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*Published in:*  
Journal of Organizational Behavior

*DOI:*  
[10.1002/job.2605](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2605)

Published: 01/11/2022

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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*Please cite the original version:*  
Kakarika, M., Biniari, M., Guillén, L., & Mayo, M. (2022). Where does the heart lie? A multistage process model of entrepreneurial passion and role identity management. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 43(9), 1562-1578. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2605>

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# Where does the heart lie? A multistage process model of entrepreneurial passion and role identity management

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## Funding information

State Research Agency (AEI)-10.13039/501100011033, Grant/Award Number: PID2019-108043GA-I00

## Summary

With research on entrepreneurial passion booming, there is an increasing need to understand how and why that passion influences entrepreneurs' performance over time. To address this need, we develop a multistage process model, proposing that entrepreneurial passion type—harmonious or obsessive—explains how entrepreneurs modify their identity and reprioritize their roles as inventors, founders, and developers in response to feedback as the venture develops, thus giving rise to different patterns of role identity transition or persistence. The proposed feedback system advances our understanding of entrepreneurial passion by providing a dynamic view of the impact of passion and role identity management on overall entrepreneurial performance. We conclude by outlining the theoretical and practical implications of our multistage process model and by presenting an agenda for future research on entrepreneurial passion and role identity management.

## KEYWORDS

entrepreneurship, feedback, harmonious/obsessive passion, role identity transition/persistence

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

“Prioritize your passion. It keeps you sane.” —Criss Jami (philosopher and founder of Killosopher Apparel)

Within the growing body of research on passion (Pollack et al., 2020), a subset of studies has focused on entrepreneurial passion (e.g., Breugst et al., 2012; Cardon et al., 2009, 2013; Murnieks et al., 2014). Although successful entrepreneurs are considered passionate individuals (Mueller et al., 2017), not all are passionate about all aspects of entrepreneurship, and their entrepreneurial behavior over time varies greatly. For example, some entrepreneurs are successful inventors. Consider Ferran Adrià, one of the world's top chefs and a “passionate and disciplined creator” (Svejenova et al., 2007, p. 555), who kept his award-winning restaurant closed 6 months of

the year before closing it down entirely in order to focus on experimenting with new recipes. Other entrepreneurs find success as founders. For example, ski instructors, golf pros, and tour guides tend to create ventures that serve their particular lifestyle and are often not interested in venture development past that point (Barringer & Ireland, 2006). Other entrepreneurs are equally successful in identifying opportunities, founding ventures, and developing those ventures. Gareth Williams appears to be one such fully rounded entrepreneur: He developed a metasearch model to compare flight prices, co-founded Skyscanner, and drove the company to international growth, showing dedication both to his ideas and to the venture's needs. What might account for these differences in foci and therefore in behavior and overall entrepreneurial performance?

The answer to this question may lie in the way entrepreneurs experience passion for these entrepreneurial activities and the

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importance they ascribe to their role identities as inventors, founders, and/or developers (Cardon et al., 2009, 2013; Murnieks et al., 2014). While the popular advice for entrepreneurs is to follow their passion, it is reasonable to assume that sticking with one's natural passion for any of the three entrepreneurial role-related activities may not always be a good thing (Spivack & McKelvie, 2018). Moving from one role identity to another and managing the potential conflicts between them is critical to adjusting behavior and successfully creating and developing new ventures (Mmbaga et al., 2020).

However, several important questions remain unanswered, including how entrepreneurs deal with their passion over time, as they are exposed to signals of success or failure through the various venture stages during their entrepreneurial life. What happens when they are not passionate about key aspects of the entrepreneurial process that nevertheless require energy, devotion, and sustained attention? Previous scholarly work has mainly been cross-sectional, mostly treating passion as something atemporal (Pollack et al., 2020). Such assumptions of stasis undermined our understanding of how entrepreneurs experience passion and adjust their behavior over time. More recent studies, however, reveal that in reality passion is far from static (Collewaert et al., 2016; Gielnik et al., 2015; Lex et al., 2020), as the process of starting a new venture involves several development stages that are not necessarily linear (Lichtenstein et al., 2007). Therefore, entrepreneurs may experience passion for various entrepreneurial activities differently across the stages of the venture, with consequences for their behavior and entrepreneurial effectiveness (Cardon et al., 2009).

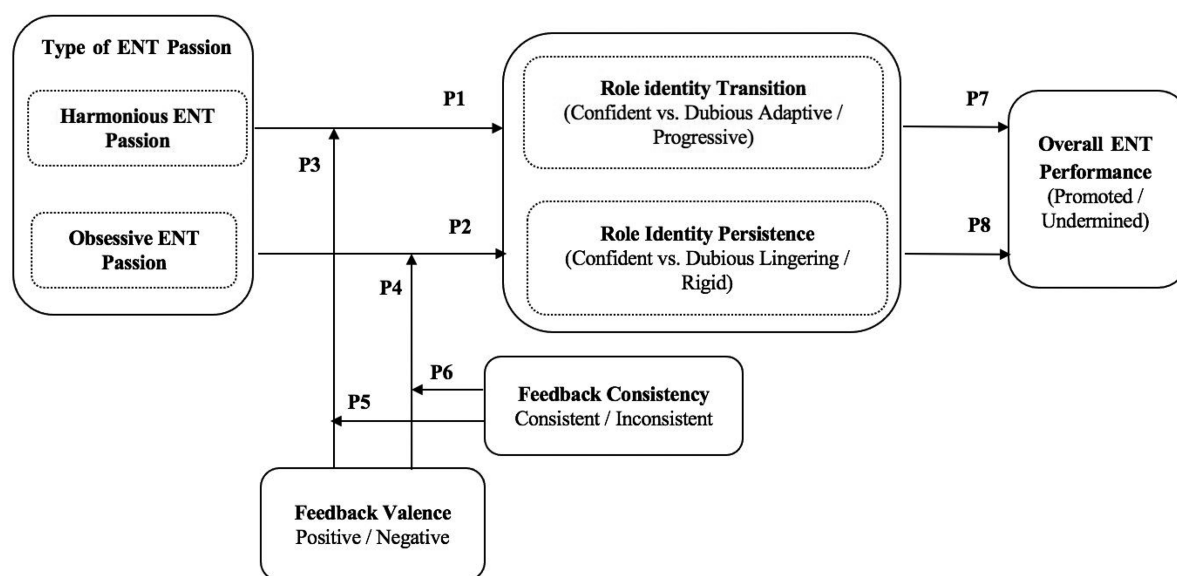
In addition, although passion includes both an affective and an identity dimension (Cardon et al., 2009, 2013; Lex et al., 2020), the temporal aspects of identity have not been sufficiently examined. Past scholarly work has assumed that, at any given time, a single role identity is central to the experience of entrepreneurial passion and that the relative importance of role identities is stable over time (Cardon et al., 2009; Murnieks et al., 2014). However, entrepreneurship scholars have also recognized that “over a lifetime, an entrepreneur may change the salience of different role identities” (Cardon et al., 2009, p. 516; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). In parallel, identity theorists have posited that identity is multifaceted and subject to change (Dutton et al., 2010). Individuals may experiment with multiple selves that are often in conflict with each other—that is, they may engage in identity work to form and revise their identities (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). It is important to account for such identity changes in order to understand how entrepreneurs' cognitive and behavioral responses might differ across venture stages, influencing their overall performance (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021).

To address these issues, we develop a multistage process model that conceptualizes how entrepreneurs manage their role identity. We propose that key factors in this process are the type of the entrepreneurs' passion (harmonious vs. obsessive; Vallerand et al., 2003) and the feedback they receive on their performance at different venture stages (Collewaert et al., 2016). These jointly trigger role identity transitions or persistence and corresponding behavior. This proposal

bridges the burgeoning body of passion literature and the research on identity and self-regulation. The dualistic (Vallerand et al., 2003) and entrepreneurial passion models (Cardon et al., 2009) draw on identity research and clarify that one's self may be complex and comprises central role identities. Self-regulation theory (Carver & Scheier, 1998) helps to explain how passion is experienced over time (Lex et al., 2020) and influences identity work by mobilizing approach or avoidance motivation (see Atkinson, 1964; Higgins, 1997). Finally, identity control theory (ICT; Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 2009) posits that entrepreneurs continuously interact with the environment and sheds light on how performance feedback triggers identity work. Because each of these theories explains unique parts of the phenomenon under study, we integrate them into a comprehensive theoretical model (see Figure 1) to explain how entrepreneurial role identity develops over time based on the type of passion, influencing entrepreneurial performance.

