

Working paper:
How female founders as role models influence nascent female
entrepreneurs: 3 narratives from female entrepreneurs

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Participated in Nordic Conference on Small Business & Entrepreneurship 2022 (NCSB2022):
Abstract accepted on 11 February 2022
WP submitted on 27 April 2022
Peer review conducted by Ulla Hytti, Turku School of Economics
WP presented and feedback received on 19 May 2022

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How female founders as role models influence nascent female entrepreneurs: 3 narratives from female entrepreneurs

ABSTRACT

Introduction and Objective: Women are underrepresented in entrepreneurship. One reason, among others, is a lack of female role models. Research shows that role models matter (Bosma et al. 2012). Quantitative research proves that female founders positively influence nascent female entrepreneurs among their employees (Rocha and Praag 2020). The purpose of this paper is to reach a deeper understanding of this influence through a qualitative study by answering the question: How are women inspired into entrepreneurship by female founders/owners¹? What happens between the two females?

Methods: Through interviews with three female entrepreneurs who have worked for a female founder, this study examines the influence that female founders have had on the entrepreneurs. Each respondent was interviewed twice. First through a semi-structured interview and secondly through a narrative interview conducted by employing a narrative pictogram in which the informant was asked to make a graphical representation of her role models and depict the relationship to them. This method helps the researcher access the tacit knowledge behind the informant's narrative (Jakobsen, Worm, and Li 2018).

All interviews have been video recorded. The collected interviews have been transcribed and interpreted through deductive and inductive reasoning, followed by a presentation of the narratives according to narrative thematic analysis.

Results: The informants all worked for a female founder who acted as a positive or negative role model. The female employers were important for the informants as nascent entrepreneurs by putting them in a position where they felt out of their comfort zones. The informants experienced that their former female employer involved them in difficult tasks and decisions and had a high degree of openness and transparency. They do not always experience this transparency with male employers.

Discussion and Conclusion: This study adds a qualitative aspect to older quantitative studies that showed a positive influence from female founders on female employees regarding entrepreneurship.

The study shows that the nascent female entrepreneurs were inspired by working with the female founders who had employed them – even if the founder was not a role model. They were inspired by the way they acted or solved tasks. The founders put nascent entrepreneurs in positions where the latter felt out of their comfort zones. The nascent female entrepreneurs were also involved in the founder's network as well as in difficult decisions because of openness from the female founders.

This study indicates the importance of exposing nascent female entrepreneurs to female founders to enhance female entrepreneurship regardless of whether the female founder is a positive or negative role model.

A research limitation is that this study is based on narratives given by only three informants from three different industries. It indicates a need for future studies to examine the extent of the findings (across industries).

Keywords: Role model, Female entrepreneur, Female founder, Nascent entrepreneur

Paper type: Working paper

¹ In this paper, the word founder will be used from now on to cover also one case where a female owner has a significant presence, as if she was the founder.

1. Introduction

In the past, there has been much focus on the fact that a lot fewer women than men become entrepreneurs – more precisely, in 2014, 25 % and in 2019, 27 % of the Danish entrepreneurs were female (Fonden for Entreprenørskab 2021).

Different studies argue that there are multiple causes. Causes often mentioned are the lack of or too few role models (Rocha and Praag 2020), (Karimi et al. 2014), more difficult access to financing (Dansk Erhverv 2020), (Vækstfonden 2020), communication about entrepreneurship that is often in a language that appeals more to men (Orlandi 2017), (Gupta, Goktan, and Gunay 2014), (Mette Søggaard Nielsen, Kim Klyver 2020), the lack of network for women in entrepreneurial circles (Klyver and Grant 2010), and women's own feelings of lacking entrepreneurial education (Hindle, Klyver, and Jennings 2009).

Furthermore, it could be important that there are many female-dominated jobs in the welfare area in Denmark. At the same time, there is better equality in the labour market for employees compared to self-employed, making employee jobs more attractive to women (Klyver, Kim 2021). It is still of interest to heighten the share of female entrepreneurs because women's ability to run businesses is the same and even a bit higher than men's abilities (Dansk Erhverv 2022).

This working paper dives into the importance of role models and tries – as an extension of Rocha and Praag's great quantitative study (Rocha and Praag 2020) that is based on 89000 employees in start-up companies – via a narrative study to develop suggestions on how female entrepreneurs affect the aspiring entrepreneurs among their female employees. The study seeks to more deeply understand what it is that, according to Rocha and Praag, gives up to 89 % likeliness that a woman becomes an entrepreneur when she works at a start-up company with a female founder than if she had worked for a male founder. The study explores what happens in the "space" between the female founder and the aspiring female entrepreneur while this person is an employee of the founder. What can female founders do as role models for future female entrepreneurs among their employees, and what is it that is being started in the female founder? Thus far, this connection is inadequately illuminated.

1.2. Definitions and terminology

Terms need to be defined to avoid terminology confusion. The word founder is used about the founder of a business where the founder has hired staff. The word owner is used about an owner or co-owner who has hired staff. The term entrepreneur is used for the interviewed informants who started their own businesses after being employed by a founder or owner. Even though these informants, hereafter, can be described as a founder or an owner, the word entrepreneur is used about the informants throughout this paper.

This working paper uses a wide definition of the term role model. As Bosma et al. describe, a role model is a common reference to individuals who set examples to live by for others and stimulate or inspire other individuals to make (career) decisions and achieve certain goals (Bosma et al. 2012). When you compare yourself to a role model, you are likely to search for someone who looks like you because it makes easier access to self-evaluation and self-improvement (Lockwood and Kunda 1997). Rocha and Praag underline the importance of affinity (*Rocha and Praag 2020*). According to Rocha and Praag, the influence from a role model is higher if you have the same background, and the higher resemblance, the higher tendency to start on your own. Other research also underlines the importance of affinity (Byrne, Fattoum, and Garcia 2019), (Radu and Loué 2008), (Bosma et al. 2012). There are distinctions between *real-life* role models – direct role

models (such as parents, siblings, mentors) – and *symbolic* or more remote role models (such as high profile entrepreneurs who are given exposure in the media) (Byrne, Fattoum, and Garcia 2019).

This working paper is divided into five main sections, including a literature review. Then follows a section that explains the chosen method and a section that presents the three narratives with analysis. In the last section, a conclusion is given on the completed study.

2. Literature review

Klyver and Grant show a connection between knowing an entrepreneur and the likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur (Klyver and Grant 2010). An Iranian study based on 331 students measures the positive connection between knowing a role model and “entrepreneurial intention” (Karimi et al. 2014).

Other factors also come into play. According to Dansk Erhverv in 2022, a women’s lack of belief in their own competencies is the second most common cause of women’s reluctance to start a business (Dansk Erhverv 2022). Research also shows that women need a higher level of education, more start-up experience, and more social capital to have the same level of start-up intention as men (Hindle, Klyver, and Jennings 2009).

In this context, the term *self-efficacy* is often mentioned, defined as the belief in one’s own abilities to successfully execute an action to obtain a desired outcome (Radu and Loué 2008). A study with 547 entrepreneur students and 98 entrepreneurs at the Max Planck Institute showed a higher increase in self-efficacy after an entrepreneurial course with founders as role models. The effect was greatest when the founder and the students were of the same sex (Bechthold and Rosendahl Huber 2018).

