in someday becoming an entrepreneur or owning a business. It induces a low initial passion for entrepreneurship, besides having low proximity to the founders and low entrepreneurial-relatedness of the tasks, which did not initiate the combined contagion and self-regulation mechanism as the contagion effect could not be triggered. One might say it is not about "be there or be square"; instead, an employee must have a certain degree of entrepreneurial passion, proximity to the founders, and entrepreneurial-related tasks so that the perception of effort can affect the employee's entrepreneurial passion.

As the cases of RB and AW showed no influence on perceiving entrepreneurial effort under certain conditions, I make the following propositions:

Proposition 6: Neutral perceived entrepreneurial effort does not affect entrepreneurial passion.

Proposition 7: A combination of low proximity to the founders, low entrepreneurial-task relatedness, and low initial entrepreneurial passion does not affect entrepreneurial passion.

The findings and the derived propositions are summarized and included in the model represented in Figure 3. I based this model on combined theory from literature and enriched it with the results of this study. Therefore, I further developed the theory and set new theoretical boundaries.

5. Discussion

I motivated this research by the limited available knowledge in the field of entrepreneurship on the impact of perceived behavior on experienced emotions. To extend the current empirical works, I researched the question: "How does the employees' perception of their supervisor's effort influence the employees' entrepreneurial passion?". The data revealed that proximity to the founders, entrepreneurial-relatedness of the employee's tasks, and initial entrepreneurial passion work as antecedents of the combined mechanism of contagion and self-regulation. No effect will likely occur if they are not present to a certain degree. Furthermore, perceived neutral effort showed no effect on entrepreneurial passion. Additionally, the data showed that counterintuitive results might occur while perceiving effort. Perceiving high effort under the condition of having a low initial passion can lead to a decrease in

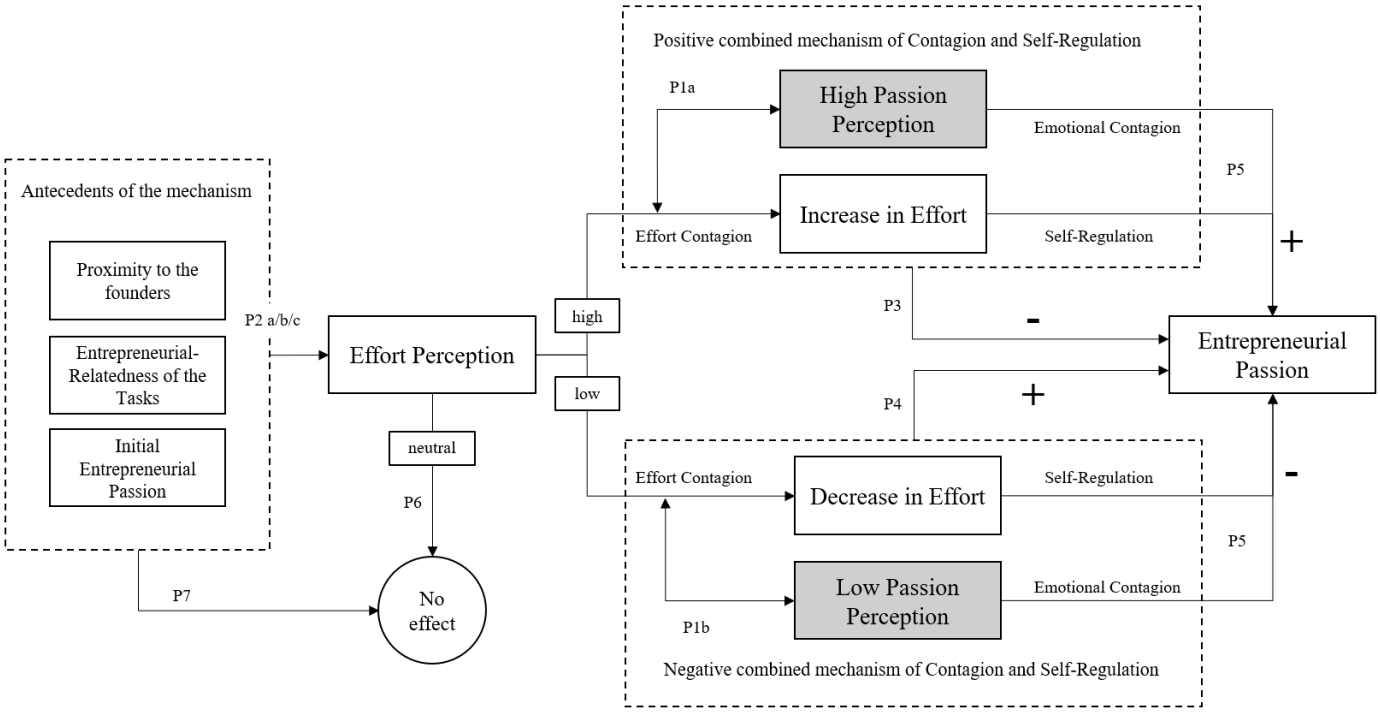

Figure 3: A model of perceived supervisor effort and its impact on the employee's entrepreneurial passion