This article makes several contributions to scholarship. First, it contributes to the passion and entrepreneurship literatures by developing a model that integrates work on the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) with research on role-based entrepreneurial passion (Cardon et al., 2009) and self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Building on previous theorizations that passion “mobilizes an entrepreneur's self-regulation processes” (Cardon et al., 2009, p. 518), we approach entrepreneurial passion as a dual construct and integrate it with approach or avoidance motivation (Atkinson, 1964), unpacking its characteristics. We argue that the complex identity of harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs allows them to combine the inventor, founder, and developer roles and have an approach motivation; by contrast, obsessively passionate entrepreneurs may consider one role identity more dominant and in conflict with the others, even weighting it to the point of obsession, and have an avoidance motivation (see Bélanger et al., 2013; Vallerand et al., 2003). By including both types of passion in our model, we capture how the *relative* focus of passion on specific entrepreneurial activities relates to self-regulation systems (Higgins, 1997) and facilitates or disrupts role identity transition (see Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 1999). We thus address calls to revisit harmonious and obsessive passion in entrepreneurship through a self-regulation lens (Lex et al., 2020).

Second, we advance the literature that examines role transitions (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 1999) by elaborating on feedback as a key contingency factor that shapes the effects of passion on role identity transition over time in the entrepreneurship context. Based on ICT (Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 2009), we suggest that the positive or negative valence and consistency or inconsistency of feedback on role performance determine the verification of the entrepreneur's central role identity, thus influencing the revision of her repertoire of roles (see Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), completing the feedback loop (Burke, 2006). Building on previous work by Tripathi et al. (2020) and Lex et al. (2020), we specify the cognitive and affective reactions to feedback per passion type, explaining the joint effects of passion and feedback on role identity transition or persistence at different stages of a venture (prefounding, founding, and postfounding). This model of



ENT: Entrepreneurial

**FIGURE 1** Proposed theoretical model

a feedback system increases our understanding of how entrepreneurial passion focus and identity co-evolve across occasions/time (at the within-person level; Tripathi et al., 2020), responding to calls to study the intraindividual aspect of role identity in an episodic way (Owens et al., 2010) and to specify the mechanisms and boundary conditions of this process.

Finally, we contribute to the literature on the ultimate effects of passion on entrepreneurial performance (e.g., Drnovsek et al., 2016; Mueller et al., 2017). Drawing on Cardon et al. (2009), we define overall entrepreneurial performance as the sum of an entrepreneur's effectiveness in opportunity recognition (generating innovative and useful ideas), venture creation (acquiring financial, human, and social capital), and venture growth (increasing sales, profit, and market share). We propose that the joint effects of entrepreneurial passion type and feedback loops on role identity transition or persistence may be repeated in a circular manner and shape an entrepreneur's identity–environment fit, behavior, and overall performance. Being obsessively passionate about a given role-specific activity might lead to identity and behavioral traps, disrupting engagement in activities that fit better with venture demands and undermining the venture's overall success over time. Our theoretical framework explains why, for example, some inventors do not develop their ventures despite environmental signals of success, whereas other entrepreneurs often succeed by reinventing themselves throughout their entrepreneurial lifetime. This explanation challenges the current thinking that sticking to one's passion is always a good thing (see Lex et al., 2020).

In sum, this article offers novel theorization on how passion and performance feedback influence the affective and identity processes inherent in entrepreneurship. Our theoretical model addresses calls for research on entrepreneurial passion alongside self-regulation (Lex et al., 2020), entrepreneurial identity (Murnieks et al., 2014; Pollack

et al., 2020), and feedback processes throughout entrepreneurial endeavors (Tripathi et al., 2020; Uy et al., 2015).

## 2 | DEFINITIONS AND STARTING ASSUMPTIONS

### 2.1 | Definition of entrepreneurial passion

Entrepreneurial passion consists of intense positive feelings such as enthusiasm and joy derived from specific activities that entrepreneurs love and find self-defining (Cardon et al., 2009). It is a “multiplicative combination of (1) the identity centrality of the activity or object to the individual and (2) the level of intensity of the feelings the individual experiences for that object” (Cardon, Post, et al., 2017, p. 287). That is, passion involves both a focus and an intensity dimension. In this article, we examine how entrepreneurs' passion is focused on one or more roles (Mathias & Williams, 2017, 2018; Mmbaga et al., 2020) or activities (Cardon, Glauser, et al., 2017) that are meaningful to the entrepreneur's self-concept (Cardon et al., 2009). For the sake of parsimony, we use Cardon et al.'s (2009, 2013) distinction among three roles, each related to distinct parts of the entrepreneurial process: the inventor role, focused on identifying opportunities; the founder role, focused on creating new ventures; and the developer role, focused on expanding the ventures. We assume that each entrepreneur has some preference for a particular role and that the three roles' relative importance for the self—that is, their identity centrality (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001)—can vary over time (Tripathi et al., 2020). Identity centrality drives readiness to act out the focal identity (McCall & Simmons, 1966); thus, passion for a particular role encourages engagement in relevant activities (Vallerand et al., 2003) and role

performance (see Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Murnieks et al., 2014; Stryker & Serpe, 1982).

Following recent calls to synthesize the role-based and dualistic views on passion (Pollack et al., 2020), we integrate the definitions of passion advanced by Cardon et al. (2009) and Vallerand et al. (2003) into a dualistic model as follows. *Harmonious entrepreneurial passion* refers to the experience of intense positive feelings for a self-defining venture-related activity that has been autonomously internalized in the entrepreneur's role identity. This process occurs when entrepreneurs have freely accepted the activity as important in itself; thus, the activity occupies a significant, but not overpowering, space in their identity, in balance with other aspects of the entrepreneurial life. Harmonious entrepreneurial passion manifests itself in well-proportioned conscious attention to multiple entrepreneurial roles (inventor, founder, or developer) and their related tasks. As Vallerand et al. (2003, p. 763) noted, harmonious passion is "characterized by a flexible and adaptive form of involvement in the activity that leads the person to [...] mindfully decide whether to engage in the activity."

By contrast, *obsessive entrepreneurial passion* results from a controlled internalization of a self-defining venture-related activity in the entrepreneurial identity. That is, the experience of intense positive feelings for the activity is beyond the entrepreneurs' control; they feel compelled to indulge in the activity, not so much for its own sake but because other positive experiences (e.g., social acceptance or self-esteem) depend on it. Thus, the activity takes up a disproportionate space in the entrepreneurial self-concept, creating conflict with other roles and negative feelings if the entrepreneur is prevented from engaging in the activity (Vallerand et al., 2003). An obsessively passionate entrepreneur becomes totally and unconsciously absorbed in a specific dominant entrepreneurial role (inventor, founder, or developer).

In line with both Cardon et al. (2009) and Vallerand et al. (2003), (a) we view identity centrality as a feature of passion rather than as an antecedent (cf. Murnieks et al., 2014), and (b) we focus on how passionate entrepreneurial activities are internalized in the entrepreneurial identity (harmoniously vs. obsessively) rather than on the intensity of the feelings they evoke. We neither examine variation in mean levels of passion across entrepreneurial roles nor assume that all roles evoke equal passion over time.