Affinity – the fact that you are similar or feel a type of kinship is mentioned in articles occupied by the importance of role models for entrepreneurs. According to Rocha and Praag, the effect of having a role model is greatest when you have the same background: The more similar the backgrounds are, the more likeliness there is that you start a business (Rocha and Praag 2020). A French study found that you seek someone who resembles yourself in your search for a role model because it gives a more accurate self-evaluation and provokes better self-improvement/progress (Byrne, Fattoum, and Garcia 2019: 177). The influence of the role model increases with the perceived similarity in terms of personal characteristics, values, and aspirations (Radu and Loué 2008: 443). A Dutch study with 292 entrepreneurs mentions that the chosen role models tend to resemble the entrepreneurs in terms of sex, nationality, and their work sector. However, the role models are older and have larger businesses. Therefore, the role models are living proof that certain goals are obtainable and can, thereby, heighten the self-efficacy of the individuals (Bosma et al. 2012).

When it comes to career development, the typical role model strategy for individuals is, according to Donald Gibson, to identify with multiple role models, and he argues that the role model construction is best thought of as a selection process for attributes rather than a search for a

“whole” role model. By choosing attributes, the individual can create a cognitive “composite role model” of what the individual wants to be. Gibson wants to move away from viewing role models as primarily serving as “a learning function”. Instead, the role model has three related functions: 1. To provide learning. 2. To provide motivation and inspiration. 3. To help individuals define their self-concept. According to Gibson, you have a set of role models that you construct and relate to on four dimensions: 1. A *cognitive positive/negative* dimension, 2. a *cognitive global/specific* dimension (where *global* refers to a variety of attributes including skills, characteristics, and behaviours. *Specific* refers to a small set of attributes), 3. A *structurally close/far* dimension, and 4. a *structurally upwards/sideways/downwards* dimension (Gibson 2004).

3. Method/study design

A pilot study was conducted with two female entrepreneurs as informants prior to the final study. The pilot study shows that a methodical narrative approach using pictograms is suitable to answer the question about what happens between role models and nascent female entrepreneurs. It turns out that the use of pictograms as a visual element in affiliation with the narrative interview has value as a help to evoke knowledge that, presumably, would otherwise remain unmentioned.

With a social constructivist approach, I am convinced that I, as an interviewer, also affect the stories that are being created. One place where this influence became clear was in the second interview, where the informants at the beginning of the interview, largely did not think they could think of anyone or at least no more than one role model. However, as the narratives progressed and were drawn on paper, I asked them about more details, and this request often gave rise to them thinking of more and more significant role models.

Three informants participated in the study. A qualitative approach was chosen where each informant was interviewed twice. In the interviews, narrative and visual approaches have been used.

The three informants have been chosen among female entrepreneurs who have worked for a female founder or owner.

Purposeful sampling has been used (Creswell and Poth 2018) to find participants who fit the following criteria:

It must be a female entrepreneur who fulfils the following four criteria

- She owns and runs a business.
- She has previously worked for another female founder or owner who was not a family member.
- She has a story to tell about her lived life with entrepreneurship.
- She is willing to share her story.

Purposeful sampling is about finding the most appropriate informants to answer the research question. Creswell mentions several different sampling strategies. Here, two are chosen in combination: Snowball and Intensity, which means that interesting informants are identified through people who know people who have “information-rich cases that manifest the

phenomenon intensely but not extremely” (Creswell and Poth 2018: 159). Chaim Noy also defines snowball sampling as the fact that the researcher gets access to informants through the contact information that has been provided by other informants (Noy 2008: 330).

The informants were found through contact with key people with knowledge of entrepreneurs, direct contact with known and lesser-known entrepreneurs, and posting on LinkedIn, where the post has been read more than 2000 times.

The interviews were conducted in the period 28 October to 9 November 2021. For two of the informants, the interviews were held at their place of business, while the interview with the third informant was held at IBA Erhvervsakademi Kolding.

All interviews are video-recorded and subsequently reviewed and listened to as soon as possible after the interview, as recommended by Maxwell (Maxwell 2013). Hereafter, the interviews have been transcribed.

The first interview was done as a semi-structured interview where the informants spoke about their entrepreneurial stories and their views on the fact that women start only 26% of new businesses. The first round of interviews is based on an *etic* approach where the informant gives information about their view and their position on entrepreneurship. The first interview also creates a relationship between the interviewer and the informant.

In the second interview, a narrative method was used along with visual data – also known as a *narrative pictogram* (Jakobsen, Worm, and Li 2018). The narrative method does not stand alone, because you can question if everything can be described with words.

Visual methods contain the potential to support and capture stories that would not otherwise emerge or be elaborated. In this instance, a version is used where the informant draws or sketches connections during the interview. No special drawing skills are required to do this. The specific method, which is called a narrative pictogram, has been developed and described by Michael Jakobsen, who, alongside two colleagues at CBS, has tested it in a study on how local business people develop strategies to grow their businesses in complex cross-cultural business contexts (Jakobsen, Worm, and Li 2018). In this context, two terms are essential, *Etic* and *Emic*. The terms come from the American linguist Kenneth Pike (Pike 1967) and are used to describe behaviour from two different points of view. *Etic* is the description of behaviour as seen through an outside observer’s eyes, while an *Emic* approach is about seeing the phenomenon with the insider’s eyes. An *emic* report is from a person who belongs in the environment being investigated. By letting the informant draw a sort of map over their role models and their relation, knowledge is sought to be uncovered that would otherwise remain unmentioned.

The interviewees were asked to think back on their entire careers, think about entrepreneurship role models, and then tell what came to mind. Simultaneously, the informants were asked to mark/draw a graphic representation of their role models and their relationships with them on a piece of A3 paper. Then, the informant is guided to talk about the role models’ importance to the informant’s entrepreneur career. The interviewer seeks to further challenge the subject by asking questions such as “Why do you draw a mark like that or include that here?” or “Why are you connecting this mark with this relationship instead of another?” During the interview, the

interviewer attempts to avoid controlling the dialogue but instead pushes the informant to actively think and create connections between the drawn elements that she sees and, thereby, talk about the connections between the different elements on the drawing/the pictogram. Using a narrative method alongside visual data – also known as narrative pictogram (Jakobsen, Worm, and Li 2018) - creates a possibility to make clear experiences and experience that would otherwise remain unsaid.

The analysis of the collected narratives has been done with a thematic analysis approach described by Tea Torbenfeldt Bengtsson and Ditte Andersen (Bengtson and Andersen 2017). That means that the story remains “intact” and that the focus is primarily towards *what* is being said and not *how, to whom or with which purpose* (Järvinen and Mik-Meyer, 2017:247). In other words, the focus is almost exclusively on what is told and almost not on how it is told.

Every narrative is interpreted as a whole with the details that are included. The workflow has been to work with one narrative at a time. The goal for each narrative was not to end up with generic explanations but to keep the individual narrative’s statement “intact”.

Interview quotes have been put into the narratives to illuminate comments, interpretations, and previous research references. The interview quotes have been “tightened up” to a certain extent, so incorrect formulations have been corrected, and pauses have been left out just as knotted spoken language has been rewritten, so it is easier to read, cf. guide from Gareth Williams according to Tea Torbenfeldt Bengtsson and Ditte Andersen (Bengtson and Andersen 2017). That way, the focus is on what is told.

For validation of the narrative, member checking is used (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Thus, when extracts and clippings have been made, the material is presented to the informant, who is allowed to check and evaluate the narrative. In this collaborative process, the parties (interviewer and informant) can negotiate and discuss the meaning of the stories, just as there will be validation on the part of the informant.

After approved editing, the narratives can be published.

4. Narratives and analysis

In this chapter, the three narratives will be presented. They are structured in a way that begins with a short introduction giving background information about the informant.

