Chapter IV

Founders and the Creative-Business Intent Tension in the Video Game Industry: What Insights Can a Calling Offer?

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper explores how the founder’s calling influences the way founders of creative companies such as game companies manage the tension between the need to focus on creative production and the need to focus on business goal pursuit in innovative product development.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative multiple-case study of 20 companies representing the Dutch video game industry has been conducted.

Findings: The findings suggest that the meanings that founders ascribe to their work in the video game industry can be best captured by the concept of the founder’s calling toward the video game industry. This concept encompasses the founder’s passion toward the video game industry and persistent immersion in personally significant activities, which are significant because of the meaning that founders ascribe to them. Depending on the strength of their calling (weak versus strong), game company founders activate either a company developer or professional role identity and prioritize either a business or creative strategic intent in innovative game development, respectively. Founders who co-activate both role identities, however, can manage the creative-business intent tension by integrating and differentiating the two opposing strategic intents.

Research limitations/implications: Future research should examine the link between the founder’s calling and the management of the creative-business intent tension in large creative companies and in different international contexts.

Originality/value: The paper reveals that the concept of a calling provides a unique perspective on how founders of creative companies manage the creative-business intent tension in innovative product development.

Keywords: Calling, Creative industries, Founder role identity, Innovative product development
“On my business card, I am a corporate president. In my mind, I am a game developer. But in my heart, I am a gamer.”

Satoru Iwata (CEO, Nintendo)

4.1. Introduction

Driven by a search for novelty, creative industries, such as the video game industry\(^\text{10}\), are greatly concerned with the development of innovative products. This activity, however, is challenging, as it involves a tension between a strategic focus on creative production (art for art’s sake) and a strategic focus on business goal pursuit (art for profit) (Caves, 2000; Lampel, Lant, & Shamsie, 2000; DeFillipi, Grabner, & Jones, 2007; Peltoniemi, 2014). The long-term survival of a creative company then depends on its ability to manage this tension (Peltoniemi, 2014). Recognizing the great significance of creative industries for an economy’s innovative potential (Müller, Rammer, & Trüby, 2009), scholars have shown growing interest in the topic of innovation in creative industries (e.g., Cillo & Verona, 2008; Camelo-Ordaz, Fernandez-Alles, Ruiz-Navarro, & Sousa-Ginel, 2012). Furthermore, the exploration of innovation-related tensions and paradoxes in creative industries has become the focus of several special issues in journals such as *Organization Science* (Vol. 11, Issue 3, 2000) (Lampel et al., 2000), *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (Vol. 28, Issue 5, 2007) (DeFillipi et al., 2007), and *Organization Studies* (in preparation, Jones, Svejenova, & Strandgaard, 2012). However, our understanding of the tension between the

\(^{10}\) The term “video games” technically refers to console games, i.e., those played on consoles such as Sony’s Playstaton, Nintendo’s GameBoy, or Microsoft’s Xbox (Tschang, 2007). In this paper, however, when referring to the video game industry, we imply that the industry includes console games, computer games (i.e., games played on computers), mobile games (i.e., games played on touchscreen and mobile devices) and so-called serious or applied games (i.e., games and gamification mechanisms applied for problem solving in other industries).
need to focus on creative production and the need to focus on business goal pursuit in creative industries, the strategies that founders utilize to manage this tension, and the factors that influence it remains incomplete (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; Patush & Koivun, 2014).

Existing research suggests that founders play a crucial role in influencing their company’s values, culture, and strategic choices (Schein, 1992; Baron, 2007; Nelson, 2003; Strandgaard Pedersen, Svejenova, Jones, & De Weerd, 2006). In particular, prior research has examined the role of founder-related factors such as personality (e.g., Zhao, Seibert, & Lumpkin, 2010), human capital (e.g., Unger, Rauch, Frese, & Rosenbusch, 2011), and social capital (e.g., Stam, Arzlanian, & Elfring, 2014) in shaping companies’ strategic decision making and outcomes. Recently, however, researchers have drawn their attention to the role of founders’ entrepreneurial passion and identity in this regard (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2009; Murnieks, Mosakowski, & Cardon, 2014; Fauchart & Gruber, 2009; Powell & Baker, 2014; Mathias & Williams, in press). This shift in research focus stems from the recognition that by expressing their identity, founders infuse their ventures with meaning (Kimberly, 1979; Fauchart & Gruber, 2009). Thus, an understanding of founders’ identity and associated entrepreneurial passion could provide important insights into the meanings that founders ascribe to their work and the way in which these meanings influence their strategic decision making in context of their ventures. Nevertheless, we know little about how these founders’ work-related meanings influence the way in which founders of creative companies in particular manage the tension between the need to focus on creative production and the need to focus on business goal pursuit in innovative product development.

The entrepreneurship literature distinguishes between different types of founder role identities and their associated entrepreneurial passions (i.e., a passion for inventing, a
passion for founding, and a passion for developing) (Cardon et al., 2009). Moreover, while these different entrepreneurial passions are closely related to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activities, previous studies have not accounted for other activities, roles or even domains that are associated with a particular context in which companies are created, such as music, education, or video games. Only recently have Clarysse, Van Boxtstaël, and Van Hove (2015) drawn attention to the importance of acknowledging that in addition to the “pure” entrepreneurial role identities of inventor, founder, and developer, founders may adopt other role identities to manage their ventures. In particular, the authors propose that there is a need to distinguish between a passion for venture development (i.e., an entrepreneurial role) and a passion for the profession because this distinction provides unique insights into the differences in the strategic goals that founders pursue and thus associated differences in ventures outcomes. Further, a founder’s passion for engagement in professional activities can go beyond intense positive feelings to pursuing a ‘calling’. Such a passion seems to be of particular relevance for founders in creative industries who are likely to associate themselves with artists or artistic/creative professionals who view their work as a “labor of love” or as a calling (i.e., a consuming, meaningful passion that people experience toward the (artistic/creativity) domain) (Menger, 1999; Røyseng, Mangset & Borgen, 2007; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). Thus, we suggest that in creative industries founders have strong passion for their profession, and therefore identify with both their professional as well as their entrepreneurial role. In this way, such founders differ from traditional entrepreneurs in other industries for whom entrepreneurial identity is often the most salient. Focusing on the founder’s calling11 in the context of creative

11 When referring to the concept of a calling in this paper, we mean a “secular” (nonreligious) understanding of calling (e.g., Hall & Chandler, 2005; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011) and view it as being closely related to one’s work or occupation in creative industries.
industries allows one to better capture the different meanings that founders ascribe to their work in creative industries. Furthermore, the concept of a calling accounts for the unique (life) purpose or (noncommercial) cause (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009) that founders feel drawn to realize through their ventures. Such a purpose or cause is important because it may be related to different domains of professional activities that founders of creative companies could view as personally meaningful and may therefore shape their strategic decision making in innovative product development.

Drawing on the above logic, this paper employs the concept of a calling to capture the meanings that founders ascribe to their work in creative industries and to explore how founders in creative industries manage the tension between art for art’s sake (professional identity) and art for profit (entrepreneurial identity) in innovative product development. In a broader sense, a calling can be viewed as the meaningful, purposeful and consuming engagement of an individual in an occupation or a domain at work that originates from the feeling of being drawn to this occupation (e.g., sense of destiny, perceived perfect fit) or a work-related domain which is central to his or her identity (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010). Building on data from a multiple-case study of 20 game companies in the Dutch video game industry, in this paper, we explore how the founder’s calling influences the way in which founders of creative companies such as game companies manage the tension between the need to focus on creative production and the need to focus on business goal pursuit in innovative product development.