## 2.2 | Identity work and role transitions

We adopt the developmental perspective in identity research (Dutton et al., 2010), according to which individuals' self-definitions change over time (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) as they experiment with provisional selves and adopt new roles (Ibarra, 1999). The motive for such change is to achieve fit with a set of internal and external perceptions and standards (Dutton et al., 2010), such as the pressure for high performance in certain tasks (Ibarra, 1999). We thus consider that role transition involves identity reconstruction and is characterized by psychological (and sometimes physical) movement between roles (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Although individuals may linger in past roles despite changes in their external reality (Wittman, 2019), role transitions are common. They are prompted by a constant need for movement throughout the career lifespan (Ashforth, 2001). Driven by the situational needs of the venture, role transitions require the development of identities in which the new roles become more central than others to the entrepreneur's sense of self (Mathias & Williams, 2018). The adoption of a new role and the refinement of one's identity is accompanied by a constellation of expectations (e.g., Kelman, 2006). Reconciling these role expectations with reality may be a challenging task for entrepreneurs. However, few links between these role transition processes and entrepreneurial development have been established (for an exception, see Mathias & Williams, 2018).

We argue that new role requirements lead to periods of ambiguity or conflict (Settles, 2004) in which identity work becomes inevitable (e.g., Stryker & Burke, 2000). Identity work has been described as a punctuated development process with numerous work role changes (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 1999). Building on the literature on role transitions among organizational members (e.g., Ashforth, 2001) and entrepreneurs (Mathias & Williams, 2017, 2018), we posit that entrepreneurs engage in identity work during transitional periods of the venture's life cycle.

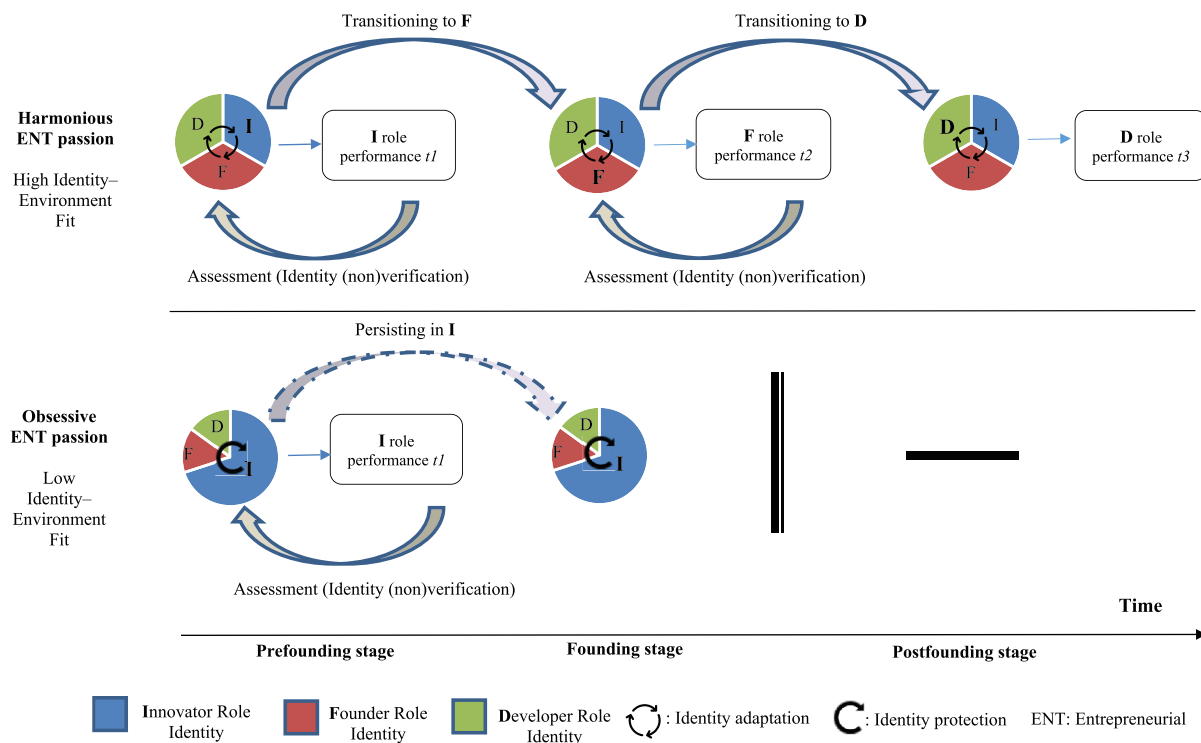
## 2.3 | A multistage model of entrepreneurial passion and role identity transition/persistence

Figure 2 illustrates our multistage process model of entrepreneurial passion and role identity transition or persistence. We argue that the way passionate entrepreneurs internalize and integrate the three core entrepreneurial activities influences how they cognitively respond to environmental demands as the venture moves through prefounding, founding, and postfounding stages. These three stages require entrepreneurs to "wear different hats" (Mathias & Williams, 2018) or shift roles (Hoang & Gimeno, 2010) and therefore to engage in identity work in order to "centralize" the role identity that matches the venture's situational demands.

To restructure an identity, individuals need to internalize new values, motives, and beliefs (Wittman, 2019), thus facing uncertainty. Shifting roles can be emotionally demanding, as entrepreneurs anticipate and explore the fit between the self and the expectations of the new role (Mathias & Williams, 2018; see also Ibarra, 1999). To explain how the two types of passion facilitate or disrupt entrepreneurs' identity work and changes in the centrality of their role identities, we integrate research on self-regulation and identity complexity.

## 2.4 | The role of self-regulation and identity complexity

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed that people assess themselves and their situation against their goals and categorize any potential stressor as either an opportunity or a threat. They do so by activating



**FIGURE 2** A multistage model of entrepreneurial passion and role identity transition/persistence

either of two self-regulation systems—promotion or prevention—that induce an approach or avoidance motivation to accomplish their goals (Higgins, 1997). These two dispositional motivational tendencies refer to striving for success or avoiding failure, respectively (Atkinson, 1964). We propose that entrepreneurs' identity work and role transitions are influenced by such achievement motivation, which differs per passion type; harmonious and obsessive passion relate to approach and avoidance motivation, respectively.<sup>1</sup> These differences in self-regulation can be explained by identity complexity.

The identity of harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs is characterized by high complexity (see Vallerand et al., 2003); that is, they can focus on both identity integration and differentiation (Caza & Wilson, 2009), thus minimizing identity conflict (Van Sell et al., 1981). Specifically, they can perceive invention, founding, and development as different but harmoniously coexisting and integrated parts of their entrepreneurial identity. Research has shown that possessing a broad identity repertoire is a buffer against stressful events (Linville, 1987). The more complex an identity is, the more likely the entrepreneur is to have the psychological resources to deal with role underperformance, see new roles as opportunities, and grow in new required roles (see Dweck, 2012; Hoang & Gimeno, 2010). This approach motivation, associated with the hope of success in multiple roles (see Atkinson, 1964), enables the harmoniously passionate entrepreneur to engage in identity experimentation.

Because obsessively passionate entrepreneurs have one dominant role identity, that is, low identity complexity (Caza & Wilson, 2009), they are more sensitive to identity conflict (see


Vallerand et al., 2003) and have a narrow identity repertoire; thus, they can be debilitated by negative events (Linville, 1987). When multiple role identities are in conflict with each other (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001), the pressures of one interfere with the pressures of another (Van Sell et al., 1981). For example, as the venture develops, entrepreneurs who identify obsessively as inventors might perceive a clash with the required founder identity that threatens their sense of self; they may cope by trying to preserve the status quo, that is, avoiding the new role identity (Petriglieri, 2011). This avoidance motivation is likely because of fear of failure in the new role (see Atkinson, 1964; Bélanger et al., 2013). Persisting in both role identities (when only one is valued) might come at a high psychological cost, as the new role may entail a feared or disliked possible self (Carver, 2006; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of harmonious and obsessive entrepreneurial passion, which result in entrepreneurs' role identity transition or persistence, as elaborated below.