After this introduction, the narrative is arranged according to themes to follow a thematic way of presenting narratives. The focus will be on the stories regarding female founders as role models.

Even if the informant mentions many male role models, their influence will not be analysed further except for one case in which a male founder had feminine values.

All three informants had a female founder as their last employer before starting their own company.

The informants all had a wish to have their latest employer anonymised in the narratives, which is met by calling the companies AA, BB and CC, while the female founders are named XX and a male founder named YY.

In the narrative text, R means the Respondent/informant, and H means Hanne/the interviewer. The figures and letters at the beginning of each statement refer to the number and time in the video recordings. Where .. is seen, it means that some text has been cut.

As shown in the table below, the informants all had a set of role models. This finding aligns with Gibson's suggestions that individuals in their career development often identify with multiple role models and construct their own role models by selecting attributes corresponding with personal needs and ambitions (Gibson 2004).

Table 1. Overview over informants

Name	Vibeke	Kristine	Malene
Education	Advertising designer (artist)	Self-taught, however, studies at KU	Store assistant, computer assistant, and HD
Age	50	30	48
Marital status	Married, two children	Single	Single with partner
Age of business	Ten years	Two years	½ year
Ownership interest	100 %	40 %	100 %
Sole founder?	Yes	No, with another woman	Yes
Field of business	Artistic and graphic decoration as well as visual communication	Sale of sportswear	It consultant
Yearly turnover	The informant does not give out information about the turnover, but she has not decreased in living standard by becoming self-employed	6-7 mil. in 2020, expected 13-15 mil. in 2021	Expected one mil. in 2022
Number of employees	0	Six besides the two founders	Currently 0. Expectations about eight to ten in the long term
Number of mentioned role models	Five close Five distant	Five close Three distant	17 close

4.1. Vibeke's narrative

4.1.1. Background information

Vibeke is 50 years old. She is married with two children. She is a trained advertising designer who started her company, Skaberkraft, in 2011 after many years as an employee at various advertising agencies.

The starting idea was to be a subcontractor to advertising agencies, but when that did not work, Vibeke went after customers who had many customers, e.g., fairs. That idea succeeded, and Vibeke could make a living from it from day one. Vibeke was well equipped to start up her own company as she had a large network and sales training from her previous work at large agencies.

For a period, Vibeke has worked as a part-time teacher at Eventmageruddannelsen.

Vibeke greatly appreciates the feeling of freedom that painting by herself gives her. She also mentions the advantage of being self-employed being able to take care of her family when there is a special need for it.

Vibeke strategises with her accountant every three to four years. All goals from the 2017 plan were reached in 2021 - e.g., the goal of cutting off tedious tasks and customers. Recently, Vibeke has had an independent studio built in the garden so that she can also have customers, short courses and exhibitions there. Her long-term dream is to work with her own paintings so that the work becomes completely pleasurable.

Furthermore, the plan involves the spouse in the company in the long term and possibly the children. If the company is to grow further, it must be with partners, not other employees.

During the narrative interview, Vibeke mentioned and sketched two male and three female role models – one is a family member, one is a friend, and three are people she knows from her professional career. In addition, Vibeke listed five people that she follows on social media. These people, three men and two women, also could be considered distant role models.

4.1.2. The startup decision came out of a wish to preserve her integrity and self-determination

The motivation to become self-employed partly arose from the fact that she was tired of other people deciding for her how things were to be done and partly from her family situation with two small children that did not fit with her coming home late from work.

The biggest inspiration for Vibeke was that there should be no overselling in her own company:

1c 14:56: I am simply allergic if something is wrong with integrity... If you work somewhere and what you say to the outside world is not the reality. That it is all just icing that you are presented with, I am well aware that, of course, you show off the most beautiful, but there must still be a reasonable sync with it. I have seen so much of that in all my employment relations. How much has just been promised and oversold, and when it comes to delivering, then some others are sitting with the

problems. That has simply been the biggest motivator to start for myself. To say: "Well, what I promise, that's what you get". I have no problem showing it along the way, so it's actually a nice day. There is no stomach ache about now they have to see it, and now I have said I have it ready and I do not have it. All that gave me stress before is gone now... I get stressed out by that fake something.

Vibeke also says that it was, in particular, her life situation – having small kids – that made her decide being self-employed. However, XX, a very important role model (the female founder of Vibeke's latest employment), was also important for her decision.

2b 8:39: So, I think what happened to me regarding starting on my own was that, well, I just needed to try making decisions on my own, and that didn't actually have that much to do with XX. It was more that thing with the entire *time* and the entire situation in society and the business and all that. I had these small children at home. I thought that I would like to try it out – and at the same time, get this quiet life where I decide. There wasn't anyone who just wanted to book a meeting in Silkeborg at night or something like that. Then I actually think I saw myself in a different light. Right now, it occurs to me that I'm thinking that she inspired me.

Asked if somebody was crucially important to her decision, Vibeke answers:

2c 11:55: Well, it was the meeting with XX, and then it was crucial to me that I actually did not see any other options because I thought I would not be involved in this anymore. I do not want not to be able to control when I come home and that I then have to be pushed out into having to be pressed all the time, and I was on my way to turning 40 that I had to be pushed all the time to "Ah, but you may as well just stay a few hours. We're only finished at half-past five" and stuff like that. Before I got home to my little children and before they went to bed it was late. I simply could not live with that. That was the job I had, and if I had to find one somewhere else, it would be the same. Therefore, I simply could not imagine that I should continue. So, it was crucial that I needed to manage my time because I do not mind doing things, but I needed to control when so that I could also be there for my family. That was crucial.

4.1.3. Role model influence from XX, the founder of Vibeke's last workplace
Hereafter, Vibeke finds her all-important role model in the founder of her last place of employment. XX has been extremely important to Vibeke. Her story about this importance is organised below in different thematic tracks.

4.1.3.1. Affinity

Vibeke sees a lot of similarities between herself and XX, who has been a highly inspiring and very important role model:

2a 15:46: I met the first female role model – probably in 2009-10. That was the boss I had at the advertising agency where I worked before starting for myself. She is, to this day, the woman who has inspired me the most ever – so, she is in a category. She is actually completely out of a category because she is, she has an unimaginable amount of energy. She is curious. She is childishly happy. She is creative. She has the yes-hat – almost the yes-suit on. No matter what you bring, she just says JAAH like such a little kid who wants to play the same game as you, and it's damn inspiring to meet someone like that. She has her own advertising agency and has been very keen on – ever since she was young and meeting her husband – what is it I want. It's a bit like my story. She had apprenticed as a draftsman, and even then, she had that entrepreneurial dream. She had that part with her, and she wanted a large agency with real customers and many employees. She made a life plan with her husband – over dinner when they were quite young. The plan implies that the man will have a job where he travels a lot and it implies five children that they got. I think that is somehow interesting too.

2a 20:30..., but because she came from the same background as me as a graphic designer, having that sharp eye for conceptualisation and getting people to experience a message was so damn inspiring, so completely wild. It was because of her that I dared to start for myself.

2a 22:50 When I came out, met XX and saw all the cool things she could do and the way she does it, I thought, now I can see myself in this role because all this, it has to be wrapped up because then all of a sudden, I have something to contribute.

2a 24:00 All of a sudden, I see a bit of myself, and that may be where I think, oh and see how happy she is and all she can do. So, I actually experience that, and I get the courage to do a lot more like this experientially and also get to use my skills for something other than selling some goods. Here I experienced that I could use that communication ability for teaching, for example, and XX does a lot of that. She gives presentations and does short courses and things like that.