Our study aims to make several contributions. First, it contributes to a growing body of research that explores how creative industries reconcile tensions in innovative product development (e.g., Lampel et al., 2000; Tschang, 2007; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; DeFillippi et al., 2007). In particular, we show that the meanings that founders ascribe to their work in creative industries can be best captured by the concept of the founder’s
calling and that this concept is important for understanding how founders of creative companies manage the tension between creative ambitions and business goals in innovative product development. We explore different strategies that creative companies adopt to manage this tension. Second, our study contributes to a growing body of literature on the role of the meaning that founders ascribe to their work in shaping company outcomes (Fauchart & Gruber, 2009; Powell & Baker, 2014; Cardon et al., 2009; Murnieks et al., 2014; Mathias and Williams, in press). Our findings emphasize the value of employing the calling concept for understanding the meanings that founders ascribe to their work in creative industries and show that these meanings shed unique light on the strategic intent that founders of game companies prioritize. Third, our study contributes to the literature on the calling concept (e.g., Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy & Dik, 2013) by providing an empirical exploration of the concept of a calling and contextualizing it with respect to creative industries. In this way, we join the debate on the meaning of a calling itself (e.g., Duffy & Dik, 2013), and our findings support research that emphasizes the secular understanding of this concept (e.g., Hall & Chandler, 2005; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). Finally, this study highlights the significance of exploring the concept of a calling for the understanding of creative companies’ strategic decision making. In particular, our findings suggest that the implications of a calling can extend beyond career and work-related outcomes (e.g., Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Cardador, Dane, & Pratt, 2011; Elangovan et al., 2010). Before describing our study and presenting our results, however, in the next section, we review the literature on the creative-business intent tension in innovative product development in the video game industry, entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial identity and elaborate on the concept of a calling.
4.2. Theoretical Background

4.2.1. Managing the Tension Between Art for Art’s Sake and Art for Profit in Innovative Product Development: The Case of the Video Game Industry

While innovative product development is vital for creative industries, strategic decision making related to such development appears to be a very challenging task for companies in creative industries. This task is challenging because creative industries and creative persons representing them have to manage an ongoing tension between their artistic ambitions and financial gains, which leads to problems in coupling creative efforts to commercial reasoning (Caves, 2000; Lampel et al., 2000; DeFillipi et al., 2007; Peltoniemi, 2014). One way to look at this tension in the context of innovative product development is through the lens of a paradox, where this tension is viewed to include contradictory yet interrelated elements (i.e., being creative versus making business) that seem logical in isolation but absurd or irrational in combination (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Lewis, 2000). Thinking of the tension between the need to focus on creative production and the need to focus on business goal pursuit in innovative product development as a paradox allows one to explore the approaches that founders of creative companies use to manage this tension. In particular, the paradox literature notes that founders of creative companies can manage this tension by engaging in integration and differentiation strategies (Lewis, 2000; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009). While integration involves fostering the interdependence and synergy of

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12 As in other inductive studies (e.g., Suddaby, 2006), we engaged in an iterative process characterized by constant comparisons between theory and data (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). Thus, similar to Nag, Corley, and Gioia (2007), we elaborate on the main concepts used in the study in presenting the introduction and the following conceptual background in order to facilitate the necessary clarity of exposition. It is important to note, however, that the theoretical concepts presented here informed us in the course of our study. In particular, our reference to the concept of a calling was a product of our data analysis rather than its precursor (i.e., our data analysis led us to consult the relevant literature to make sense of the data).
contradicting elements of the paradox, differentiation entails a separate focus of the founder in pursuing his or her creative ambitions or business goals. The relevance of the paradox literature for the understanding of the tension between the need to focus on creative production and the need to focus on business goal pursuit in the innovative product development is supported by previous studies examining the exploration-exploitation paradox in companies’ strategic intent (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009) and the identity tensions of creative professionals (Gotsi, Andriopoulos, Lewis & Ingram, 2010).

The challenge of managing the tension between focusing on creative production, on the one hand, and focusing on business goal pursuit, on the other hand, in innovative product development is also very relevant to the video game industry, which serves as an empirical setting for our investigation in this paper. This challenge is further exacerbated in this industry since the industry is highly turbulent and since the expectations of creativity and innovation are regarded as its defining features (Christopherson, 2004; Cadin & Guérin, 2006; Hotho & Champion, 2011). The tension between focusing on creative production and focusing on business goal pursuit in the video game industry is reflected in game companies’ struggle to place their strategic focus on either developing their intellectual property (IP) (i.e., their own games) or doing Work for Hire (WFH) (i.e., games developed to client specifications) (Christopherson, 2004; Hotho & Champion, 2011). In the case of own IP development, game companies devote their resources to creating higher value IP (a focus on creativity), which they would further commercialize (a focus on business), while in the case of WFH, they use games developed for clients to generate revenues and invest in building a sustainable game development process (Hotho & Champion, 2011). Considering the focus of creative industries on creative development, it follows that game companies would prefer to prioritize own IP development. However, it also comes with a considerable amount of risk since the expression of artistic values and
technological virtuosity is harnessed under great time and economical constrains (Cohendet & Simon, 2007). Nevertheless, game companies that focus on producing games for clients are compelled to engage in own IP development (Hotho & Champion, 2011), albeit on a rather small scale. The above discussion highlights that survival and prosperity in the video game industry hinge on game companies’ ability to manage the tension between the need to focus on creative production, on the one hand, and the need to focus on business goal pursuit, on the other hand, in innovative game development.

4.2.2. The Role of the Founder in Managing the Tension Between Art for Art’s Sake and Art for Profit in Innovative Product Development

Since founders define their company’s strategic direction, which shapes company outcomes (e.g., innovation, survival) (e.g., Schein, 1992; Baron, 2007; Nelson, 2003; Strandgaard Pedersen et al., 2006), we suggest that exploring founder-related factors is important for understanding how founders of game companies manage the tension between pursuing their creative ambitions and business goals in innovative game development. Most research has investigated the role of founders’ personality, human capital and social capital as factors that explain how founders define and manage their company’s strategic decision making (e.g., Zhao et al., 2010; Unger et al., 2011; Stam et al., 2014). Recently, however, scholars have noted the importance of studying entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial identity in this regard (Cardon et al., 2009; Murnieks et al., 2014; Fauchart & Gruber, 2009; Fauchart & Gruber, 2009; Powell & Baker, 2014; Mathias & Williams, in press).

Entrepreneurial passion refers to the intense positive feelings related to the entrepreneurial activities that are meaningful and salient to the self-identity of the entrepreneur (Cardon et al., 2009). The concept is closely tied to entrepreneurial identity,
which represents individuals’ set of meanings and behaviors that define them when they adopt an entrepreneurial role (Murnieks et al., 2014, p. 1589). Identity has been acknowledged to be a determinant of passion (Cardon et al., 2009; Murnieks et al., 2014), since individuals feel passion toward activities partly because they view them as important. Nevertheless, Murnieks and colleagues (2014) also acknowledged the possible existence of a reciprocal link between identity and passion. According to the identity theory (Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000), individuals view themselves in terms of their associated social roles, which carry particular meanings and expectations for behaviors. For example, Cardon and colleagues (2009) suggest that in the context of their ventures, entrepreneurs have different role identities that are linked to particular entrepreneurial activities. These authors specifically identify (1) an inventor role identity, which is associated with identifying, inventing, and exploring new opportunities; (2) a founder role identity, which is associated with establishing a venture for commercializing and exploiting opportunities; and (3) a developer role identity, which is associated with nurturing, growing, and expanding the created venture. The identity theory suggests that these different role identities that are embedded in entrepreneurial identity will differ in terms of their salience (Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000)—that is, the readiness of entrepreneurs to evoke a particular role identity (Murnieks et al., 2014). Role identity activation determines whether an identity will actually be enacted in a situation in which more than one role may be appropriate (Stryker & Burke, 2000). For example, Mathias and Williams (in press) suggest that entrepreneurs may have work identities associated with the conflicting roles of an entrepreneur, investor and manager, which they activate when evaluating and selecting opportunities.

Given that starting a company in the video game industry is very much driven by the founder’s deep love for and personal significance ascribed to game development
(Peticca-Harris, Weststar, & McKenna, 2015), game company founders are likely to identify with their creative professional role (i.e., role as an artist, programmer, or game designer) in addition to their entrepreneurial role. Hence, a focus on purely entrepreneurship-focused concepts of entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial identity does not allow one to capture the meanings that founders ascribe to their work in the video game industry. In a recent study, however, Clarysse et al. (2015) argue that there is heterogeneity in the roles with which founders identify and their associated passions, and the authors propose that founders’ professional passion may co-exist with their entrepreneurial passion—namely, they may have a passion for venture development. These two passions encourage founders to pursue different strategic goals (i.e., profession-client relational goals in case of a professional passion and profit and growth-maximizing goals in case of a development passion); thus, differences in venture outcomes may arise. However, the meanings that founders ascribe to their work in the video game industry are likely to be similar to those of artists and creative professionals; thus, founders may be characterized by a calling rather than just a professional passion (Menger, 1999; Røyseng et al., 2007). Thus, it is important to consider the founder’s calling toward the video game industry in order to better capture the meanings that game company founders ascribe to their work in the video game industry, which may shed unique light on how such founders manage the need to focus on creative production and the need to focus on business goal pursuit in innovative game development. Furthermore, the concept of the founder’s calling allows one to capture a particular (life) cause or purpose that founders pursue through their ventures (e.g., Hall & Chandler, 2005; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), which is likely to have a noncommercial nature in creative industries (Røyseng et al., 2007). Knowledge of this cause or purpose is important in order to understand why the activities in which founders engage in their companies are meaningful and personally significant to them.
In sum, in this study, we employ the concept of a calling to explore how founders of creative companies such as game companies manage the tension between the need to focus on creative production and the need to focus on business goal pursuit in innovative game development. We now turn to the empirical part of our paper.