## 2.5 | Type of entrepreneurial passion and role identity transition/persistence

We predict that harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs will process information on and respond flexibly to new venture demands, perceiving them as opportunities; this adaptability enables role identity transition (see top row of Figure 2 and Table 1). Passion consists of positive affect, which facilitates cognitive flexibility (Isen, 2002). In the



**TABLE 1** Type of entrepreneurial passion

Harmonious entrepreneurial passion	Obsessive entrepreneurial passion
<b>High identity complexity</b>	<b>Low identity complexity</b>
Cognitive flexibility	Cognitive rigidity
Broad identity repertoire	Narrow identity repertoire
<b>Approach motivation</b>	<b>Avoidance motivation</b>
Identity opportunity	Identity threat
Growth, experimentation	Stability, preserving status quo
	
<b>Identity work focused on identity adaptation</b>	<b>Identity work focused on identity protection</b>
<b>Role identity transition (P1)</b>	<b>Role identity persistence (P2)</b>

case of harmonious passion, this flexible and adaptive thinking is enhanced because the activity is internalized autonomously, and the entrepreneurial identity is highly complex (see Vallerand et al., 2003). For example, as the venture evolves, it requires the entrepreneur to be less absorbed in inventing and more focused on founding, while maintaining some passion for growing the venture. Such restructuring of the overall identity (Wittman, 2019) is easier for the harmoniously passionate entrepreneur to process cognitively, and the resulting approach motivation and identity work focused on adaptation (see Dutton et al., 2010) facilitates role identity transition (see Table 1). In support of this argument, harmonious passion has been empirically linked to a “heightened cognitive state” (Ho et al., 2011, p. 41).

**Proposition 1.** Harmonious entrepreneurial passion facilitates role identity transition as venture demands change over time. It focuses entrepreneurs' identity work on identity adaptation, which enables their transition across the inventor, founder, and developer role identities.

By contrast, we predict that the low complexity of obsessively passionate entrepreneurs' identity and their motivation to avoid new roles, which are perceived as a threat, will disrupt role identity transition (see bottom row of Figure 2 and Table 1). Obsessive passion disrupts flexible thinking (Vallerand et al., 2003). Because the excitement derived from the preferred activity is “uncontrollable,” the entrepreneur is cognitively “rigid” and cannot fully disengage from thoughts about it, despite venture demands to engage in a new activity. For example, when the passion for inventing occupies a disproportionate space in the entrepreneur's mindset, it may crowd out the founder identity that is important at the founding stage and disrupt identity reconstruction (see bottom row of Figure 2). Obsessively passionate entrepreneurs fear that a new role identity might not yield equally intense rewards (see Bélanger et al., 2013), so they are unwilling to

experiment and instead seek identity stability (see Lafrenière et al., 2011). Their identity work is focused on protection (Petriglieri, 2011) and involves maintaining the current role identity and distancing themselves from the new one (see Table 1).

**Proposition 2.** Obsessive entrepreneurial passion disrupts role identity transition as venture demands change over time. It focuses entrepreneurs' identity work on identity protection, which enables their persistence in the inventor, founder, or developer role identity.

## 2.6 | Feedback as a contingency factor

Scholars have long noted that external feedback strongly affects one's self-view (e.g., Bandura, 1997) and triggers identity work (see Ashford & Tsui, 1991). Drawing on ICT (see Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 2009), we propose that entrepreneurs operate in a feedback system with the following three components (see Figure 2) (a) *Input*. As they continuously interact with the environment, they receive input in the form of feedback on their role performance (i.e., the fulfillment of the particular role's obligations and expectations; Welbourne et al., 1998). (b) *Assessment*. They next assess its congruence with the central role identity and try to continuously verify the self (Tripathi et al., 2020). For example, patenting an invention may strengthen an entrepreneur's identity as an inventor; securing financial resources from venture capitalists may endorse an entrepreneur as a founder; and internationalizing a venture may validate an entrepreneur's identity as a developer. (c) *Output*. When feedback does not (does) verify the focal role identity, entrepreneurs are more (less) likely to seek alternatives (see Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), and this output of identity work completes the feedback loop (Burke, 2006). Feedback has two well-established dimensions: valence (positive or negative) (e.g., Zhou, 1998) and consistency (consistent or inconsistent) (e.g., Renner, 2004; Stone & Stone, 1985).

### 2.6.1 | The role of feedback valence

Following Jordan and Audia (2012), we define *feedback valence* as the positive or negative outcome of the comparison between one's actual role performance and one's aspiration level. Positive feedback indicates that role performance is at or above the aspiration level and progress toward meeting ideal standards is adequate (Karoly, 1993; Uy et al., 2015). Negative feedback indicates inadequate progress or failure.

Based on ICT (see Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 2009), we suggest that negative feedback will generally encourage identity reconstruction. Such feedback (e.g., losing sales volume) reveals that the entrepreneur is not realizing the role (see Stryker, 1980). Devaluation of a central role identity (Stets, 2005) likely results in questioning and negotiating who one is as an entrepreneur (see Dutton et al., 2010) and motivates one to take a leap and experiment with new roles and

**TABLE 2** Type of entrepreneurial passion and feedback valence

	Harmonious entrepreneurial passion Identity adaptation and role identity transition	Obsessive entrepreneurial passion Identity protection and role identity persistence
<b>Positive performance feedback</b>	Partial identity verification and self-worth Motivation to grow in other roles Identity development <i>Progressive transition</i>	Overall identity verification and self-worth Motivation to preserve contentment Identity maintenance <i>Rigid persistence</i>
<b>Negative performance feedback</b>	Partial identity nonverification—Low stress and anxiety Motivation to learn from feedback Identity correction <i>Adaptive transition</i> (P3)	Overall identity nonverification—High stress and anxiety Motivation to ignore feedback Identity defense <i>Lingering persistence</i> (P4)

identities (Ibarra, 1999) to meet ideal standards. By contrast, positive feedback can be reassuring. Signals such as securing external funding indicate that the entrepreneur is moving in the right direction to achieve the role-specific goal. Such role identity verification should enhance the centrality of the focal role identity (Ashforth, 2001; Tripathi et al., 2020) and generally discourage experimentation with new roles.

Nevertheless, the effect of feedback valence on identity work may not be quite straightforward. On the one hand, contrary to ICT predictions, research on self-enhancement (e.g., Jones, 1973) suggests that because negative feedback “feels bad” and threatens individuals’ self-worth, it may trigger identity protection strategies and impair efforts to improve (Petriglieri, 2011). On the other hand, the self-affirmation (Steele, 1988) and enhanced self-confidence resulting from positive feedback (Bandura, 1997) may facilitate identity experimentation. We elaborate below on feedback valence as a key contingency factor that shapes the effects of each passion type on role identity transition/persistence, offering a more nuanced view of its effects on identity work.

#### *Harmonious entrepreneurial passion and feedback valence*

We have argued thus far that harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs have high identity complexity, which buffers stress and anxiety in times of adversity (Hoang & Gimeno, 2010; Linville, 1987). They are thus well equipped to manage negative feedback on one aspect of their sense of self. When they realize that what they have been doing in one role has fallen short of the standards they aspire to, they will likely perceive an opportunity to correct their identity and unleash the learning benefits of negative feedback (e.g., Cope, 2011). That is, they will address the partial nonverification of their entrepreneurial identity (see Burke, 2006; Burke & Stets, 2009) by revising their self-definition to achieve equilibrium and a positive view of the self (Dutton et al., 2010; Ibarra, 1999; Wittman, 2019). In line with the adaptive perspective in identity research, which refers to a change in identity content to better fit with external standards

(Dutton et al., 2010), we expect harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs who face negative feedback to engage in *adaptive role transition*. Table 2 summarizes these predictions and their cognitive and affective mechanisms.

When harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs receive positive feedback on their performance in one of the three roles, their entrepreneurial identity is only partially verified (see Burke, 2006; Burke & Stets, 2009). Mastering one part of what it means to be an entrepreneur may highlight that there is room for improvement in some others. Despite the experience of eagerness and elation stemming from doing well in one role (Carver, 2006), the perceived gap in entrepreneurs’ self-worth, combined with their approach motivation, may still coactivate (Blader, 2007) other entrepreneurial role identities and trigger motivation to grow in other roles. In line with the progressive perspective in identity research, which refers to a change in identity content toward a more developed or ideal identity (Dutton et al., 2010), we propose that these entrepreneurs will engage in *progressive role transition* (see Table 2).

Taken together, we propose that both positive and negative feedback may motivate harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs to approach new roles as opportunities and adapt their identity, thereby triggering role identity transition. However, negative feedback is more likely to trigger role identity transition than positive feedback because it challenges one part of the self and more clearly indicates that overall ideal standards are not being met. Therefore, negative feedback strengthens the urge to change the centrality of role identities address and “correct” the self.