When Vibeke is asked if she thinks it matters how much you resemble your role model in terms of age, marital status, education, whether you have children, and where you come from, she answers:

2c 25:18-25:50: Yes, I think it does. I think it means something that you can reflect on yourself in that person because there must be something that ignites inside someone that you would like, and that is for me all these (Vibeke points to XX and the other role models in the drawing). What appeals to me is that I want to be like that. I'm good at that too. She's the same as me. That's what matters.

Vibeke says she feels like she's similar to the other role models because they can all draw and use this skill to explain themselves. This observation is a kind of professional reflection:

2c 26:00: I'm good at that too. I think I can do the same as her (XX). There is someone who can see how much that means. The others here (Vibeke points to the other role models in the drawing) I can see that we can all draw. That's what we're good at. I think I'm the same as the others here. We are made of the same thing. If we have to explain something, then it is drawn and thought about what kind of form and what

must be inside – all those thoughts that others do not think. It's exciting to meet someone who is good at it or immediately understands and who says yes, yes, yes. It's so cool, and there are not that many of us.

Vibeke's narrative corresponds with research regarding affinity. According to Rocha and Praag, the influence from a role model is higher if you have the same background (gender, age, education, birthplace and motherhood), and the higher resemblance, the higher tendency to start on your own (Rocha and Praag 2020). Other research also underlines the importance of affinity (Byrne, Fattoum, and Garcia 2019), (Radu and Loué 2008), (Bosma et al. 2012).

4.1.3.2. Strengthened self-efficacy by working with XX

With XX Vibeke attains confidence in her own ability to be successful:

2a 25:00: The one out there (at AA) said to me: "You would actually be a good teacher," and I hadn't seen myself like that. At some point, XX said: "You'll just go and listen to that lecture, and then you'll learn. You don't need to hear it many times to be able to do the same. So, to her, it was enough to hear it a few times, say the same, and then you were the same. That's incredibly simple, but I got a taste for it and thought, does it have to be more complicated than that? It was a cool, cool experience to go and experience her.

2b ca. 9:00: And then I actually thought that I saw myself in a different light out there. I'm only realising that now when I'm thinking about it, well, she inspired me.

2b 9:57: When I all of a sudden could step out there and be the one that was the face to the public and got to do a lot of things, I thought, okay, I can do something that is worth more than I had thought. Then I can see there is some potential here for me. At least I'm the only one that does it, so I have to try it out.

Vibeke's narrative, at this point, clearly is about a strengthened self-efficacy which refers to an individual's belief in her capacity to execute behaviours necessary to produce specific performance. (Radu and Loué 2008). A study from the Max Planck Institute also has shown that the effect on self-efficacy by having a founder as a role model was highest when the role model had the same gender as the student (Bechthold and Rosendahl Huber 2018).

4.1.3.3. Professional inspiration

Vibeke tells that she to a very high degree was professionally inspired from XX:

2a 17:57: ... but she's a role model because she knows what she wants, and she's leading the way *all the time*. She is not afraid of taking care of any of the tasks. She also has a very clear – I experience while I'm out there – very clear position on how things should be. There is nothing that does not matter, especially about how things look. It matters what is served at the meetings because it must also say something about who we are. What kind of clothes are we wearing? It's not at all about what kind of brands or whether it's modern. It is: Can we signal something by choosing the same colours or some material. Then we do it. So, it inspired me insanely, and I simply had such a learning curve (Vibeke shows with her pencil a 45-degree angle). It was absolutely wild to see such a woman there, who so thoroughly had an attitude

to how we convey this in the best way. She was also such a first mover at the thing about that it has to be experienced. So you learn it much better. It is much better communication if it is something you experience. So everything she did. It was a sort of campaign. No matter what, whether they needed a new system or a new employee arrived, it was made into a campaign. I think it was really, really fun to be a part of.

2b 5:12: She was and is a huge, huge, huge, huge role model because I have never met anyone who is so insanely good at conceptualising and making a concept. In the course of a quarter of an hour, she had come up with something that is simply so star-brilliant that you do not understand it at all. She is – her design is beautiful, what she does is mega beautiful, accomplished, and easily decodable. She is so talented, but her brain is enormously creative, and she expects others to do the same as her, and they can not.

2b 9:57: ... but mega inspiring, and she still is. I love when I see some of the things she does when she just unfolds in some campaign. So in that way, she's a role model.

Because of XX's special professional competencies, Vibeke was highly inspired and had a steep learning curve when XX employed her. This fact and the affinity mentioned above correspond with research showing that the effect of a role model is biggest when you have the same background (Rocha and Praag 2020). The influence from the role model is higher the more similar she is perceived and may be stronger if the role model effectively appeals to the observer's self-concept (Radu and Loué 2008)

4.1.3.4. Involvement

Vibeke describes a special form of involvement that she is not sure would take place working for a male founder. Very quickly after her employment she became the person who showed new customers around in the company. Vibeke says, that it gave her a feeling of "stepping into paradise" and a feeling of "this belongs to me" (2b 00:30). She also very soon was invited to take part in XX's network:

2c 5:49: Women talk to each other differently and much more including. So she – as I step in here, she says: "Oh, you have to be in this network. We go to it together" and stuff like that. I'm not sure at all it would have happened if it had been a man. Then he would have thought: "I'm going to the network on my own so I get the assignments", or have said: "Well, I'm in this network, so you don't need to be there too. You can go to that instead". But where she kind of sees, she understands what it is that takes place in the network. We can easily be there, both of us, and it is cool. We can make cool events together and stuff like that. It was really good.

4.1.3.5. Role model had highest effect when she was easy to decode and when she brought Vibeke out of her comfort zone

2c 17.12 Asked about what goes on between Vibeke and XX when it had the highest effect on Vibeke, she answers:

2c 17:30: I experience her (XX) in some situations where it's easy to decode what it is she does – what it is it gives those she does it to. How can I do the same? Because she makes it look easy and light and simple, and it actually is. For example, I remember that she used a lot of creative tools for *everything* and then she had Duplo.

2c 18:20: Vibeke talks about how she copied its use at a network meeting that she was tasked to take over and control on short notice. Even though there were only spent five minutes on getting the idea of using the Duplo blocks to build a dilemma, the network meeting worked really well:

2c 18:43: There is also some learning in that. I was out of my comfort zone in the entire year and a half I was out there. Then you also learn something, but it is also sometimes unpleasant.

2c 20:24: A lot of times, it was in the moment. That was at least one of the things I was challenged on out there because I had been very determined to plan things. But there wasn't time for it. It was learning by doing. I put a lot of work into getting a handle on that, and it has helped me so much regarding teaching.

2c 20:40: Seeing her succeed at something that I know she has thought of two minutes prior – I found that inspiring. You can't see it, and there is nothing wrong with that. It works.

Being brought out of her comfort zone, Vibeke has learned important things, and she learned by being thrown into it.

Vibeke also talks about how XX can put task on employees that are crossing their boundaries:

2a ca. 19:00: Where I had challenges with it was that what she thinks is fun, she will put on others without asking. In most cases, I could take it – well, because I actually needed to get out there and be pushed out of my comfort zone after the financial crisis and during the financial crisis, it was actually. But there were a lot who couldn't take it. If you're like that, there will be divided opinions because there are some who will be insecure about it and think that's too much.

2b 5:57: She doesn't ask, she just does. There is nothing that is crossing her boundaries. Her grey area is huge, and I think that it is nice that she is like that, but you have to be careful about putting that on others. In a way, I think some look at me and think: Wow, is she a role model, she's marching ahead, or she does something. We who know her, know that you're not supposed to take it all so literally.