4.3. Methods

To address the role of the founder’s calling within the video game industry in enriching the understanding of how founders manage the tension between the need to focus on creative production and the need to focus on business goal pursuit in innovative game development, we employed a multiple-case study approach to compare and contrast different game companies (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2003). The case study approach allows one to address “how” questions, and it is regarded as an appropriate vehicle for enriching a limited understanding of phenomena (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Furthermore, it allows one to capture the contextualized nature of the investigated phenomena, which characterizes the video game industry.

4.3.1. Case Selection

Following Eisenhardt (1989), we focused on selecting theoretically relevant cases. In particular, we selected game companies that represented the video game industry in the Netherlands. While the Dutch video game industry is a lucrative and growing market, it lags behind the well-established North American, Asian and Eastern European video game markets (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2013). There are about 330 game companies in the Netherlands, of which only a small percentage qualify as large game companies with international recognition. The largest part of the Dutch gaming industry consists of microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (with fewer than 10 employees) (Gamesmonitor, 2012). Previous research suggests that SMEs tend to
experience greater challenges in managing innovation-related tensions because they are relatively more resource constrained than larger companies (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Bierly & Daly, 2007). Hence, given the developing nature of the Dutch video game industry, the majority of which consists of SMEs, Dutch game companies likely find it more difficult to manage the tension between the need to focus on creative production and the need to focus on business goal pursuit in innovative game development. Thus, this industry represents a useful context for our exploration.

Furthermore, to ensure that the chosen cases sufficiently represent the diversity of the Dutch video game industry, we purposefully sampled a) game developing studios \((n = 15)\), i.e., game companies focused purely of the development of entertainment games on different platforms (e.g., console, mobile, online, and PC), and b) ‘serious’ or applied game studios \((n = 5)\), i.e., game companies focused on applying games and playful mechanics to solve problems in other industries (e.g., healthcare, education). The distribution between game developing and applied studios in the Netherlands is equal (Gamesmonitor, 2012). The chosen game companies differ in terms of their years of existence, size, and number of (co-)founders, and many of the companies share a connection with the Dutch Association of Game Companies.

The majority of the selected companies have more than one founder. Moreover, in most of the game companies, each member of the founding team is responsible for a particular area of company functioning (e.g., creative direction, technological direction, finance). Founders or co-founders who are responsible for creative direction or the overall functioning of the company are likely to also oversee and determine how innovative game development is approached in these companies. Accordingly, we focused on interviewing (co-)founders who hold such an important role within a game company. Additionally, whenever possible, we also interviewed other members of the founding team. However, in
this paper, we used these data only to enrich our understanding of the game companies and to refine our findings.

4.3.2. Pilot Research Design

We began this project with a pilot study in which we conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 (co-)founders\(^\text{13}\) of game companies, and we interviewed one (co-)founder in each game company, with the interviews lasting 30 minutes on average\(^\text{14}\). Considering the limited theoretical understanding on innovative product development in the video game industry, we aimed to obtain a general understanding of what stimulates and triggers innovative game development in the video game industry with this pilot study. We developed an interview protocol based on Crossan and Apaydin’s (2010) multi-dimensional framework of the determinants of organizational innovation, which distinguishes among five types of firm-level variables that support innovation: missions/goals/strategies; structures and systems; resource allocation; organizational learning and knowledge management tools; and culture (see Appendix B). We used these five types of firm-level variables as the main themes around which we asked our interview questions.

**Preliminary findings from the pilot that influenced the full study design.** In analyzing the data from the pilot interviews, we realized that what stimulates and triggers innovative game development in companies in the game industry differs from that in other commercial companies. One of the explanations for such differences lies in the creative nature of the video game industry and the resulting products, as well as in the SME nature of game companies. For example, our analysis showed that game companies approach

\(^{13}\) Here, we refer to founder entrepreneurs who not only founded a company but also own and manage it. Thus, they are likely to engage in different roles in their work.

\(^{14}\) The data for this pilot study was collected in collaboration with a master student – Maurice Aarsen.
game development not necessarily as a technology-driven but rather as a creativity-driven process. Hence, innovative game development is understood as the development of new and unique games.

Our interview transcripts also suggested important learning moments. First, they showed that when talking about innovative game development, game company founders often referred to the significance and meaning that they attached to their engagement in game development and to their affinity with different domains of game development. Consequently, we turned to the existing literature on entrepreneurial passion (Cardon et al., 2009), meaning of work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Rosso et al., 2010), and calling (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011) to make sense of the emergent findings. Furthermore, we recognized that the ability to innovate in game development is grounded in the ability of game companies to manage the tension between creative and business strategic intents. This finding highlighted the necessity of further exploring this tension, which was the focus of our second-stage study. In this stage of the study, we built upon the findings from this pilot study. Specifically, we developed a new interview protocol, which enabled us to capture more information about founders’ personal histories, work experiences and experiences in managing the need to focus on creative production, on the one hand, and the need to focus on business goal pursuit, on the other hand, to enable innovative game development.

4.3.3. Second-Stage Study

During the second stage of the study, which was performed 1.5 years later, we returned to the interviewed founders to conduct follow-up interviews. Among the 12 initially interviewed founders, two did not agree to participate in the second stage of the study: one because of time constraints and the other because his or her company ceased to exist. Nevertheless, we still decided to keep their responses in our final sample, as they
provided important insights into the phenomenon of interest in the pilot stage of the study. However, we used the data from these companies in the analysis only as a source of additional evidence on the emergent findings. We also identified eight additional game companies through snowball sampling, in which we asked interviewees to recommend additional interviewees. In the interviews with the newly recruited game companies, we also asked questions similar to those used in the pilot study to ensure the compatibility of all the collected data. In broadening our sample with more game companies, we were able to obtain a better understanding of the differences associated with innovative game development between game developing studios and serious game studios. The final sample consisted of 20 game companies, the characteristics of which are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Overview of the interview data

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<th>Game company</th>
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<th>Interviews</th>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Founder $^P$</td>
<td>GDS (games for PC, console, websites, tablet and smartphone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Founder $^{P+S}$</td>
<td>SGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Founder $^{P+S}$</td>
<td>SGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Founder 1$^S$</td>
<td>SGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Founder 2$^S$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Founder 1$^S$</td>
<td>SGS</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Founder 2$^S$</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Founder $^{P+S}$</td>
<td>SGS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* P = interviewed during the pilot study; S = interviewed during the second-stage study. GDS = game developing studio. SGS = serious game studio.

### 4.3.4. Data Sources

The complete data collected to build each case (a game company) included qualitative data collected through a) semi-structured interviews with (co-)founders and b) website and archival data. We treated informant interviews as the primary source of data.
and used website and archival data to enrich our understanding of each case’s context in order to refine the insights from the interview or even find visible contradictions.

**Interviews.** We focused on interviewing founders who provided strategic direction within 20 different game companies during both the pilot and second-stage studies. Given that the majority of game companies have more than one founder, we tried to interview (when possible) more than one founder in each company. In total, we interviewed 27 founders from 20 game companies. The interviews lasted 45-90 min each.

The modified interview protocol used during the second-stage study was designed with a focus on the meaning that founders ascribed to their work and the tension between a creative and business strategic intent, as associated with innovative game development (based on preliminary findings from the pilot study) (see Appendix B). Our questions did not include terms such as “passion,” “calling,” or “tension,” which were discussed only when such words were mentioned by the respondents. The interview protocol for the second-stage study included two sets of questions. The first set of questions aimed to understand respondents’ thoughts, feelings and experiences related to their work, to game development, and to games in general. We started by asking the respondents to reflect on their roles and responsibilities in their game companies and the personal significance attached those role and responsibilities. Next, we asked the respondents to read paragraphs describing the calling, career, and job orientations described in Wrzesniewski and colleagues (1997) and to rate them on the scale from one (i.e., “not at all similar to me”) and seven (i.e., “very much similar to me”) 15. Subsequently, we asked the respondents to

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15 According to Wrzesniewski and colleagues (1997), individuals tend to have different orientations with respect to their work, such as their job, career, and calling orientations. People with a job orientation view their work as a means to an end that allows them to acquire the resources needed to enjoy their life away from work. In turn, individuals with a career orientation have a deep personal investment in their work and aim to achieve rewards that accompany career advancement. Finally, people with a calling orientation find work to be an end in itself, as they work for the fulfillment that doing the work brings.
explain why they selected a particular rating. A similar procedure to that in Berg, Grant, and Johnson (2010) was used. This question was asked to capture the respondents’ feelings about their work: the meaning that they attached to their work and the reasons why they work. We also asked the respondents to share their career stories about how they found their way into the video game industry. Answers to this question provided a better understanding of what game development and work in the video game industry means for the founders. Additional questions that were asked in relation to their stories were “what is the best thing about working in the video game industry?” and “what is so special about the work that you do?”