**Proposition 3.** (a) Harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs who receive negative (positive) feedback on their performance will undergo an adaptive (progressive) transition across the inventor, founder, and developer role identities, and (b) the process of role identity transition will more likely occur when feedback is negative than when it is positive.



### Obsessive entrepreneurial passion and feedback valence

We have also argued that obsessively passionate entrepreneurs have a less complex identity, which does not buffer stress in times of adversity (see Linville, 1987). Hence, when exposed to negative performance feedback on their dominant role, these entrepreneurs will experience anxiety. They may perceive the nonverification of their role identity as a threat to their overall entrepreneurial self-concept (see Petriglieri, 2011; Vallerand et al., 2003). The self-enhancement motive—the desire to see oneself in a positive light—will likely be activated (e.g., Jordan & Audia, 2012; Sedikides et al., 2003) to the point that they ignore the negative feedback in order to defend the self (Petriglieri, 2011). This process will prevent identity learning (see Pratt et al., 2006) and result in *lingering role persistence*, an identity response pattern that refers to cognitive continuity strategies to protect the identity under threat (Wittman, 2019) (see Table 2).

Positive feedback on the performance of these entrepreneurs' dominant role is likely to verify their overall sense of entrepreneurial self and enhance their self-worth. According to Carver (2006), avoidance motivation yields relief, calmness, and contentment when feedback is positive. Positive feelings drive persistence in the roles that invoke such feelings (see Cardon & Kirk, 2015; Pham, 2004), as the individual strives to preserve a positive emotional state (see Jones, 1973). In addition, studies have shown that progress increases task-specific self-confidence (see Bandura, 1997). Entrepreneurs will thus obsessively focus on the pleasurable role that verifies their overall sense of entrepreneurial self and try to maintain their overwhelmingly salient role identity (see Stryker & Burke, 2000), resulting in *rigid role persistence* (see Vallerand et al., 2003) (see Table 2).

Overall, we propose that both negative and positive feedback may motivate obsessively passionate entrepreneurs to avoid new roles and protect their identity, thereby triggering role identity persistence. However, positive feedback is more likely to trigger role identity persistence than negative feedback because it clearly indicates that overall ideal standards are being met and reassures the self. Therefore, positive feedback strengthens the urge to persist in the focal role identity and preserve contentment.

**Proposition 4.** (a) Obsessively passionate entrepreneurs who receive negative (positive) feedback on their performance will experience lingering (rigid) persistence in the inventor, founder, or developer role identity, and (b) the process of role identity persistence will more likely occur when feedback is positive than when it is negative.

## 2.6.2 | The role of feedback consistency

*Feedback consistency* refers to variability in information about performance across feedback occasions and sources (see Stone & Stone, 1985; Uy et al., 2015). When feedback is consistent, individuals are more likely to attribute their performance to internal causes (Liden & Mitchell, 1985). By contrast, individuals who receive

inconsistent feedback will be more inclined to attribute their performance to external circumstances, such as luck or the personal characteristics of the feedback provider (Weiner, 1992).

Accordingly, we suggest that the consistency of feedback over time shapes the effects of its valence on identity verification. When feedback is consistently negative, there is less doubt over its accuracy (see Stone & Stone, 1985). Even though in general individuals tend to attribute their failures to external influences (Weiner, 1992), consistent failure should reduce this self-serving bias. As individuals try to understand why they have not successfully tackled their challenges, they more confidently attribute steady failure to internal causes (Liden & Mitchell, 1985), realizing that their present effort is unlikely to lead to the attainment of the role-specific goal. This pattern reverses when entrepreneurs receive consistently positive feedback; steady progress over time, attributed internally, confidently verifies the central role identity. Inconsistent feedback, however, raises some doubt about whether success or failure is directly linked to one's own effort. Thus, entrepreneurs are more likely to attribute sporadic failure (success) to accidental external causes, and identity nonverification (verification) is dubious.

These differences in identity verification contingent on feedback consistency should further influence passionate entrepreneurs' identity work focused on adaptation or protection and elicit different patterns of transition/persistence among the entrepreneurial role identities over time. We summarize eight such patterns and their cognitive and affective mechanisms in Table 3. We now explain more precisely how all three factors—passion type, feedback valence, and feedback consistency—interact with one another to influence changes in the centrality of role identities.

### Harmonious entrepreneurial passion, feedback valence, and feedback consistency

We propose that harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs who consistently fail in the focal role are likely to confidently conclude that they are on the wrong track in verifying the corresponding role identity (Stets, 2005); thus, the partial nonverification of their entrepreneurial identity is confident. Their high cognitive flexibility and approach motivation should allow them to identify an identity opportunity, address the need to shift priorities, and change. Therefore, consistent negative feedback coupled with harmonious passion will trigger strong learning from failure, that is, intense learning cycles of identity work (Pratt et al., 2006), which includes disengagement from one role identity (Petriglieri, 2011) and its corrective substitution with another (Wittman, 2019). For example, Ariana Huffington's consistent failure to publish her second book (rejected by 36 publishers) triggered her identity reconstruction into becoming the co-founder of Huffington Post.<sup>2</sup> We call this identity transition pattern a *Confident Adaptive Transition*, as it implies that the entrepreneur engages in purposeful and intensive identity restructuring (see bottom left quadrant of Table 3).

Similarly, when environmental signals of success are consistent over time, it is reasonable to expect that harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs will perceive them as accurate (see Stone & Stone, 1985)

**TABLE 3** Type of entrepreneurial passion, feedback valence, and feedback consistency

		Harmonious entrepreneurial passion Identity adaptation and role identity transition	Obsessive entrepreneurial passion Identity protection and role identity persistence
Positive performance feedback	Consistent	Confident partial identity verification	Confident overall identity verification
		Strong partial self-efficacy and forward-looking growth	Strong overall self-efficacy and complacency
		Developmental substitution	Maintenance-oriented inertia
	Inconsistent	<b>Confident progressive transition</b>	<b>Confident rigid persistence</b>
		Dubious partial identity verification	Dubious overall identity verification
		Weak partial self-efficacy and forward-looking growth	Weak overall self-efficacy and complacency
Negative performance feedback	Consistent	Developmental experimentation	Maintenance-oriented perseverance
		<b>Dubious progressive transition</b>	<b>Dubious rigid persistence</b>
		Confident partial identity nonverification	Confident overall identity nonverification
		Strong learning from failure	Strong failure notice
	Inconsistent	Corrective substitution	Defensive inertia
		<b>Confident adaptive transition</b>	<b>Confident lingering persistence</b>
		Dubious partial identity nonverification	Dubious overall identity nonverification
		Weak learning from failure	Weak failure notice
		Corrective experimentation	Defensive perseverance
		<b>Dubious adaptive transition</b>	<b>Dubious lingering persistence</b>
		(P5)	(P6)

and attribute success to their own efforts. Nevertheless, their pride (see Steele, 1988) and confidence (Chen et al., 1998) in the one verified role will not prevent role identity transitions, since their confident entrepreneurial identity verification and strong self-efficacy are only partial (see Lex et al., 2020). They may thus confidently consider a role identity transition as an opportunity for personal growth in new roles (Dutton et al., 2010) in a forward-looking way and engage in developmental identity work focused on substituting the verified role identity with a new one. This appears to be the case of Gareth Williams, who “never lost [his] product focus” but became the CEO of Skyscanner and developed it internationally.<sup>3</sup> We therefore expect that harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs who receive consistent positive feedback will engage in a pattern we call *Confident Progressive Transition* (see top left quadrant of Table 3).

**Proposition 5a.** Harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs who receive consistent negative (positive) feedback on their performance will undergo a confident adaptive (progressive) transition across the inventor, founder, and developer role identities.