4.1.4. Summary of Vibeke's experiences with influence from other female founders
The decision to start up her own company came from dissatisfaction with her working conditions which did not match her need of having time with her small children. She wanted more self-determination. Another important motivation was that she could not accept the way of overselling that took place in the industry because she wanted to preserve her integrity. Finally, XX, the founder of her latest workplace, was a motivation and significantly impacted her decision.

XX was a highly inspiring role model for Vibeke, who found that she resembled the role model in many ways. XX was very creative and had high professional concept and campaign development skills. By putting Vibeke out of her comfort zone, XX taught Vibeke many things.

She gave Vibeke confidence in her own ability by letting her take care of new customers at the office and by letting her know that she could be a teacher and manage a network meeting almost with no preparation time. Vibeke also experienced a special form of involvement that she is not sure would take place working for a male founder

A part of Vibeke's narrative confirms prior research:

- That affinity with the role model is important (Rocha and Praag 2020)(Byrne, Fattoum, and Garcia 2019)(Radu and Loué 2008)
- That strengthened self-efficacy is important (Radu and Loué 2008) (Bechthold and Rosendahl Huber 2018)
- That role models can boost confidence, give inspiration and expand network (Rocha and Praag 2020)

Another part of Vibeke's narrative provides new insights:

- That the role model teaches the nascent entrepreneur important things by bringing her out of her comfort zone throughout the entire employment duration
- That the female founder, from the beginning, let the nascent entrepreneur into her own network

4.2. Kristine's narrative

4.2.1. Background information

Kristine is 30 years old, single has no children, and lives with her co-founder. She is a self-taught woman apart from one year of study in Information Science at the University of Copenhagen. Her experience comes from jobs in different fashion companies as a shop assistant, store manager and sales responsible. She worked in a marketing agency for a female founder in her latest job.

In 2019, together with another female founder, Mille (a friend and former colleague), she founded the company Planet Nusa Aps which designs and sells women's sportswear made from old fishing nets. The company is situated in the centre of Copenhagen in Sankt Peders Stræde in a very attractive and expensive location having three floors, and several square meters at its disposal. The location was chosen to prove the seriousness of the startup decision. Each of the two founders owns 40% of the company, and an investor owns 20%. Planet Nusa Aps has six employees, and the revenue for 2021 is expected to be 13-15 Million DKK.

During the narrative interview, Kristine mentioned and sketched one male and seven female role models – one is a family member, three are from Kristine's former professional life, one is a former sports coach, and three are distant role models, which means that Kristine follows them on social media. All three of them are female founders.

4.2.2. The startup decision came out of dissatisfaction and a wish to create a good working place for others.

Kristine's motivation for starting a company came from a dissatisfaction with the working conditions in the industry and a desire to create a good working place. Asked about how she got the idea of starting a company she answered:

1a 5:00: Well, I actually think it began in, I say dissatisfaction, and that always sounds so negative, but it was actually more industry-specific. But it was actually also for me personally, managerially as well. It has always been important for me to create a workplace where it was important for people to be. Important to me. We spend so many hours of our life at work. I have been going to work a lot in my life where I haven't felt good enough and haven't felt seen and haven't felt appreciated. That's why it is this way. Besides, of course, doing a good business is one of our focal points, a personal focal point for me, to create a good workplace for some people.

1a 10:04: It actually came from a rebellion against the traditional. A rebellion against the work environment that we came from. I think it came as a bit of a breakup from it to ask ourselves, how can we create a foundation where we can come back. Are we on the same page as our users? Are we close to our clients? We have values that we really want to communicate that we think are great, and we made some great choices from the beginning. So, it was definitely a rebellion against some background knowledge from an industry that we know really well.

It was not a role model who made Kristine an entrepreneur, but more a sense of dissatisfaction

2a 09:5x: But I don't think I have met a person that has been a direct cause for me to think: This is what I'm going to do. It has always been the road there that has been like that. As I also mentioned, it has been a bit of a rebellion against some of the things I have been in.

Kristine's self-efficacy is strengthened by not being alone and she would not have started a company without a partner.

1a 00.07.37: Well, I actually think that it (*the process of doing the business*) bears the mark of much naivety as well. Of course, observing others do it, becoming inspired to do it, but also with an incredible amount of uncertainty, and, like, giving yourself the chance and, I think, I would have never done it by myself, alone. I have only been able to do it because we have been two people and the fact that there was someone else there. Mille and I are very different, and she is probably a bit more robust than I am. A bit quicker on the trigger than I am. So, I am definitely the one sitting by the parking brake, but the combination has been great.

1a ca. 19:00: The jump, I actually think, I kind of found the courage to through, well, Mille, actually. Besides the fact that she had a female boss where we were working together, she also came from a clothing brand founded by two women our age and helped run it, they were three people building it up, and it was two years before we began. So, she has been involved a lot in building a business, and I think that was the driving force to say: Alright, now we're going, and you can come along, and it's now. And then I thought: Well then, I'm doing it because I trust you and because I have also seen what it is they are able to do. Not that we are similar to them or anything,

but we, like, saw: Okay, but it can be done. So, we were pretty close to that. Mille, of course, work-related, and me on the sideline to see: Alright, they can get something up and running. We can do this as well.

Without a partner, Kristine would not have started a company. Her self-efficacy is strengthened by not being alone and watching and working close to other female founders. This corresponds with experience from prior research providing evidence for higher self-efficacy among female students after having worked close to female founders (Bechthold and Rosendahl Huber 2018). It also corresponds with Radu and Loué saying that role models, besides their instructional function, also serve as motivational incentives (Radu and Loué 2008: 443)

Kristine also told about her employment at BB (a marketing agency and her latest working place) in which she, through her job, was inspired by a lot of contact with small startups:

2a 00:17:30: When I was working at BB, I worked with many self-employed women. Some were living off of their social media. Some were living off of being sports stars. Some were living off of being actresses, some were living off of other things, so I was kind of on the sideline to make their personal life work as well as being a support in their professional life. That was also captivating to me. Because I was kind of sat in a middle position where I both had these talents and influencers, celebrities and whatever else they were and had a lot of clients on the other side. So, I was also out talking with *a lot* of self-employed, smaller businesses building a company that needed advertisements and stuff like that. So, I was also driven a lot in the area of people with smaller entrepreneurial dreams who were really inspiring and thought: God, there are some awesome stories here. Everyone brings some form of a story. I thought that was really cool.

This part of the story corresponds with Bosma's findings that "entrepreneurship can be seen as self-reinforcing" or "may further encourage new entrepreneurial initiatives because it is easier to find an appropriate example or obtain information or resources from other entrepreneurs" (Bosma et al. 2012: 3)

4.2.3. Influence from the latest employment before Kristine started her own company
At BB, Kristine worked for a female founder (called XX), who was not a role model but nevertheless inspiring to some point. The founder showed how to act like a man and taught Kristine how to be hard selling.

2b ca. 16:50: XX was not a role model for me when I worked at BB.

2a 00:21:46 R: There is no doubt about the fact that I was not particularly happy to be where I was, but I gained a lot from it because I, of course, saw a strong woman, and then you can feel however you want, but XX came with a speed and some go-getting where I thought: wow a speed, wow some go-getting you arrive with. No lack of confidence here. She was confident to sit down at a table and say: Hello, here I am. I have built this, we can do this, and sometimes I sat and thought: God, we are selling sand in the desert of Sahara or whatever it's called. We promise the best. We have nothing to bring to the table, but that was definitely my, like, femininely driven,

where I thought: You can't do that, no, no. But when I look at what has taken place in other industries and how men sometimes behave, like, good at captivating a room. Then it was a form of inspiration for me to say; God, you can do that! There were also many other things where I thought: I don't think it should be like that. But it was an inspiration for me to see someone who said, now I'm going to strive to be the best. She wanted to be the best, and she will be the best. She does it without looking back.