The second set of questions aimed to elucidate the overall functioning of the game companies and the process of commercializing game development. In particular, we started with general questions about the game company, such as “What makes your company special?” and “What does your company strive to be known for?” Next, we asked about the nature of the games that the company develops, the meaning behind them and the reasons for choosing them. We also asked the founders to reflect on the process of game creation and the process of making the created game a market product. In particular, the game company founders responded to the following questions: “What is the commercialization process in your company” and “How do you approach creative ambitions and commercial interests in game development?”

*Website and archival data.* Data on each game company case were enriched by publicly available materials related to the companies and the interviewed founders. In particular, we collected relevant information from websites, online magazines, blogs, and videos (e.g., founder interviews, pitches, conferences talks, presentations). We also used the LinkedIn accounts of founders to verify their demographic information. Nevertheless, we mainly focused on our interviews as the primary data source in our data analysis.
4.3.5. Data Analysis

In the data analysis, we focused on moving from the collected data to a theoretical understanding of innovative game development in the context of the Dutch video game industry. The data analysis process was a systematic and iterative process that was informed by existing qualitative analysis techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Eisenhardt, 1989; Gioia et al., 2013). In the analysis process, we were assisted by the qualitative data analysis software system NVivo 10. In particular, this program allowed us to build complete cases of each game company by using all the collected data.

We started with an extensive exploration of the data separately for each game company. Examining case after case, we performed open coding, and we did so by creating in-vivo codes—that is, first-order codes originating from words and terms used by the founders of game companies or simple descriptive phrases (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this process, we distinguished first-order concepts that offered general insights into founders’ work-related meaning and their companies’ approach to game development. While in several game companies the data were collected from more than one founder, our analysis on founders’ work-related meaning was centered on the founder responsible for the company’s creative vision, as an in-depth focus on such as founder was likely to provide an understanding of the game company’s strategic approach to innovative game development. Next, we engaged in “axial coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)—that is, we searched for relationships between and among the first-order concepts to convert them into second-order themes. We inductively approached this process by allowing the relationships and second-order themes to emerge from the data. Since we designed our study as a multiple-case study, we further engaged in cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989) in order to identify similar concepts and relationships across cases and compare the identified second-order themes. The second-order themes that appeared across cases were further
assembled into aggregated dimensions, and we then tried to label these dimensions by using the emerging concepts. However, we also engaged our empirical findings in a dialogue with the existing literature in order to allow potentially relevant concepts to assist in the process of labeling the aggregated dimensions (e.g., calling, strategic intent). Finally, we constructed a data structure framework in order to illuminate all the steps that we took in moving between the empirical and theoretical findings, which is presented in Figure 4.1.
Figure 4.1. Overview of the data structure

**First-Order Concepts**

- Labor of love
- Passion for games, the creative process, programming
- Connection to work, games, and the industry as a whole
- Alignment of passion and work—it is not a job
- Continuous engagement in and unconditional devotion to game development or the related domains
- Grounding the “WHY do they do” in satisfying one’s creative urge
- Grounding the “WHY do they do” in contributing to people, gamers, and the industry
- Developing own IP and what “we like”
- Enabling creative freedom
- Doing “work for hire” (WFH), working for clients
- Enabling a stable financial position (revenues, security)
- Identifying and expressing the importance an artist, game designer/developer or programmer
- Identifying and expressing the importance of a role associated with managing the company

**Second-Order Themes**

- Passion toward the video game industry
- Persistent immersion in personally significant activities
- Meaning ascribed to these personally significant activities
- Creative intent
- Business intent
- Professional role identity
- Company developer role identity

**Aggregated Dimensions**

- The Founder’s Calling Toward the Game Industry
- Strategic Intent Tension
- Activating a Role Identity
• Being creative while working for clients and managing a company
• Building a sustainable company as a creative process

• Enabling a continuous and sustainable process of game production through own projects
• Building a resource foundation that enables engagement in creative projects
• Approaching a game as a product rather than as art

• Segregating main projects from “backstage”
• Emphasizing time dependency of explorative vs. exploitative game development

Figure 4.1. Continues
4.4. Findings

Our data analysis revealed that the meaning that founders of game companies ascribe to their work can best be described by the concept of a calling, which encompasses the founder’s passion toward the video game industry (art, design and/or tech), persistent immersion in personally significant activities and meaning ascribed to personally significant activities. Moreover, the founders reported finding it difficult to manage the tension between their desire to pursue their creative ambitions (creative strategic intent) and the need to account for business goals (business strategic intent) in innovative game development. Employing the concept of the founder’s calling in the video game industry, we found that a strong founder’s calling toward the video game industry is associated with the activation of a professional role identity by the founder and thus a priority for pursuing a creative strategic intent. In turn, a weak founder’s calling toward the video game industry is associated with the activation of a company developer role identity by the founder and thus a priority for pursuing a business strategic intent. However, when founders with a strong calling co-activate their professional and company developer role identities instead of prioritizing only one of the strategic intents and thus risking the survival of their companies, they integrate and/or differentiate the two opposing strategic intents in an attempt to manage the tension. Below, we elaborate on our findings in greater detail.

4.4.1. The Founder’s Calling Toward the Video Game Industry

As our analysis revealed, experiences of passion and affinity toward games or other aspects of game development were the primary meaning-providing reasons for why founders committed themselves to and chose to build their career in the video game industry. In combination, these experiences resonated with an extreme form of pursuing meaningful work, namely, a calling toward the video game industry. All but three founders interviewed in the second phase of the data collection admitted to having a calling
orientation with respect to their work rather than a job or a career orientation (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Among these founders, one specifically mentioned the term ‘calling’ when explaining what work in the video game industry means to him/her: “how do I feel about my work? It is a calling basically.” We propose that the concept of a calling allows capturing the meaning that founders ascribe to their work in the video game industry. Indeed, this concept encompasses passion as one of its important elements (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011) and a sense of identity that provides meaning to founders’ work experiences (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Rosso et al., 2010). It also accounts for the unique (life) purpose or (noncommercial) cause that founders (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009) that founders feel drawn to realize through their ventures. Furthermore, the notion of a calling has been discussed in research on artistic labor markets and careers where careers are referred as a “labor of love” (Menger, 1999).

Regarding the concept of a calling that emerged in process of founders’ making sense of their work, we turned to the literature on the “secular” (nonreligious) understanding of a calling (e.g., Hall & Chandler, 2005; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Elangovan et al., 2010, Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011), which further contributed to our understanding of the meanings that founders ascribed to their work in the video game industry. In particular, three themes constituting the concept of the founder’s calling toward the video game industry emerged: a) the founder’s passion toward the video game industry, i.e., interest, passion, and love toward domains of art, design and/or technology; b) the founder’s persistent immersion in personally significant activities, i.e., continuous pursuit of, commitment to, and investment in game development itself or in activities associated with different related domains; and c) the founder’s meaning ascribed to personally significant activities, i.e., the purpose and meaning found in these activities that is characterized as self-centered or other-oriented. Accordingly, the founder’s calling
toward the video games industry should be understood as an experienced passion by the founder toward the video game industry combined with a persistent immersion in activities that the founder regards as personally significant owing to the meanings(she) ascribes to them.