By contrast, when the negative feedback is inconsistent over time, entrepreneurs' nonverification of one part of their identity is dubious, and role identity transition may not be perceived as definitely needed. Because harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs are cognitively flexible and open to environmental feedback, they will still

learn from failure. That is, they will engage in corrective identity work focused on experimentation with aspirational and provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999), albeit in a less confident and purposeful way. For instance, the founder of Starbucks, Howard Schultz, faced highly variable negative feedback. Unsure about his response to obstacles, he stepped out of the business, but soon returned and succeeded by balancing his “unbridled passion and enthusiasm”<sup>4</sup> for creation with the company's development. We call this pattern *Dubious Adaptive Transition* (see bottom left quadrant of Table 3).

When positive feedback is inconsistent over time, harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs may attribute their success externally and doubt the verification of one part of their entrepreneurial identity. Such weaker partial self-efficacy and self-affirmation (Steele, 1988) implies that there is still room for improvement in the focal role. However, as entrepreneurs need to reinvent their ventures to remain competitive in a changing environment, their cognitive flexibility and approach motivation will still allow for forward-looking growth and developmental identity work focused on experimentation with other role identities to serve the venture's evolving needs. For example, Richard Branson, the founder of the Virgin Group, responded to inconsistent positive feedback by turning self-doubt into an opportunity to commercialize new ideas in diverse fields, ranging from music with Virgin Records to travel with Virgin Atlantic Airways.<sup>5</sup> That is, harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs continue to view a transition between role identities as an opportunity for self-growth, albeit in a less confident way, reconstructing the self by engaging in a pattern

we call *Dubious Progressive Transition* (see top left quadrant of Table 3).

**Proposition 5b.** Harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs who receive inconsistent negative (positive) feedback on their performance will undergo a dubious adaptive (progressive) transition across the inventor, founder, and developer role identities.

Taken together, we propose that both consistent and inconsistent positive or negative feedback may trigger harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs' transition across their role identities. However, feedback consistency magnifies the effect of feedback valence on this process by increasing the entrepreneur's confidence in identity (non) verification. In effect, in order for feedback consistency to increase the likelihood of role identity transition at its "peak," feedback should be consistently negative. Alternate configurations involving inconsistent feedback are unable to achieve the same confidence in identity (non)verification and therefore do not provide the same motivational strength for identity reconstruction. Although consistent positive feedback also triggers role identity transition for harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs, consistent negative feedback acts as a greater trigger because it strongly challenges one part of the self and strengthens the urge for identity adaptation to new roles.

**Proposition 5c.** Among harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs, the process of role identity transition varies with feedback valence and feedback consistency, such that the process will more likely occur when feedback is consistent than when it is inconsistent, and when feedback is consistently negative than when there is any other combination of feedback valence and feedback consistency.

#### *Obsessive entrepreneurial passion, feedback valence, and feedback consistency*

We next propose that obsessively passionate entrepreneurs who receive consistently negative feedback over time will experience strong psychological distress and frustration because repeated signals of failure result in confident nonverification of their entrepreneurial identity and reduce their overall self-worth, representing a consistent identity threat (see Petriglieri, 2011; Stryker & Burke, 2000). They may respond to such distress with defensive identity inertia in order to protect the self (Petriglieri, 2011), resulting in what we call *Confident Lingering Persistence* (see bottom right quadrant of Table 3), as in the case of Elizabeth Holmes.<sup>6</sup> That is, as they come to notice the consistency, they may eventually attribute the failure internally. Instead of changing their identity in response to the venture's demands, however, they may go dormant or consider changing the context by abandoning their venture for another entrepreneurial endeavor (see Hoang & Gimeno, 2010).

Similarly, consistent positive feedback over time should convincingly verify obsessively passionate entrepreneurs' overall role identity.

Internal attributions will increase their confidence and strengthen their overall self-efficacy (see Bandura, 1997; Chen et al., 1998). Their avoidance motivation will further encourage them to preserve this satisfying emotional state, leading to high levels of self-complacency and maintenance-oriented identity inertia, that is, inertia in order to maintain the focal role identity. For example, consistent success in innovation will magnify self-satisfaction and reinforce self-perception as a successful inventor. The result will be *Confident Rigid Persistence* (see top right quadrant of Table 3). Past research confirms that when individuals do not doubt their own success, they experience complacency (Bandura, 1997) and become overconfident (Stone, 1994).

**Proposition 6a.** Obsessively passionate entrepreneurs who receive consistent negative (positive) feedback on their performance will experience a confident lingering (rigid) persistence in the inventor, founder, or developer role identity.

By contrast, inconsistent negative feedback may go unnoticed or its accuracy may be called into question. Obsessively passionate entrepreneurs may attribute low role performance externally to accidental causes (see Weiner, 1992) and fail to assume personal responsibility for it. The self-enhancement motive also predicts that individuals may retrospectively revise their understanding of past actions to conclude that they had acted more competently than they really had (e.g., Greenwald, 1980) in order to maintain the status quo. Such entrepreneurs may even become blind to negative cues and disregard or trivialize the feedback (see Kunda, 1990; Swann, 2012) in order to weaken the threat (Petriglieri, 2011), defend their role identity (see Bélanger et al., 2013), and preserve their positive self-views (Lafrenière et al., 2013). The dubious nonverification of their overall entrepreneurial identity coupled with the low cognitive flexibility of obsessively passionate entrepreneurs (Vallerand et al., 2003) will result in defensive perseverance in the focal role identity, an identity trap (see Brockner et al., 1986) that we call *Dubious Lingering Persistence* (see bottom right quadrant of Table 3). For example, Cova and Svanfeldt (1993) suggested that highly passionate entrepreneurs pay little attention to contradictory market information and continue with their initial plans.

In a similar way, erratic progress may cause obsessively passionate entrepreneurs to doubt the accuracy of the feedback. Psychologists have long agreed that the motivation to see oneself positively is a fundamental drive that influences cognition (e.g., Kunda, 1990) and distorts people's self-perceptions in a positive direction. As people tend to process positive information about the self fluently (Sedikides et al., 2003), we expect that, for obsessively passionate entrepreneurs, weak positive reinforcement will cast some doubt on their overall entrepreneurial identity verification and ability to sustain progress (Uy et al., 2015), that is, weaken their overall self-efficacy and complacency (see Bandura, 1997). Being emotionally absorbed by the focal role identity, they will place more weight on information that verifies it and engage in maintenance-oriented identity perseverance, that is, persevering in that identity in order to maintain it. For instance,

inconsistent success with product development might put into question an obsessively passionate entrepreneur's persistence in the inventor role. We call this pattern *Dubious Rigid Persistence* (see top right quadrant of Table 3).

**Proposition 6b.** Obsessively passionate entrepreneurs who receive inconsistent negative (positive) feedback on their performance will experience a dubious lingering (rigid) persistence in the inventor, founder, or developer role identity.

Overall, we propose that both consistent and inconsistent positive or negative feedback may trigger obsessively passionate entrepreneurs' persistence in the focal role identity. However, feedback consistency magnifies the effects of feedback valence on this process by increasing confidence in identity (non)verification. In effect, in order for feedback consistency to increase the likelihood of role identity persistence at its "peak," feedback should be consistently positive. Alternate configurations involving inconsistent feedback reduce confidence in the (non)verification of identities and therefore do not provide the same motivational strength to persist in the focal role identity. Although consistent negative feedback also triggers role identity persistence for obsessively passionate entrepreneurs, consistent positive feedback acts as a greater trigger because it firmly reassures the self and strengthens the urge to avoid new roles.

**Proposition 6c.** Among obsessively passionate entrepreneurs, the process of role identity persistence varies with feedback valence and feedback consistency, such that the process will more likely occur when feedback is consistent than when it is inconsistent and when feedback is consistently positive than when there is any other combination of feedback valence and feedback consistency.

## 2.7 | Effects on overall entrepreneurial performance

The eight role identity transition/persistence patterns presented above start a new feedback loop (see Figure 2), which allows continuous adjustments of identity (Tripathi et al., 2020), influencing the extent of *entrepreneurial identity–environment fit* over time. Drawing on person–environment fit theory (see Edwards, 2008), we define this as the degree to which the entrepreneur's central role identity matches the situational needs of the venture. Facilitated and well-timed role identity transitions aligned with venture demands are likely to promote the entrepreneur's overall performance (see Figure 1). By contrast, when entrepreneurs persistently emphasize a particular entrepreneurial role identity over others regardless of the venture's situational demands, overall performance over time will be hindered.