entrepreneurial passion. In contrast, despite perceiving low effort, entrepreneurial passion can increase under perceiving high passion and having low initial entrepreneurial passion.

5.1. Theoretical and practical implications

My finding on perceived effort as an indirect antecedent of entrepreneurial passion joins the literature stream that deviates from the dominant theories in entrepreneurship (e.g., Gielnik et al. 2015) that view passion as a catalyst for effort (e.g., Baum and Locke 2004; Cardon et al. 2009). The result follows the call from Gielnik et al. (2015, p. 1025) "[...] that theoretical frameworks on entrepreneurial passion need to consider entrepreneurial passion to be an outcome of entrepreneurial effort." and extend it by including perceived effort and the entrepreneurial employee into this framework.

Additionally, this paper responds to calls in the entrepreneurship literature to look into what fuels the passion for entrepreneurship (Cardon et al., 2012) by accounting for perceived entrepreneurial effort as an essential factor. Research in this field is relevant since academics suggested that entrepreneurial passion is positively related to crucial characteristics in entrepreneurship, for example, creativity (Cardon, 2008), success and commitment (Breugst et al., 2012), motivation (Cardon et al., 2005), evaluations (Mitteness et al., 2012) and numerous more.

Besides, these findings answer the calls from academics to investigate more on the impact of entrepreneurs on new venture employees (Breugst et al., 2012; Hubner et al., 2020) and therefore contribute to leadership research which has focused dominantly on leadership styles and organizational performance (Ensley et al., 2006). Scholars argued for the importance of passionate employees in new ventures to be beneficial (Cardon, 2008) and positively impacts their motivation, creativity, and success at work (Ho & Pollack, 2014). Cardon (2008) asked how founders may shift their passion to their employees while assuming the positive benefits of having passionate employees. The results give another valid answer to this question by implying that perceiving effort can transfer passion from entrepreneur to employee. As Hubner et al. (2020) argued on the importance of stimulating the employees' entrepreneurial passion as this can be a relevant strategy for maximizing their contributions to the entrepreneurial goal, this paper shows another pathway by examining how perceived effort triggers an employee's passion response. Additionally, this paper supports the claim of Cardon (2008, p. 83): "[...] if entrepreneurs want their employees to experience passion they must work harder in order to make their passion contagious to their employees." in explaining how and why working harder makes entrepreneurial passion contagious.

By examining the effect of perceived effort on the employees' entrepreneurial passion, this work is first in combining theory on passion contagion, goal contagion, and self-regulation and therefore contributes to their streams of literature. The result suggests that it is not either the perception of behavior or the perception of emotion to stimulate the emotion of entrepreneurial passion exclusively but that both mechanisms run hand in hand. Employees cannot per-

ceive emotion without perceiving behavior, nor can they perceive behavior while not perceiving emotion. This paper indicated that both streams work collaboratively and should be observed as a whole system concurrently.

Finally, the results show that the positive and negative effects of perceiving effort have certain boundaries. For example, on the one hand, employees can become less passionate about entrepreneurship when they experience too intense effort contagion in relation to their initial entrepreneurial passion, which can make them feel deterrent about entrepreneurship. On the other hand, perceiving high entrepreneurial passion can outshine the effects of perceiving low entrepreneurial effort, especially when the employee's initial passion is low.

The results hold several implications for practitioners. First, entrepreneurs can stimulate their employees' emotions by showing specific behavior. Entrepreneurs who work with high effort on their entrepreneurial tasks are likely to observe an increase in their employees' passion for entrepreneurship when they maintain high proximity to them and provide them with entrepreneurial tasks. Showing high effort can benefit entrepreneurs as their employees' efforts will likely increase and deliver better performance. Employees who experienced the positive effects of the combined contagion and self-regulation mechanism can improve venture performance by contributing with higher creativity, higher task performance, more innovation, and even intrapreneurship. However, entrepreneurs must be careful when employees perceive low entrepreneurial effort, as this could negatively impact the employees' level of effort and their entrepreneurial passion. Entrepreneurs should aim to counter this mechanism by expressing high entrepreneurial passion or, as suggested by Lex et al. (2019), encouraging low-passionate employees to increase their efforts to make them more passionate. Besides, they should keep an eye on not overwhelming low-passionate employees with entrepreneurial effort and passion. This perception may decrease the employees' passion response because it can make them feel a deterrent and more distanced from entrepreneurial tasks.