Adopting the perspective of how their calling affects how founders make sense of their work and its significance, we found that the founder’s calling toward the video game industry represents a continuum (ranging from weak to strong) rather than a dichotomy. In this study, a strong founder’s calling towards the video game industry was found to be associated with a greater emphasis on founders’ passion for and persistent immersion in personally significant activities associated with the video game industry, as well as the deep significance and inseparability of these activities from their lives. We derived an understanding of founders’ views of these experiences from the following information: a) founders’ reflections on the extent to which the meaning that they ascribe to their work corresponds to the three work orientations (job, career and calling) (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997); b) founders’ profound explanation for these reflections; and c) founders’ overall sensemaking of the meaning of their work and their engagement in the video game industry. Based on this information, we found that all but three founders showed a strong calling toward the video game industry. Among the three founder with a weak calling toward the video game industry, one simply did not view his or her work as a calling (i.e., the founder is low with respect to calling orientation), and the others engaged in the video game industry because they wanted to be entrepreneurs rather than because they wanted to be employed in the video game industry per se. However, given the limited number of cases and given our particular focus on the meaning that founders ascribe to their work in the video game industry, we were not able to make any conclusions regarding whether these founders might have had a strong calling to be an entrepreneur. Moreover, since we
encountered a limited number of cases of founders with a weak calling toward the video game industry, in discussing our findings, we mainly focused on game company founders with a strong calling toward the video game industry. Further, we discuss the emerging themes that provide an understanding of the founder’s calling toward the video game industry. Additional illustration for these themes is provided in Table 4.2.

**Passion toward the video game industry.** The interviewed game company founders emphasized being highly committed, motivated and determined to work in the video game industry. They referred to games and the game development process as their hobby, their passion and a great interest in their life that originated in their childhood. However, given that the founders engage in different domains in the video game industry (i.e., art, design, and technology), founders’ passion toward the video game industry seems to be complex. In particular, the founders differed in terms of the importance that they placed on one or several of the domains of game development. The domain that they were most passionate about was also connected to the kind of education that they pursued (e.g., art school or computer science). Accordingly, the reason why many game company founders were developing a game and working in the video game industry laid in the artistic, design, and technological opportunities (or a combination of these opportunities) and was not limited to the desire to develop games per se. As an illustration, one founder explained the importance of games for him:

I have always had a passion for digital things, computers and so on …, and at a quite young age, I started to experiment with it, but at one point, when I actually got to make games, it was really the ultimate thing to be able to make them. If you make games, then that is something that is very nice to do. [...] I just learned to program games, though it is technical …, but it was never my passion to dive into
that technology. Finally, I ended up in the direction of game design and programming. That is what I like. (GDS13)

**Persistent immersion in personally significant activities.** The interviewed game company founders mentioned that they engaged in the continuous pursuit of their love for game development and/or activities associated with related domains. Such a pursuit was reflected in the founders’ career stories that highlighted their interest in game development and its different domains as being a thread in their life. Furthermore, the founders were engaged in constant thinking about their personally significant activities, even on vacation. They expressed being very devoted to game development or related domain(s) and noted finding it very difficult to imagine life without it and regarding it as part of themselves. In this way, they often did not view their work as work and noted having trouble avoiding doing work in their off time. For example, one of the founders explained how deeply he/she identified with game development:

> If I could, I would stay that … regarding working on games, working on game development and just working on making the industry a better place until I die … essentially not even until I retire..., I just cannot stop. I knew that I could not do it when I was young, and until today, I have not stopped thinking about games, game development and the entire gaming industry on a gaming basis… because I love doing it. I love working on video games. I love working in an industry that can make games. [...] I grew up with games being part of my life. … I always felt like this is what I want to become …; it [games] is part of my being. (GDS10)

**Meaning of personally significant activities.** The interviewed founders regarded following their passion and being continuously engaging in personally significant activities as highly meaningful and purposeful activities. Given that meaningfulness within the
secular concept of a calling is determined subjectively by the individuals themselves, we regard personally significant activities as meaningful because they are oriented both toward the self and toward others (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Rosso et al., 2010). According to previous research (Korsgaard et al., 1997; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004), the differences might be explained by founders’ work values being more “other-oriented” (i.e., concerned with the welfare of others) or more “self-centered” (i.e., concerned with obtaining personal gains and acting according to self-serving goals to maximize expected personal outcomes). Indeed, we found that game company founders viewed their personally significant activities as meaningful because they experienced them as benefiting either themselves or others. The self-centered meaning ascribed by game company founders to such activities was reflected in the emphasis that founders placed on the importance of satisfying their urge to create something, to receive recognition for their games, to express themselves and/or to make a particular game that they wanted. As an illustration, one of the founders shared the significance of engaging in game development for them:

It has been a lifelong obsession for me to create something of my childhood experiences in the game form. [...] I am very passionate about making games, for instance, about pursuing a project regardless of whether it generates a commercially viable product. [...] I like that people like my work. I can get pretty upset when people do not like my work .... I like it … when people say “that is awesome. I had such a fun time.” … And there is another thing with this particular project. I am very interested in the topic and making a game about that specifically. (GDS2)

In turn, the other-oriented meaning of these significant activities was reflected in game company founders’ emphasis on the importance of creating meaningful experiences for other people, entertaining and making them happy through games and contributing to
the video game industry. In addition to games’ entertainment value, these founders viewed games as a tool to help people to learn, communicate, advance in their lives and feel empowered. For example, one founder explained that his reason for developing games was to benefit people rather than to benefit himself by acquiring recognition:

As you are making games, you are trying to make people enjoy themselves. At least, this is the goal…. I really want to excite people. […] I have a creative vision of how to make people happy with a game. […] You have the indie scene, which is very personally focused. I really do not like that because for me it puts the focus away from games to people who make games. … So, I do not necessarily seek acknowledgment or creative legacy …. I am very aware of my tiny role in the universe. … My main goal is to make people happy. I can do it with games …. I think entertainment is very important. […] So, I really like what I am doing and I think it is important. (CDS11)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second-order themes</th>
<th>Aggregated dimensions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passion toward the video game industry</strong></td>
<td>“I can actually hardly imagine that I would not have had that [being creative], and I'm almost certain that this also applies to the rest of the guys. It's just something that you have. It feels to me like the most honest profession in the sense that I do something or create something, or we make something that we like with our passion. [...] Creating stuff, in this case games, is something that I get a lot of fulfillment from.” (GDS10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persistent immersion in personality</strong></td>
<td>“Regarding the passion I have for technology, games, everything related to games and technology … and the passion I have for video games and for information technology, as I became older, the more ...it grew... and the bigger it became. I think my passion for games is unlimited.” (GDS4)</td>
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| **significant activities** | “I am always busy in my head with creating something, improving something. For me, it is a drive that I just always had … from the time when I was small. [...] Most of the time, when I am at home and I have spare time, I might build a little game for myself. So, I am busy with making games a lot basically. ... I do not see my work as work. I always tell people that I work by daylight, but when I go home, I will do my hobby, which are basically the same. [...] This [game development] is something that I have always done. I have made games since I was about 8 years old. … One of the most important things about my identity is the work that I do. ... If people ask me “what kind of
“Because of my passion, my dream ..., my life-time wish was to make a video game. ... For me making video games was a childhood dream, as I started gaming when I was 6 years old. From that moment ..., I have dreamt to be able to ever make or help make a game. ... I have also built computers myself since I was 11.” (GDS4)

Meaning ascribed to personally significant activities

“Give it [game] to people. Then, hopefully, other people will be like "oh, this is cool. I am happy that this exists.” They not necessarily need to be happy because I made it, but as long as they are happy ..., it sort of feels to me like I can add something to somebody's life, not necessarily on a very deep level, but still. Games may be seen as a trivial thing, and maybe, to the many people, they are, but for some people, they are important. They spend their time on them in their daily lives; it helps them through their dull moments or whatever. [...] You also add some fun to their lives. If I see somebody plays X [our game] and he smiles, he gets a feeling in his head. That is what I like about it. For me, that is also adding something to somebody's life and experience.” (GDS10)

“Basically, the goal is very simply to make video games that are fun to play for gamers and for me. ...I want to bring that back: the retro focus. [...] The gameplay is the key. This is the message that we want to give to gamers. The games need to be fun, and I hope ... when they play our game, they really feel that it has value for their money. [...] I hope that the current generation of gamers will recognize the old games and will try to love them.” (GDS4)

Note: The quotes presented in the table illustrate founders with a strong calling in the video game industry.
4.4.2. Tension Regarding Strategic Intent in the Video Game Industry

The creative nature of the video game industry suggests that by definition, all founders of game companies would aspire to prioritize their creative ambitions (*creative strategic intent*) over their commercial goals (*business strategic intent*) in order to do art for art’s sake (Caves, 2000). However, the reality of economic principles confronted game company founders with the necessity of managing these two opposite strategic intents. For example, the interviewed founders referred to this challenge in the following way: “without a good component of business, there is no business …; there is … a struggle”; “that is always kind of a struggle”; “you have to do a lot of business as well; … it is not only creating”; and “you just have to be realistic too …; you need to have some kind of balance between surviving and creativity.”