XX also gave Kristine a belief in herself and taught her how to be transparent to her employees about her business.

2a 23:37 H: Can you point out what you did and did not take with you from XX?

R: I think I brought the ability to dare to believe and, actually, especially, on the last day where I actually quit because I don't know what I had imagined she would say to it, but she was really, really happy for me and sent me out into the world and said: If anyone should do it then it is you. So, she actually sent me out with a belief in myself, despite everything. To say: "It's full speed ahead". So, she did that. I was not crazy about her management style, so I knew I had to get out. One thing is how you want things to look to the public. It is also important to build a strong foundation behind you, and I experienced that breaking. There was no agreement between how she experienced things and how the reality was in the company and the conditions, etc. I have also become smarter since then, and it is tough to run a business, but yes, I have brought that with me. And then I actually think, if I should say something positive that I think she did. She was actually relatively transparent with her employees about what was going on instead of my former male bosses. Everything with them went on behind closed doors. We were sometimes invited to the big table with her, and I have always thought that was a little dangerous. Like that, because, uh no. But in a way, it also gives you some peace to be involved in how things are. I have brought that with me and say, well, some things are handled behind closed doors, but in reality, it is also important to inform about how the situation is right now. Right now, the cash is close to going, so we have to put in an extra effort. Sometimes it is easier to relate to as an employee, and that was cool.

It may seem contradictory that Kristine learns things from XX that she takes advantage of in her own company when she says that XX is not a role model. But because of XX's leadership style, Kristine did not see the whole person of XX as a role model. According to Gibson, a negative role model can also provide learning even though she is unpleasant to work with interpersonally. A negative role model also can be the mirror image of a positive role model (Gibson 2004), which corresponds with Kristine's desire to create a good working place, not copying the leadership style of XX.

According to Kristine, involvement is a characteristic behaviour of female founders. Women are more involving and more likely to share information.

2a 00:25:54 H: Now, I'm actually thinking I see a parallel with what you are saying. You're saying that you were brought in with that and when I asked about Malene (a colleague and role model from one of Kristine's former workplaces) – what it was

that she did, you also said that she brought you in. Is there something there? Do you think that that is something women do more?

K: I think it might be my generalisation, but now I'm saying it anyway. I think that women might be better at seeing people somehow, and I think that we can use that in leadership positions sometimes. Being able to be better at working as a team instead of it being like: I'm doing it by myself. It is always a little bit difficult because I have always worked in a female-dominated industry where I have always primarily had female colleagues. So, I cannot completely comment on it, but my impression is that there are many more solo races with the men, whereas I think we as women are sometimes better at working as a team. It is my theory, and that is also what I mean by saying that even though we are com-colleagues (contraction of competitors and colleagues) with a lot out there, we are still good at sharing experiences because we are not as afraid of each other...

According to Kristine, women might be more collectively oriented, whereas men often run solo or, in other words, are more competitive in their behaviour.

Kristine has been an active networker and she also tells of the importance of the network she got from BB:

1b 00:05:48 H: Can you tell me about the network and participation in the network and maybe also about the female network?

R: Yes, well, I have always been fairly committed – also before I became self-employed – in the female network and salons and this and that. I have experienced that there has been an enormous need from a lot of ambitious career women. But, well, like, to have someone to spar with. I have experienced that there have been, well, a really big need to find some like-minded people to spar within multiple contexts. I also think that women are very good at sharing experiences and actually want to give something. We have experienced that as well also afterwards in the network and amongst com-colleagues: That we actually are willing and good at sharing information and helping each other. So, I am invited and have been very active in the different networks – not as much anymore due to time.

2b 04:5x H: Is network something you have used or gained from your role models?

R: I actually think it comes, like, aggressively from here (Kristine points to BB on the drawing). The thing with creating and establishing relations and sometimes also daring to get on a stage, which used to be uncertain territory, I think that comes from here.

2b 06:36: It has probably been the strongest move, despite it being the most horrible work environment. Then it was the strongest move for me because I expanded my network so much. I use and have used it a lot since then. I use every bit of it now, and we also have collaborations with BB today. Then we also do business because the whole thing is kind of like an eco-system, right?

The employment at BB expanded Kristine's network to the degree of high business value for her today.

Watching something which was outside Kristine's comfort zone has been positive and instructive for Kristine in her employment at BB.

2b 10:1X H: What happens between the role model and you when it has the strongest effect?

R: You can say that when you observe your role model do something that is both inspiring but also outside your own comfort zone, right, then your horizon is expanded in some way, right? That gives you new ideas and thoughts.

4.2.4. Summary of Kristine's experiences with influence from other female founders

According to Kristine, the idea of being an entrepreneur did not come from a role model but a sense of dissatisfaction with her job. Nevertheless, she was strongly inspired by working closely together with other female founders.

Her latest female boss – a female founder – was not a role model for Kristine, but Kristine learned a lot from her despite this. She learned how it could pay off to act like a man neglecting the Danish "Jantelov". She also learned how to sell and be transparent to employees about the business. Furthermore, she was introduced to a very important network of other startups, and she was given a sense of self-efficacy. This self-efficacy was strengthened by not being alone but starting up together with a partner.

A part of Kristine's narrative confirms prior research:

- That strengthened self-efficacy is important (Bechthold and Rosendahl Huber 2018)
- That role models serve as motivational incentives (Radu and Loué 2008)
- That a negative role model can provide important learning (Gibson 2004)
- That entrepreneurship can be self-reinforcing (Bosma et al. 2012)
- That role models can boost confidence, give inspiration and and expanded network. (Rocha and Praag 2020)

Another part of Kristine's narrative provides new insights:

- That a female founder involves her employees to a higher degree in the situation of her business – or, in other words: she shows more transparency to her employees, maybe because she is more collectively oriented
- That the learning from the female founder had the highest effect when Kristine was out of her comfort zone
- That the female founder gave access to her own network

4.3. Malene's narrative

4.3.1. Background information

Malene is 48 years old and educated first as a shopping assistant, next as an IT assistant, and since 2007, she also holds a Graduate Diploma in Business Administration.

She has a boyfriend and no children. She grew up in a family with a mother running her own business, a dancing school, with her father as an assistant partner.

She has been employed in many small startups working with information technology, having typically two years of employment in each company. Her latest employment, however, lasted for eight years.

In the middle of 2021, she started her own company, Aiva It Implementering, which has its clients primarily in the Faroe Islands. Malene knew the clients from her former job, not that she has taken the clients from her former employers, but instead, she cooperates and buys products from her former working place and helps clients implement them and create value with these products.

For 2022 Malene expects revenue of 1 million Danish Kroner, and in the future, she can imagine her company's growth until she has eight to ten employees.

Malene has many role models, and during the narrative interview, she mentioned and sketched nine male and eight female role models - four of them were family members.

4.3.2. Startup decision came out of a wish for self-realisation and self-determination
Malene is rather happy about her working experience until now and finds that she has had a lot of exciting and fun working life. In all her jobs, she has been working in close contact with the owners or managers of the companies and acted as a sparring partner. The decision to start her own company does not come out of dissatisfaction but more from a wish to take care of herself and decide for herself.