Employees can include these findings when choosing to work for startups. Suppose they want to increase their entrepreneurial passion. In that case, they could emphasize their potential supervisors' level of entrepreneurial effort and aim for roles with high founder proximity and high entrepreneurial-relatedness of the tasks. Employees should know they can counter a decrease in their effort and passion when perceiving low effort by raising their effort or looking out for highly passionate supervisors.

5.2. Limitations, future research, and conclusion

A potential limitation of this study reveals due to its case-based nature. The case-based methodology of this study restricts the model's generalizability and, therefore, its external validity because of the limited sample size. This limitation is usual for case-based approaches and qualitative studies in general (Lee et al., 1999). However, it provides an intriguing opportunity for further and future research. To evaluate key linkages in the presented model, scholars could use broader methodologies to generalize the findings beyond the case-based approach. For instance, they could take already established measures for constructs like effort (Foo et al., 2009), passion (Cardon et al., 2013), established adaptions to scales to account for the employees' perceptions of these constructs like perceived passion (Breugst et al., 2012) or formulate own adaptions for perceived effort. Furthermore, they should build measures for proximity to the founder and entrepreneurial-relatedness of the employees' tasks. With these measures, future scientists can test the presented propositions quantitatively.

Another area for improvement in this study is that it could be more dynamic. Although I tried to account for the development in passion and effort by posing questions to the interview participants and selected participants who can describe current processes and past results, this study does not investigate a phenomenon over time. As Gielnik et al. (2015) observed, current literature trends consider that people's motivation and self-regulation are not static and change over time. Future contributions should account for that and establish longitudinal studies. Time is essential, especially in process work, as it is the only omnipresent factor (Gehman et al., 2018). A suggested benchmark would be to measure the proposed key linkages every week, as other scholars demonstrated before (e.g., Gielnik et al. 2015).

It is possible to argue that this study suffers from obtrusiveness that impacts the participants' self-reported measures. Obtrusiveness is a known issue in qualitative studies (Lee et al., 1999). I countered obtrusiveness by establishing a high level of researcher-subject trust through theoretical sampling, as I knew most of the participants before or got at least a warm introduction. Future research could improve by relying on more objective measurements for constructs like passion and effort. In this study, I evaluated key linkages through the self-reported measures of the interview participants. I tried to validate the employees' statements by triangulating them with secondary data to enrich the cases, but this does not substitute more objective data like video recordings at work or captured timetables.

This research combined the literature streams investigating perceived emotion and perceived behavior. This work shows that both mechanism, effort contagion, and passion contagion can occur, and the data suggests that perceiving passion has a stronger effect on entrepreneurial passion than perceiving effort. Future research should answer why one can be stronger than the other and what factors contribute to this.

Finally, an exciting path for further investigation could be on the upper boundary for perceiving effort on this model. The findings imply a certain maximum of perceived effort compared to the initial entrepreneurial passion the employee brings into the job. The perceived effort might negatively affect the employee's entrepreneurial passion when this boundary is exceeded. It is relevant and interesting for scholars and practitioners to discover further insights into this relationship.

To conclude, the perception of effort is a relevant topic in entrepreneurship as every employee in new ventures is exposed to perceive entrepreneurial effort. This study shows that employees are affected by the mere perception of effort in their passion for entrepreneurship. When initial passion, proximity to the founders, and entrepreneurial-relatedness of the employees' tasks are high, the perception of supervisor effort can have a noticeable impact on the employee. Then, employees who perceive high effort are likely to increase their effort, which in turn triggers an increase in their entrepreneurial passion. On the other hand, employees who perceive low effort might reduce their effort, which triggers a decrease in entrepreneurial passion. Furthermore, perceiving too much effort could lead to a decline in entrepreneurial passion if the employee initially has a low passion for entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs and employees should account for this. Besides, the perception of low effort can get outshined by perceiving high passion. It is another major result of this study as it implies that perceived emotion has a bigger impact on the recipient's emotion than perceived behavior.

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