This tension was reinforced by situational factors such as resource availability and organizational characteristics. Specifically, the interviewed founders mentioned that the availability of funds or financial resources had an important influence on their opportunities to pursue creative strategic intent independently of their focus on business strategic intent. Moreover, organizational characteristics, such as organizational age and size, also influenced the founders’ ability to pursue their stronger calling toward the video game industry and to focus purely on a creative strategic intent. With respect to organizational age, younger game companies had to engage more in WFH to fund their dream projects (business intent) during their first years in order to survive than older game companies. With respect to organizational size, for larger game companies it was more important to recognize the need to pursue a business strategic intent in order to ensure company survival than for smaller game companies.
Further, we discuss in detail each pole of this tension between creative and business strategic intents.

**Creative strategic intent.** Across the interviewed game company founders, creative strategic intent was manifested in game company founders’ emphasis on developing games that they liked and that they were passionate about. In particular, a creative strategic intent was reflected in their desire to pursue creative freedom in game development, to develop their own games or IP, and to develop unique and experimental games. The success of such games was uncertain, as these games were not developed based on market trends. In this way, the development of such games was more driven by founder’s passion that enables freedom of creative expression rather than by the market. For instance, the interviewed game company founders emphasized their creative strategic intent in the following way: “our motivation to work together is to build stuff that we like and not the stuff that somebody happens to need”; “the main principle of our strategy is to do what we really want”; “we want to determine ourselves what we make”; and “we want to do things that we like ourselves [...]; we have indeed chosen these games because of our passion and not for commercial reasons.”

The interviewed game company founders viewed the development of unique games as an opportunity to not only differentiate themselves in the market but also to change the market and create new experiences. Indeed, many company founders did not want to merely follow market trends or work for clients, as they viewed such an approach to be a commercial approach that was against their creative nature. For example, one founder explained that for his game company, it was important to develop unique games that could surprise gamers and change the market:
We do have a sense that we do not just want to imitate the successes of others. We want to pursue our own style and to make our own type of games. [...] You just have to have that drive to really want to do your own thing. … You should want to put your own stamp on something and not just imitate others. [...] It is quite surprising if you do things differently and really uniquely in your own way, and people will be surprised. [...] We want to create something that can change the market. (GDS13)

In this way, the focus on creative strategic intent and thus on innovative and unique game development was very much linked to the importance and the meaning that founders ascribed to game development. In particular, one founder explained that his or her passion served as a driving force for innovative product development and that without this passion, no innovation would have occurred:

If you do not have passion for what you do, I think you quickly fall back on what you already know, namely, the status quo. If you do have passion for what you do, you see the possibilities, and you get inspired by what it is possible and what you would want to do. [...] I think if you are in a field for which you have no passion, then that security will become a priority very fast. Then, you are doing it practically to earn your living, which is not necessarily wrong, but this is then your priority. (GDS8)

**Business strategic intent.** The emphasis of the interviewed game company founders on business strategic intent entailed establishing a stable financial position through developing games for clients (WFC) (e.g., enabling secured revenues), doing WFH (e.g., building a base of financial resources) and following market trends (e.g., developing games that by definition are likely to be successful). WFC and WFH had a
slightly different meaning: WFC included the development of games for companies, publishers, and other partners, whereas WFH could also include the development of games and other technology-based products (e.g., apps, websites, online solutions) for other parties. While WFC was more characteristic of and used by serious game companies, WFH was used by game development studios to gain financial resources in order to support their game development. This distinction was reflected in the business structure of these two types of game companies. While game developing studios may had started from a creative idea and then sought to financially support it (WFH), serious game companies always had to start from a customer company problem or question to which they later apply their creative solutions (WFC). Nevertheless, the emphasis in both cases is on business strategic intent, which highlighted the commercially driven and market-driven nature of game development. By following market trends or responding to other parties’ needs while developing games, game companies could ensure the financial success of their games. For instance, the interviewed game company founders emphasized business strategic intent in the following way: “the market is more important than what I like”; “we are doing work on demand …; you have to look very well on what are the commercially and financially interesting trends”; and “we do it [WFH] just for money.”

4.4.3. The Influence of the Founder’s Calling on a Company’s Strategic Intent

Through the Activation of a Role Identity

Our data suggested a pattern whereby the founder’s calling toward the video game industry influenced the strategic intent prioritized by the game company founder. We propose that this influence might be explained by the activation of a particular role identity within founders of game companies. Drawing on the insights from our data, the identity role theory (Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000), and the literature on entrepreneurial identity (e.g., Cardon et al., 2009; Mathias & Williams, in press), we distinguished
between the activation of professional and company developer role identities. In this paper, by *professional role identity*, we refer to founders’ identification with the professional roles of an artist, game designer/developer, or programmer. By *company developer role identity*, in turn, we refer to founders’ identification with the role of a business developer, who is responsible for managing, nurturing and growing the company.

Specifically, founders with a strong calling toward the video game industry tended to activate mainly their professional role identity and thus to focus more on creative strategic intent in innovative game development. Thus, these founders focused on doing “art for art’s sake” while downplaying the importance of building a sustainable game company to support innovative game development. Indeed, the interviewed game company founders emphasized the importance of engaging in activities and behaviors that resonate with their strong calling toward the video game industry and thus with their creative profession in the video game industry. Such activities focused on enabling creative freedom within their game company and developing the best unique game and/or the best possible game that can contribute to gamers’ lives. The activation of their professional role identity also explains why these founders perceived the commercial aspects of game development to be against the true creative nature of game development and why games made for commercial purposes or in the context of WFH were viewed by the game company founders as lacking in quality in comparison with games created through experimentation and the expression of creative freedom. As the founder of GDS2 explained: “I do not see myself as a person who would make 6 small games for the iPhone just to have commercial products. That really goes against... who I am basically.”

In contrast, founders with a weak calling toward the video game industry tended to activate mainly their company developer role identity and thus to focus more on business strategic intent in innovative game development. Thus, these founders focused on doing
“art for profit” while downplaying the importance of their creative freedom, which was so important for innovative game development. The activation of a company developer role identity was reflected in the game company founders’ emphasis on the importance of engaging in activities that can establish a sustainable business, facilitate continuous availability of resources to keep the company going and allow them to manage it effectively. Such activities included developing games based on clients’ demands. As the founder of GDS6 noted: “If you want to be a company, to earn your bread, to make money and to be able to hire people to ... create even bigger projects, you have to think differently. … You have to be more open and ... how do you call it ... submissive to the client.” Given the limited number of such cases, however, we were able to support this finding with drawing a theoretical relationship that originated from our sensemaking of the data and the knowledge on the debate that exists between more artistic-oriented (focus on pursuing a personal calling) and more commercial-oriented (focus on effective money earning) game companies.

Instead of focusing on activating one particular role identity, some founders tried to co-activate professional and company developer role identities. Such co-activation was reflected in founders acknowledging that the pursuit of their personal calling toward the video game industry was inseparable from the development of their company; thus, these companies were ‘healthy’ companies that valued and took responsibility for the people they employed. For example, the founder of GDS8 explained how he or she achieved the activation of these two role identities: “I love games; I do not necessarily have to make games, so that's a transition that I've gone through. It used to be really my starting point – building games, which I find still very nice, but now I see the company itself as a project ..., so this is where [while managing the company] I can also express my creativity. […] [If you want to have a company], you have to think hard about … the role of maybe you as a
designer or entrepreneur and how can you design the environment, the company, and the rules of the company so that it operates as smoothly and healthy as possible.” This example clarifies how viewing the management of one’s company as a creative process allowed this game company founder to focus on developing his or her company. Thus, through co-activating their two role identities, founders can contribute to companies by finding a way to manage the creative-business intent tension in innovative game development.