1a 18:40 R: Obviously, there are a lot of considerations about it, and there have been throughout many years, but it's not like it has been a childhood dream. It is more that now I can finally see that this could become really cool, and it could become really cool for my own development, yes, but also my personal development, and that might actually be where most of my focus is. Yes, that is what it's all about because it is actually that realisation of being able to do a little bit more of what is good for oneself, right? ...

1a 00:13:36 R: There is no doubt that at CC (Malene's latest workplace), I have had the absolute best job ever in the best company. It is a super, super amazing place, and they really care about their employees, so it's not like I'm saying: "I have to get away". It is probably more an expression of, and I think they know this as well, my need for things to happen. Like, in periods of time, it comes up in me; now I have to do something different. But at that point, I felt like, well, if I have to build something up like that (a new project at CC), it might be more fun to do it myself.

And then there is the thing about deciding; what is it I actually spend my resources on. Not meant that I haven't been allowed to decide anything because I have. There have practically not been any restraints. So, you can say that it's very, very much about myself. Maybe it's also what happens when you become older; okay, I have to think about myself. That has also been one of the absolute best decisions I have ever made. Because, well, I can feel the difference: It's yourself making the decisions.

4.3.2.1. Friends and family members also played a role

Even though Malene says that the decision came from herself, she is also influenced by her family (mother, brother, sister, brother-in-law) and friends. Asked who had the greatest importance for her decision, Malene answers:

2d 00:02:54: Well, I actually feel like it's myself. I mean, it comes to me, like, this is something I'm ready for now. I think that it has been brought to life by the many open and deep conversations I have had with my partner and Janni (a friend) ... we have also talked about doing something together.

2e 05:35 R: I think my mum has more significance to it than CC (latest workplace), for instance, but both are something to do with showing myself from the inside how things can be done.

1a 18:00: My mum is a dance instructor and, therefore, self-employed, and has been so since we were kids as well, so there are a lot of things, good and bad, where I can see the difference from being hired by someone.

2a 00:06:56 R: ... my brother told me at one point, where I wanted to find a different job, this thing about: "Why don't you just become a self-employed consultant?" I hadn't turned 30 at that point, and I thought it was very early. But it stuck with me regardless because I often thought about it, and then it's only now that I have thought, well, I have been so happy with what I had and have had the past almost eight years. So, I don't have any need to go out and find a different job, but I did need to change and I needed to do something for myself, and those two things combined have made me think that maybe it's now I should try it.

2d 5:24 R: Well, there is no doubt that my sister and brother-in-law have – over I don't know how many bottles of red wine – we have discussed, actually my brother-in-law and me, that we would like to work together again (as self-employed).

That her family influences Malene corresponds with research showing that people with self-employed parents are more likely to become entrepreneurs (Chlosta et al. 2012), (Hoffmann, Junge, and Malchow-Møller 2015), (Schøtt and Center for Småvirksomhedsforskning 2007). As role models, family and a friend serve as motivational incentives, which is also known from former research (Radu and Loué 2008), and the influence from Malene's brother and brother-in-law (both are self-employed) corresponds with Bosma's research showing that entrepreneurship is self-reinforcing (Bosma et al. 2012).

4.3.3. Role model influence: from several female founders and two male co-founders. As mentioned earlier, Malene has many role models. This section primarily focuses on the influence of female founders to stay inside the research question. However, a couple of exceptions are made in the two cases in which Malene worked for companies owned by male and female founders. In both cases, relevant influence came from the male co-founder and the female co-founder.

4.3.3.1. Malene's mother's business also served to discourage Malene

The experience from Malene's mother both encouraged her to start up and made her wait because Malene has seen how hard it could be to have one's own business.

2a 00:10 R: My mum has had her own business, and many of those things have popped up along the way. There have been many challenges; let me say, you don't do this thing with dance schools to become rich... It is definitely where it began. It might also be a part of the reason why it has not been my dream because I could see how hard it was. I had always listened when they were fighting to make ends meet. We were four children, and they had their own dance school. It was not something you rented at the time. They had bought a big property, an old lodge building, where there were two dance halls. So, it was a very exciting and fantastic childhood, but it was very tough on my parents, at least periodically. So, there was something about collaboration. How do we do it, and how do I avoid someone taking over my business because they had experienced that and had to start back up once more... Well, some larger crises have made a big impact on me.

4.3.3.2. The Matas couple taught Malene customer service and that you can make money as self-employed.

Malene has worked in a Matas shop in Copenhagen owned by a married couple. From the wife, Malene learned about service and how to handle customers in a good way, and from watching the size of a gift, that the man was able to offer the wife, she learned that it could be rather lucrative to be self-employed.

2a 4:00: .. so, she (the female Matas owner) had the daily operation, so to speak. She is also one I think of. But there is definitely also something there that has stuck with me, from having your own in a way, right, doing it for yourself and so on. So, that is also an interesting thing there.

2a ca. 14:00: It was mostly her I followed, so to speak, that I kind of helped... She (the Matas lady) said; Well, it's better if you do this instead, you know when you say this to the customers. So, there was a lot about relations and the whole service part. She has really been the predecessor for that. So, there was no doubt that she has given some really good basis for keeping things together in the real world the entire way.

2a ca. 22:10: Moreover, I can remember, it's a completely different thing that doesn't have anything to do with anything, but still, it really impressed me that one day when she went to work, a key with a red bow on it was on the table, a car key. And then her husband told her to go to the parking lot, and there was a – I don't remember which car it was – but it was green and had a red bow around it. He had bought her a new car, so that was also things like that where I thought: Okay, there are possibilities.

4.3.3.3. Female co-owner (here named XX) at CC (Malene's latest workplace) inspired and involved Malene and taught her how to create a market.

Malene clarifies that she has been involved in finding solutions and has taken part in decisions together with the female owner, even though it became less as the company grew bigger.

2c ca. 22:30 R: Well, we finally arrived at CC. It has taken a long time. It is here we have XX, who is definitely a role model in many ways. There is no doubt about it like, she has really been inspirational in many ways, and I think we have always sparred well about how to solve things. As a leader, I think she has been good. Because it has also been a process for her, you can say. Now, I'm not the type that needs, I mean, I have not always had a big need for, like, daily management, so to speak, but talking about things and making joint decisions and so on. I think she has done that well as a leader. Of course, the larger we have become, the less influence there has been, and that is what I have been able to feel, so, I have kind of had that feeling, well, my influence becomes smaller and smaller because it is the board that decides now...

An important inspiration for Malene was that she learned how to create a market by using her network and by being present on social media.

2c ca. 22:33 R: Where she has really inspired me, and CC has inspired me. It has been the thing about how you go out and create a market, like, good contacts and so on. They have a lot of exciting ways of doing things. CC is a thousand times more modern than some of the other businesses that I have worked at on that point, and I think that has been very interesting. It has been a part of inspiring me a lot, I think. Well, like, just the thing about using your network actively, being an active participant in network meetings, for instance, it hasn't been a priority in other places, but it is important in CC, and it is also part of what I can see that I need to continue to be active because you can feel that it is there the contacts begin and where they grow from. You have to give something to get it back, right? Obviously, the systematics about follow-ups and, in general, canvas calls. A lot has been systemised.

3a 1:00: CC are great at making case stories on their clients that are then promoted on LinkedIn etc. There is also much focus on the presence of social media... The name is affirmed more and more that way.

Work-life balance had high priority at CC

2c ca. 22:35: And you're also really good at flexibility. There is no doubt that the whole thing about work life and personal life has to fit together. It is also in focus.