### 2.7.1 | Role identity transitions and entrepreneurial performance

Harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs can think simultaneously about multiple concepts, so they can broadly scan environmental information and attend to feedback (see Ho et al., 2011). Since they "don't have all their eggs in one basket," they respond to signals of success and failure with progressive and adaptive role identity transitions, respectively. By experimenting with new role identities as the venture's demands evolve, they align their identity with the environment, resulting in individual behavior that is similarly aligned (see Burke, 2006). Their high identity complexity broadens their behavioral repertoire (see Caza & Wilson, 2009), allowing them to act differently yet appropriately in different situations. As they focus their passion on activities that better match the needs of each venture stage, they may concurrently seek (Ho & Pollack, 2014) and invest resources, engage in the new role more fully, and develop new skills and abilities. They are thus likely to adjust their behavior and excel in various entrepreneurial roles. Harmonious passion has been found to predict job performance (Vallerand et al., 2007) and entrepreneurial income (Ho & Pollack, 2014).

**Proposition 7.** Harmonious entrepreneurial passion and the resulting transitions across the inventor, founder, and developer role identities translate into high entrepreneurial identity–environment fit and behavioral adjustments over time, thereby promoting overall entrepreneurial performance.

### 2.7.2 | Role identity persistence and entrepreneurial performance

Obsessive passion about role-specific tasks can monopolize entrepreneurs' thinking and foster cognitive rigidity—manifested in a tendency to resist any change in belief (Rokeach, 1960). Obsessively passionate entrepreneurs may thus be less attentive (Ho et al., 2011) and less responsive to feedback and environmental demands, blind to changing market conditions or contradictory evidence. Unable to turn their attention away from their dominant role identity (Hoang & Gimeno, 2010), they cannot match it to their environment.

Over time, such cognitive rigidity will likely translate into misaligned behavioral rigidity (see Burke, 2006; Vallerand et al., 2003) and inertia. Motivated to avoid threats (see Ho & Pollack, 2014), obsessively passionate entrepreneurs cannot engage in other activities or fully enact new roles. Their low identity complexity narrows the range of behavioral "scripts" available for their use and therefore the chances they can react to various situations (see LaFromboise et al., 1993). They respond to signals of success with either inertia (Bandura, 1997) or increased striving (see Ilies & Judge, 2005; Jones, 1973; Uy et al., 2015) that is not aligned with the venture's demands. Over time, they may even reduce their effort in activities that have been established as successful (Carver, 2006; Carver &

Scheier, 1998). Their failure to develop new skills can prevent the venture from developing to its full potential. This may explain why entrepreneurs sometimes continue to run failing ventures (Gimeno et al., 1997), either escalating (see Carver & Scheier, 1998) or eventually decreasing their effort in the same entrepreneurial activities (see Ilies & Judge, 2005), rather than undertaking corrective actions to align their behavior to the venture's demands.

**Proposition 8.** Obsessive entrepreneurial passion and the resulting persistence in the inventor, founder, or developer role identity translate into low entrepreneurial identity–environment fit and behavioral rigidity over time, thus undermining overall entrepreneurial performance.

### 3 | DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Responding to recent calls to advance theory by integrating the separate streams of the passion literature (Pollack et al., 2020), we propose a multistage model that explains how entrepreneurial passion and feedback at different venture stages jointly predict how entrepreneurs transition between their roles as inventors, founders, and developers to achieve success. Our dynamic process model of a feedback system opens up avenues for future empirical research.

#### 3.1 | Contributions to theory: Entrepreneurial passion and role identity management

First, we adopt a dynamic view of entrepreneurial passion and role identity management, relating identity development to the venture's life cycle. Our proposed model addresses Cardon et al.' (2009, 2013) call for research on the effects of the weights assigned to role identities over time and extends recent empirical studies on how passion develops (e.g., Gielnik et al., 2015) by relying on different facets of passion (e.g., Lex et al., 2020). We encourage other scholars to build on our theoretical framework and previous studies examining the foci of entrepreneurial passion (Breugst et al., 2012; Cardon et al., 2009, 2013) to delve deeper into how entrepreneurial passion foci and role identity co-evolve.

Second, our model integrates the dualistic and role-based views of passion with research on self-regulation (Collewaert et al., 2016; Lex et al., 2020), clarifying the characteristics of the two types of entrepreneurial passion. We propose that harmonious and obsessive passion's different levels of identity complexity are related to the self-regulation systems of promotion or prevention that induce approach or avoidance motivation, respectively (see Higgins, 1997). While passion can appear similar to intrinsic motivation, we follow past researchers in disentangling these concepts (e.g., Ho & Astakhova, 2018; Vallerand, 2015), maintaining that passion motivates performance (Cardon et al., 2009; Vallerand et al., 2003).

Third, we outline how different passion types and environmental feedback “push” or “pull” transitions across multiple roles as part of entrepreneurial identity reconstruction, fitting entrepreneurial passion and identity to the venture's situational needs (see Ho & Astakhova, 2018). In doing so, we extend past studies that have mainly focused on the effects of favorable progress feedback on effort intensity (Uy et al., 2015) and role identity centrality (Tripathi et al., 2020). Our work examines both positive and negative feedback in conjunction with the dualistic model of passion, addressing calls for research on both early and later stages of venture development (Uy et al., 2015) and on the effects of negative feedback (Tripathi et al., 2020).

Finally, our work contributes to the literature on entrepreneurial persistence (Cardon & Kirk, 2015) and failure (Cope, 2011; Ucbasaran et al., 2013) by addressing potential causes: obsessive entrepreneurial passion and identity traps (see Brockner et al., 1986). Despite research showing that obsessive passion undermines financial performance (Ho & Pollack, 2014), some studies have suggested that obsessively passionate individuals who experience failure may also be motivated to increase performance (Bélanger et al., 2013; Vallerand et al., 2007). Understanding business failure as a role identity threat could help scholars to further explore the social-psychological processes entrepreneurs undergo in making sense of their environment over time. Our proposed multistage process model suggests that, besides managing their emotions, failing entrepreneurs need to actively reconstruct their entrepreneurial identity and adjust their behavior in order to increase overall entrepreneurial performance.

#### 3.2 | Implications for future research and practice

Our paper also has numerous implications for future research and practice. Importantly, individual interpretations of entrepreneurial success are influenced by entrepreneurial passion and are thus relative. Entrepreneurs like Ferran Adrià, for whom “creativity is a way of life,” may never be “thrilled with the business side of things” (Svejenova et al., 2007, p. 547) but may be perfectly competent as founders; even if they do not fully succeed in financial or business terms, they may still experience satisfaction because they “have a passion activity that makes their lives worth living” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 756). Entrepreneurs are not slaves to their ventures, and a failed company does not preclude a happy founder. Despite some research evidence that obsessive passion reduces well-being (Vallerand et al., 2003, 2007), rigidly focusing on a single role may still satisfy entrepreneurs' longing to concentrate on activities that are close to their hearts and to be authentic. Future research on how entrepreneurial passion type and environmental feedback increase entrepreneurs' subjective well-being (see Carpentier et al., 2012), life satisfaction, and authenticity is therefore much needed.

Although this article focuses on individuals' identity management, our model raises interesting questions for future research on team-level entrepreneurial passion (Cardon, Post, et al., 2017). Partnering with other people may compensate for an individual entrepreneur's



one-sidedness, making it needless for that individual to switch roles. For example, passionate inventors can be fully successful by finding a partner to manage the “dirty part of business” while they focus on its creative side, as in the case of Pedro Almodóvar, who teamed up with his brother Agustin (Alvarez & Svejnova, 2002, p. 184). Similarly, Walt Disney is known for being passionate about idea generation despite consistent negative feedback early in his career<sup>7</sup>; eventually, he teamed up with other entrepreneurs to proceed to founding and development activities. More empirical work is required to shed light on how role identities are negotiated among team members with complementary entrepreneurial passion, and the extent to which passion is contagious, influencing team cohesion and participatory decision-making. Since venture idiosyncrasies indeed make a difference, scholars should also contextualize their approaches.