4.4.4. Managing the Creative-Business Intent Tension by Utilizing the Strategies of Integration and Differentiation

Looking through the lens of a paradox (Lewis, 2000; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989), we found that founders who engaged in co-activating their professional and company developer role identities tried to manage the creative-business intent tension by engaging in integration (bounded creativity, secured creativity and granted creativity) and differentiation (spatial game development separation) with respect to the two opposing strategic intents. In this regard, integration entailed emphasizing the interdependence of creativity and business in innovative game development, whereas differentiation entailed emphasizing either creativity or business in innovative game development. In the case of integration, the two role identities were regarded by founders as synergetic, and in the case of differentiation, these role identities were regarded as incompatible. This characterization corresponds with previous research on the co-activation of multiple role identities in the work-family literature, which suggests that different role identities can be considered both compatible and conflicting (Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009). We now discuss our findings in more detail. Additional illustration of the identified themes is provided in Table 4.3.
Table 4.3. Representative quotes regarding the underlying second-order themes aggregated into integration and differentiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second-order themes</th>
<th>Aggregated dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integration</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bounded creativity</td>
<td>“I have to be creative in the way I look at myself, my company and the things that I make. So doing the business is now the huge part of my creative work; so, it shapes the company in the certain direction.” (SGS17)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We actually have a very big say in what our game is going to be like. There are different forms of WFH [...]. We work with collaborative strategic long-term partners … and that shows the discussions that we have with them and that we are on equal footing when it comes to the creative process.” (GDS7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secured creativity</td>
<td>“For us, it is important that ... it [game development] is consistent with what we want to do and what we like to do. ... But the source of the money is a concern, which is unfortunately very important. Of course, you start a company to create fun things that you find enjoyable to make and play ..., but in addition ..., you have to be very commercial and really watch the commercially attractive financial trends. ... The reality is of course that you have to really look at what are the commercial successes that one can make money with; we consider this when setting up the product ... and evaluating what our customers expect and what our target is. We do not want to do something that we know no one wants and that no one is going to play.” (GDS15)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
“We want to do that [own project] as independently as possible. It is a big project, so we need money for that. … We do not have the money …; that is why we have to do WFH as well. … You need the budget to create. You need to prefinance everything. … This WFH project now generally raises a bit of extra cash that we will use for new projects.” (GDS3)

**Differentiation**

**Spatial game development separation**

“I am always looking for more autonomy, but on the other hand ..., we are an applied game company. This means that we apply game mechanics..., and we apply them to different kinds of client problems and needs. Somebody has to pay for the work that we do. … We do invest in new projects every now and then, and you then create more freedom.” (SGS20)

“In the beginning, when we first set up..., we just focused on the games that we develop ourselves, ... but the opportunities that we saw …we grabbed them. This was a board game invented by a Frenchman. … He approached me. Then, we made a deal and business relationship with each other. We started to make Game N. … So, the focus is on creating the games for ourselves, by ourselves. But, if it fits the schedule, then we are always open to work for hire. But, we also we learn from that.” (GDS4)
Integration. By co-activating professional and company developer role identities, founders of game companies engaged in the integration of their creative and business strategic intents. In this way, they were pursuing their calling toward the video game industry while enabling the sustainability of their game company. In particular, the interviewed game company founders used two main integrating strategies: *bounded creativity* and *secured creativity*. Engagement in bounded creativity was achieved through recognizing the opportunity to be creative within the framework of working on client projects and doing WFH. For example, one founder explained how doing WFH allowed creativity in his or her game company to take place:

Our theory is that if you use creativity applied to very specific constraints like a design for a client or a specific question for a client, then creativity can be used and shaped by the persons themselves to help the client to answer the specific question in order to fix their problem. (SGS19)

The interviewed game company founders also engaged in secured creativity, which was manifested in game companies’ view of the accumulation of resources (business strategic intent) as not only an important but also often as a necessary process that can enable creativity-driven game development. Furthermore, they focused on developing unique games that were approached as a product rather than an art (based on market exploration). Such an approach enabled them to achieve a continuous and sustainable process of game production (where the revenues from own products finance new projects). For example, one founder explained how his company tried to achieve the integration creative and business strategic intents:

You start with considering where is the business potential for all the creative mindsets that we have, and that we know what we are good at and … [that] we try
to maximize our output in this direction. … We are very much focused on making a great game, which sets a creative ambition, but we also know that making a great game in this case also entails making the best possible product for the customer [gamer]. So, it is a very nice way of combining the two. (GDS1)

Both of these examples show that when reflecting on the way in which game company founders manage the creative-business intent tension they take on as the “hat” of a founder (e.g., focusing on customers and the business potential of the game company) together with the “hat” of a professional (e.g., illuminating the possibilities for individual creative input). Approaching the two role identities synergistically, they can organize their innovative game development in a way such that they have the ability to create by following their calling toward the video game industry while also building a sustainable game company.

**Differentiation.** Similarly, by co-activating professional and company developer role identities, the interviewed game company founders managed the creative-business intent tension by engaging in *spatial game development separation*. Such an approach was manifested in the separation of their work on main projects for commercial success (to satisfy company’s focus on value creation) from hobby-driven small projects (to satisfy individual aspirations for the pursuit of their calling). The projects aimed at value creation allowed the game company founders to secure financial stability that is important for the survival of their companies. By contrast, smaller hobby-driven projects, which were often considered ‘backstage’ projects, allowed the founders to satisfy their need for creative freedom and the experimentation that the pursuit of their calling required. As an illustration, a founder of a serious game company explained how he or she separated the activities aimed at satisfying individual creative needs and organizational needs:
We are always coming up with new game ideas or trying to see whether we can find some time to keep projects and work on our own little projects …, but our main focus will … be the service of clients, because … it is also a more safe model for running business. […] We cannot live from just having great ideas. …So, we are not going … to become artists who do something because we need to be creative or be passionate and chaotic; rather, we need to become designers and work for people. …This means that you have to differentiate. (SGS19)

This example clarifies that the interviewed founders activated both professional and company developer role identities in the way that they approached the management of the creative-business intent tension. However, they approached them as conflicting intents; thus, they distinguished the domains and contexts in which the focus on one or another aspect of the innovative game development takes place.

4.4.5. Toward a Framework for the Role of the Founder’s Calling in the Management of the Creative-Business Intent Tension in the Video Game Industry

Figure 4.2 depicts a framework for the role of the founder’s calling in the management of the creative-business intent tension in the video game industry. According to the framework, the founder’s calling influences the strategic intent that is prioritized with respect to the creative-business intent tension through the activation of a particular role identity (professional or company developer role identity). In this regard, game companies are directed by their founders toward a particular strategic intent while the other strategic intent is downplayed. However, when founders co-activate their professional and company developer role identities, they can still pursue their calling while working on building a sustainable company. In such a case, game company founders can succeed in finding strategies for managing the creative-business intent tension through integration and
Figure 4.2. A framework for the role of the founder’s calling in the management of the creative-business intent tension in the video game industry.
differentiation of the two opposing strategic intents.

The framework starts by clarifying the nature of the founder’s calling toward the video game industry. It shows that the founder’s calling toward the video game industry is grounded in the passion of the founder toward the video game industry, whether it is experiences toward the domains of art, design, and/or technology. However, experiencing passion on its own is not enough to have the founder’s calling toward the video game industry; rather, passion merely serves as the primary driver for the founder to join the video game industry. This passion needs to be combined with the founder’s persistent immersion in personally significant activities related to his or her passion and the meaning that he or she ascribes to these activities to form the founder’s calling toward the video game industry. Furthermore, our analysis shows that the founder’s calling toward the video game industry represents a continuum, ranging from weak to strong. In this way, our findings are consistent with those of existing research on calling that advocates a ‘secular’ understanding of calling (e.g., Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Cardador, Dane & Pratt, 2011; Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010).

Further, the framework suggests that the concept of the founder’s calling sheds light on the strategic intent that game company founders prioritize in innovative game development. In this way, our findings are aligned with previous research findings regarding the importance of founders (Schein, 1992; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Strandgaard Pedersen et al., 2006) and founders’ identity and passion in shaping company-related strategic choices and outcomes (Cardon et al., 2009; Fauchart & Gruber, 2009; Powell & Baker, 2014). According our framework, a strong calling toward the video game industry induces founders to activate mainly their professional role identity and thus to pursue a creative strategic intent with respect to their game company. By contrast, with a weak calling toward the video game industry, game company founders are likely to mainly
activate their company developer role identity and thus to pursue business strategic intent with respect to their game company. The former finding corresponds with previous research suggesting that companies representing creative industries tend to focus more on doing art for art’s sake (Caves, 2000; Lampel et al., 2000; DeFillipi et al., 2007; Peltoniemi, 2014). Furthermore, recent study suggests that founders who evoke an entrepreneurial rather than a managerial role take a more innovation-focused rather a profit-focused approach to the consideration and selection of opportunities (Mathias & Williams, in press). However, given the rapid-changing nature of the video game industry, a tension between the need to focus on creative production and the need to focus on business goal pursuit is likely to exist in innovative game development that game company founders have to manage. This tension is particularly prominent in game companies in our sample because they are likely to be more resource constrained as SMEs (e.g., Cao et al., 2009), and founders of SMEs are likely to have little possibility to pursue their calling in the video game industry without attending to the business aspects of game development. In this way, the management of the creative-business intent tension represents a greater challenge for SMEs than for larger companies (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Bierly & Daly, 2007; Chang, Hughes, & Hotho, 2011). Building on previous research on the tensions in creative industries (Caves, 2000; Lampel et al., 2000; DeFillipi et al., 2007), our framework further proposes that game companies whose founders co-activate their professional and company developer role identities are able to manage the creative-business tension by engaging in integration and differentiation of the two opposing strategic intents.