That XX was a female had no importance to Malene

2d 17:50 H: Research shows that if you as a woman have worked for a female founder, there is an 89 % higher tendency to start your own later on. What do you think about that? Does it make sense in your case?

2d 00:18:00 R: I think I have to consider if I would have done it without my time at CC. I feel like saying that I probably would not have, but I don't just link it to XX being a woman. I link it to the way things are handled. So, one can agree with that. To me, it has not mattered that she was a woman.

Asked if Malene thinks that it is of importance to resemble one's role model when it comes to age, education, geographical origin, Malene is not quite sure, but thinks that affinity matters

2d 23:50 R: I don't know, actually, but I do if we're talking about XX (the female co-founder at Malene's last job) in that regard, well, I think I'm a lot like XX from CC in a lot of ways. There is also sometimes where it completely takes off, right, but I think we actually... Well, I think so because it must have something to do with being able to identify yourself, so I definitely think that. I just thought about it. I would think so.

4.3.3.4. The male co-owner at CC (here called YY) had feminine values, which influenced the working place in a positive way

2d ca. 2:19: I was just about to say that the Work-Life-Balance (that was there at CC), I don't think that comes from XX. I think it comes from YY. YY is the other primary co-owner, and he is fantastic. I don't even remember what his title is currently, but he is the one who has built the system. So, he is actually a technician, but he is also a very soft and very strong type of person. He is the one who has people from AspIT (a special IT education for people with Asperger's Syndrome). It's him who takes care of them, so to speak. I'm pretty sure that that mark is primarily from him, and there is definitely a lot of openness and flexibility in the sense that there is room for everyone.

H: And if we call those feminine values, and men can easily have feminine values, do you think that it can mean something that there is a place where it can be possible to treat each other well, and you can have a personal life as well that it may have had a meaning?

R: Well, I definitely think that it has had an enormous meaning, and there is no doubt either that XX thinks it's a good idea, but I actually think that what comes from the heart is actually from YY. That's my opinion. Yes, they can easily be called feminine values without stepping on anyone's toes. He is also someone like that. I don't know if he still is, but he has been a scout leader for many years, so he is a caring type, right, and very listening and thinking. I have to say that he is also very unique in a good way.

The examples mentioned above show how the former employers inspired Malene. In her latest job, she says that inspiration from the female owner was not related to her sex. In fact, the inspiration also came from the male founder, who had feminine values.

4.3.3.6. What goes on between the role models and Malene, when it has the highest impact

R: What is going on is definitely a confirmation. I mean, the thing that there are some people that I have tremendous respect for that trust that this can be done. They say: "By the way, you would be really good at this"... You kind of say: "Well, that is a great idea, of course you should do that"... And the confirmation of what is the worst that can happen? It's not that bad. So, it's just a new situation.

In other words, Malene's self-efficacy is strengthened by being acknowledged by role models.

A strengthened self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in her capacity to execute behaviours necessary to produce specific performance. (Radu and Loué 2008). A study from the Max Planck Institute also has shown that the effect on self-efficacy by having a founder as a role model was highest when the role model had the same gender as the student (Bechthold and Rosendahl Huber 2018).

4.3.4. Summary of Malene's experiences with influence from other female founders
The idea of being an entrepreneur came from Malene herself out of a wish for self-realisation and self-determination. A friend and family supported the idea – two of them being self-employed. From Malene's mother, who owned a dancing school, Malene knows how hard it can be, and this knowledge kept her from starting her own business until now. Twice, Malene has worked for companies with both male and female founders. According to Malene, she saw all these four founders as role models. She says that the female co-owner in her last employment wasn't a role model because of her sex - even though there was a certain degree of affinity between Malene and the female co-owner - but because she did a good job as a leader as well as the male founder did. He also had feminine values. Malene was involved in finding solutions and taking decisions. The biggest effect of having a role model is having strengthened her self-efficacy by being acknowledged by the role model.

A part of Malene's narrative confirms prior research:

- That self-efficacy is important and strengthened by role models (Bechthold and Rosendahl Huber 2018)
- That affinity can matter (Rocha and Praag 2020),(Byrne, Fattoum, and Garcia 2019)and (Radu and Loué 2008)
- Entrepreneurship is self-reinforcing (Bosma et al. 2012)

Another part of Malene's narrative provides new insight:

- The female co-owner in the company where Malene had her last job taught Malene how to create a market by actively participating in networking in a new and modern way – a way that wasn't used in any of Malene's former jobs.
- It is not the sex of the female owner that explains why she is a role model for the nascent female entrepreneur. Feminine values held by male founders are also important in the workplace.

5. Conclusion

This study adds a qualitative aspect to former quantitative studies that showed a positive influence from female founders on female employees regarding entrepreneurship.

The study shows that the nascent female entrepreneurs were inspired by working with the female founders who had employed them - also if the founder was not a role model. They were inspired by their way of acting or by their way of solving tasks.

The female employers were important for the informants as nascent entrepreneurs by putting them in a position where they felt out of their comfort zones. The informants experienced that their former female employer involved them in difficult tasks and decisions and had a high degree of openness and transparency. They do not always experience this transparency with male employers. The nascent female entrepreneurs were also involved in the founder's network. The narratives do not unequivocally indicate that women have become entrepreneurs because they have worked for a female founder. All three have many role models who have affected them. Therefore, the narratives do not unequivocally confirm the idea that the female founders act as role models for their female employees, as Rocha and Praag conclude (Rocha and Praag 2020). Rather, the informants have construed their own "cognitive composite role model" from a set of role models in line with Gibson's idea about multiple role models (Gibson 2004).

However, one of the informants clarifies that employment with a female founder was a deciding factor. In contrast, another is not inspired by the former boss and founder – rather the opposite. The third informant, employed at an owner team with mixed sex, does not ascribe her entrepreneurship decision that she has worked for a female owner. She says that the really good work conditions that the employees had rather had their source from the male co-owner with female values. However, the third informant rather thinks that the incentive to start her own comes from inside herself and not as inspiration from outside. For two informants, the start-up decision stems from dissatisfaction with workplace conditions in their previous employment, and the desire to decide for themselves is also important.

All three informants say that they have strengthened their self-efficacy by working for the female founder. This finding confirms prior research that strengthened self-efficacy is important (Radu and Loué 2008), (Bechthold and Rosendahl Huber 2018). Specifically, one informant mentions that the biggest effect of having a role model is having strengthened her self-efficacy by being acknowledged by the role model.

Contribution to the research/the new knowledge or insight:

All the informants say that the female owner involves the employees in tasks and (in some circumstances also difficult) decisions to a high degree. There is a great experience of transparency or openness – an openness that some respondents do not recognise from employment with male bosses. Therefore, it cannot be denied that this insight and incorporation still has had a (perhaps unconsciously) significance in a way that it has given future entrepreneurs an insight that has made them capable of starting their own business – completely independently of whether or not the female founder they worked for was a role model or not.

Two informants report that the role model has greatly affected them and has pushed them out of their comfort zones. The same two say they have also been let into their female founder's own network – something one of the informants does not believe would have happened in employment with a male founder.

A duality is seen where an informant, on the one hand, can distance herself from a female founder that she has worked for and believe that she definitely was not a role model. On the other hand, the informant mentions that she gained valuable competencies in the employment.

Finally, an interesting observation is seen with an informant who sees a role model in a male co-founder with female values. A field that would be interesting to investigate more in future research and is already sporadically touched upon in articles, not of a research nature (Klyver 2021).

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