In addition, given that the entrepreneurial process is unlikely to be linear and unidirectional (Lichtenstein et al., 2007), our dynamic framework can guide time-sensitive and longitudinal empirical research. Operationally, such research could adapt Vallerand et al.'s (2003) harmonious and obsessive passion scales to the three entrepreneurial role-specific activities to measure how each is internalized compared with others at different points in time, controlling for positive affect (Pollack et al., 2020). We did not examine the affective component of passion; future research can examine interactions between intense positive feelings and identity centrality and compare passion across roles using Cardon et al.'s (2013) scale. Performance feedback could be measured by both subjective and objective indicators of progress (e.g., a perceived increase in social capital vs. securing the desired financial capital from a business angel; see Gielnik et al., 2015), accounting for delays and variability over more extended time periods (Uy et al., 2015). The likelihood of role identity transition or persistence can be operationalized as changes in the centrality of role identities over time (see Lex et al., 2020), as well as entrepreneurs' transition intentions. Future research can also empirically examine other cognitive or affective mechanisms invoked by our model, such as internal and external attributions, the extent of overall (partial) identity (non)verification and confidence in this (non)verification, as well as stress and self-complacency. To examine the effects on overall entrepreneurial performance, scholars can construct a panel dataset at the between-person level (see Tripathi et al., 2020) to model growth curves (see Bliese & Ployhart, 2002).

Although past research suggests that passion type is dispositional and may remain stable over a lifetime (Vallerand, 2015), another interesting avenue for future research is to empirically test whether that is true. For example, obsessive passion may be more intense early in the entrepreneur's career, when inexperience, coupled with role demands and a desire for feedback, greatly influences social identities (see Nicholson, 1984). Entrepreneurs with more established identities and robust self-confidence from past experience might become more willing to experiment. That is, feedback may be understood as an antecedent of passion type over a lifetime, in accordance with past studies showing that progress elicits passion (e.g., Gielnik et al., 2015; Tripathi et al., 2020) over longer time periods (Lex et al., 2020). Computer

models, role-playing, and field research with entrepreneurs from various industries might be appropriate for this type of empirical testing.

Relatedly, we encourage future research on the long-term effects of feedback on the identity of harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs. Although our model predicts that such entrepreneurs will continuously and actively reconstruct their identity despite consistent positive feedback, they might also become somewhat complacent. Juan Roig's family business, Mercadona (the largest supermarket group in Spain), grew to a total of 1637 supermarkets. However, all but 14 are located in Spain,<sup>8</sup> indicating that accumulated success may have disrupted the chain's international growth. Harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs who receive negative feedback over a lifetime and continuously experiment with new roles may eventually stop reinventing themselves or even abandon entrepreneurship. Such longitudinal predictions are interesting and warrant future research.

The overall societal impact of entrepreneurial passion type and role identity management requires multilevel analysis. Individuals' obsessive passion and inability to change roles may inhibit the impact of entrepreneurial activities on innovation, economic growth, and prosperity. By contrast, we suggest that harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs are more likely to create more ventures and drive their growth, thereby creating new jobs, introducing new business forms and products, and shifting the wealth creation curve of the economy (see Acs, 2010). In line with recent empirical research showing that work passion influences performance depending on the fit with certain aspects of the environment (Astakhova & Porter, 2015), we encourage future research attention on passion, feedback, and macro-level performance, accounting for potential cultural differences.

Furthermore, we acknowledge that entrepreneurs have non-entrepreneurial role identities that may be more salient at certain times and can influence their identity work and subsequent activity engagement. Our definition implies that harmoniously passionate entrepreneurs should experience less conflict with other aspects of their life than obsessively passionate ones (see Vallerand et al., 2003). Such conflict would intensify when entrepreneurs are obsessively passionate about all three entrepreneurial roles—that is, about their entrepreneurial identity as a whole—at the expense of other non-entrepreneurial roles. Research on work–life balance shows that high engagement in a work role reduces engagement in a family role, decreasing conflict and strain (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Is the reverse true (see Lazarova et al., 2010)? We encourage future research on the joint effects of entrepreneurial passion type and non-entrepreneurial role identities on entrepreneurial identity reconstruction processes and activity engagement.

Our dynamic process model can also inform entrepreneurial practice and training. Recognizing that identity traps can inhibit an entrepreneur's performance, educators might focus on developing the self-awareness and emotional intelligence of potential and active entrepreneurs, so that they can synchronize their passion with the changing demands of their ventures. Some entrepreneurs would doubtless require coaching to perceive, understand, and regulate obsessive passion and identity coaching to move effectively among the various role



identities. Coaching practices should differ depending on the entrepreneurs' experience and demonstrated performance. Serial entrepreneurs, drawing on their past experience, might be more open to feedback and coaching. Nascent entrepreneurs may require more directive coaching to learn how to manage their entrepreneurial identity and adjust their passion focus to the venture's demands.

## 4 | CONCLUSION

While most successful entrepreneurs are passionate individuals, our proposed theoretical model suggests that their overall performance depends on the way they focus their passion and manage their role identities over time. We encourage scholars to move beyond examining the particular actions entrepreneurs take as inventors, founders, and developers in isolation and to address how transitions among these roles are influenced by harmonious or obsessive entrepreneurial passion and performance feedback. Returning to the question "Why do some passionate entrepreneurs achieve greater success than others?", we propose that part of the answer lies in whether or not their passion enables them to respond effectively to feedback and manage their entrepreneurial identity.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Charalampos Mainemelis for insightful feedback on earlier drafts, as well as Melissa Cardon and two anonymous reviewers for their extremely constructive guidance throughout the review process. We presented a previous version of this work at the 2013 Academy of Management annual meeting and the 2017 ESMT OB Mini-Conference. This research was partially funded by State Research Agency (AEI)-10.13039/501100011033 grant no. PID2019-108043GA-I00.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The dichotomous achievement motivation model (i.e., approach vs. avoidance motivation; Atkinson, 1964) is distinct from the trichotomous framework of achievement goals (i.e., mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals; Elliot, 1999). Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, examining the effects of passion type and approach/avoidance tendencies on entrepreneurs' adoption of achievement goals regarding their focal (see Elliot, 1999; Vallerand et al., 2007) and new roles and, in turn, on entrepreneurial performance over time may be an interesting line of future research. We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, however, the ideas generated in her book *Thrive: The Third Metric of Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder*, published in 2014, were exploited through the founding of Thrive Global in 2016, a media consulting company that offers solutions to manage stress and burnout.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/remyblumenfeld/2019/09/29/turn-failures-into-successes/?sh=165188b77033>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2020/01/15/how-arianna-huffington-the-meryl-streep-of-businesswomen-is-transforming-americas-workplace/?sh=de5b41b3bb40>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8250qwlT9rw>. Similarly, Schulte-Holthaus and Kuckertz's (2020) qualitative research described successful passionate musicians who became fascinated by the intersection of music and technology and purposefully refocused their artistic identity to found several digital technology start-ups. As one of their participants remarked, "the management of a passion you pursue professionally should not be underestimated" (Schulte-Holthaus & Kuckertz, 2020, p. 1347).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/10/business/10corner.html>, "Good C.E.O.'s Are Insecure (and Know It)," *The New York Times*, Oct. 9, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.virgin.com/branson-family/richard-branson-blog/doubt-kills-more-dreams-failure>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thecut.com/2017/02/when-passion-becomes-destructive.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.leadersleague.com/en/news/walt-disney-overcoming-adversity-with-passion>

<sup>8</sup> The exceptions are in Portugal. See <https://seehowitisdone.com/what-is-it-and-how-to-get-to-the-nearest-mercadona-how-can-i-find-out-where-mercadona-is-closest-to-me/>

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**How to cite this article:** Kakarika, M., Biniari, M., Guillén, L., & Mayo, M. (2022). Where does the heart lie? A multistage process model of entrepreneurial passion and role identity management. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 43(9), 1562–1578. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2605>