4.5. Discussion

In this study, we focus on the founder’s calling to explore how game company founders in the video game industry manage the tension between creative ambitions and
business goals in innovative game development. The results of the case study show that the founder’s calling toward the video game industry can be best defined as an experienced passion by the founder toward the video game industry combined with a persistent immersion in activities that the founder regards as personally significant owing to the meaning s(he) ascribes to them. Approaching the founder’s calling as a continuum ranging from weak to strong, we observed the following pattern. Founders with a strong calling toward the video game industry tend to activate mainly their professional role identity and to prioritize a creative strategic intent in innovative game development. In turn, founders with a weak calling toward the video game industry tend to activate their company developer role identity and to prioritize a business strategic intent in innovative game development. Nevertheless, all game company founders that we interviewed recognized the tension between these two strategic intents. Exploring how game company founders try to manage this tension, we found that they do so by engaging in integration (engaging in bounded creativity, secured creativity and granted creativity) and differentiation (engaging in temporal and special separating in game development) efforts. However, the ability to manage this creative-business intent tension is facilitated by the ability of founders to co-activate their professional and company developer role identities. Our findings make important contributions to the creative industry literature and growing research on the calling concept.

Our study builds on and extends research on creative industries. First, by exploring the founder’s calling in relation to innovative product development, we show that the concept of a calling can enrich the role of founders in creative industries and the ways in which they reconcile the creative-business intent tension in such industries (e.g., Lampel et al., 2000; Tschang, 2007; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; DeFillipi et al., 2007). Building on the insights from the video game industry, we proposed a framework for the role of the
founder’s calling with respect to the management of the creative-business intent tension in the video game industry. This framework highlights that the founder’s calling toward the video game industry can be pursued in the context of situational influences, the interplay of which contributes to the existence of the creative-business intent tension that game companies have to manage. However, only by co-activating their professional and company developer role identities can game company founders manage this tension. Similar to previous research (e.g., Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Gotsi et al., 2010), we found that to manage the creative-business intent tension, game company founders utilize integration and differentiation strategies. Furthermore, our study acknowledges the need to pay more attention to studying creative industries and especially those that have started to acquire “artistic” recognition only recently (e.g., Jones et al., 2012; Chaston & Sadler-Smith, 2012; Patush & Koivun, 2014), with the video game industry being a unique and underresearched case of the creative industry (Hotho & Champion, 2011; Tschang, 2007; Cohendet & Simon, 2007; Peticca-Harris et al., 2015). Building on our findings, we encourage future research to explore the factors that may stimulate founders to shift from the activation of a particular role identity (i.e., blindly following one’s calling in the creative industries) toward the co-activation of different role identities.

Our study also contributes to the growing literature on the role of the meaning that founders ascribe to their work in relation to company outcomes (Schein, 1992; Fauchart & Gruber, 2009; Powell & Baker, 2014; Cardon et al., 2009). In particular, our findings suggest that the degree of the founder’s calling toward the video game industry is likely to induce the activation of different role identities by the founder and to differentially influence the strategic intent pursuit by the founder in innovative game development. In particular, founders with a strong calling toward the video game industry tend to mainly activate their professional role identity and to prioritize a creative strategic intent in
innovative game development. In turn, founders with a weak calling toward the video game industry tend to mainly activate their company developer role identity and to prioritize a business strategic intent in innovative game development. These findings correspond to research on the calling and “labor of love” of artists, which suggests that there is a focus on an “inner drive” in the context of art that cannot be matched to the monetary considerations of a market economy of exchange (Menger, 1999). Similarly, research on leisure-based founders (Kim et al., 2015) suggests that founders whose entrepreneurial activities relate to activities originating from their leisure time are more likely to retain their “artisan” entrepreneurial identity (Stanworth & Curran, 1976). Thus, they are less concerned with growth and more concerned with the details of the product itself. By comparison, founders with a more classical entrepreneurial identity focus more on growth and organizational infrastructure (Stanworth & Curran, 1976; Kim, Longest, & Lippmann, 2015). In this regard, our findings concur with those of a recent study of Clarysse et al. (2015), which suggests that multiple identities among single entrepreneurs might lead to a more balanced outcome at a venture level (e.g., profitability and growth). Our findings are also in line with a recent study on how the evocation of multiple identities influences founders’ approach to the consideration and selection of entrepreneurial opportunities (Mathias & Williams, in press). In particular, the study shows that entrepreneurs choose an innovative, proactive, and passion-oriented approach when they evoke an entrepreneurial role and choose a customer-, profit-, and market-oriented approach when they evoke a managerial role. We call on future research to attend to the concept of the founder's calling when exploring their strategic decision making that concerns innovative product development in creative industries. In particular, scholars should explore the possibility of founders to have an entrepreneurial calling which shapes companies’ strategic choices and outcomes.
Moreover, our study contributes to the literature on calling (e.g., Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy & Dik, 2013). Specifically, by showing that founders in the video game industry can have a strong calling and by defining the main elements characterizing this concept, we provide a better understanding of the concept of a calling in the context of the video game industry. In this way, our findings resonate with research suggesting a more secular understanding of callings (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011), which advocates for a calling to be experienced in any occupation. In particular, we further develop and contextualize the existing definition of a calling provided by Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011) and show that the concept of a calling represents a continuum rather than dichotomy. Furthermore, this study makes initial steps toward highlighting the significance of the concept of a calling with respect to the understanding of founders’ strategic choices and their efforts to manage the creativity-business tension in order to enable innovative product development. In this way, our findings suggest that the consequences of a calling can extend beyond career and work-related outcomes (e.g., Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Cardador et al., 2011; Elangovan et al., 2010) toward the strategic choices of an organization.

4.5.1. Limitations and Future Research Directions

We should, however, acknowledge that our study has several limitations that should be addressed by future research. First, considering the SME status of the game companies of the founders we interviewed and the specific nature of the Dutch video game industry, we are not able to generalize our findings to larger organizations. Thus, we suggest that future research examines how the founder’s calling informs the management of the creative-business intent tension in large companies and verify our findings in the context of other international contexts.
Second, while we made every attempt possible to conduct interviews with the same founders in the second-stage study as we interviewed during the pilot study, doing so was not always possible. Thus, our ability to consistently compare the findings from each of these data collection stages was limited. It might have been interesting to explore how the relation between the founder’s calling and his or her innovation-related strategic choices develops over time. According to Dobrow (2013), a calling may develop over time and may be shaped by various factors. Thus, future research should consider longitudinal designs to explore the creative-business intent tension in creative industries and the video game industry in particular.

Third, while we explored emerging ideas regarding the founder’s calling in the second-stage analysis, we see an overlap between our conceptualization of a calling and the professional role identity, suggesting that the founder’s calling is always associated with a professional role identity (i.e., an artist, designer, or programmer). This finding may raise a question about the distinction between having a calling to be a creative professional (e.g., a game designer, programmer, and having a calling to be an entrepreneur. However, given that the concept of a calling suggests an emphasis on a particular cause or purpose (i.e., a calling for bringing societal change, a calling for changing the education system), what matters is the pursuit of a cause or purpose that induces individuals to create ventures in the video game industry. In our sample, we did not have founders who started their game companies merely because they wanted to be entrepreneurs or viewed entrepreneurship as their life purpose. Future research should further investigate the purposes that founders pursue in starting a venture and the influence of such a purpose on their venture-related strategic decision making and outcomes.

Fourth, while we tried to acknowledge the way in which resource availability and organizational characteristics such as the age, size and type of a game company influence
game company founders’ choice of innovation-related strategic intents, other factors might have influenced our findings. For example, founders may differ with regard to the salience of one type of personality over others in the context of Hollands’ (1997) RIASEC personality typology (e.g., realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional individuals) or of Gough’s (1987) California Psychological Inventory (Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta individuals). Future research should consider the role of both the founder’s calling and the founder’s personality in informing the approach toward the management of the creative-business tension.