

**International Journal of Teaching and Case Studies**

ISSN online: 1749-916X - ISSN print: 1749-9151

<https://www.inderscience.com/ijtcs>

---

**"Somehow I made it a force". How a disabled entrepreneur leveraged his self-identity in the workplace as a competitive advantage?**

Catherine Lejealle, Julien Billion

**DOI:** [10.1504/IJTCS.2024.10063026](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTCS.2024.10063026)

**Article History:**

Received:	30 August 2023
Last revised:	01 September 2023
Accepted:	18 September 2023
Published online:	21 March 2024

## **“Somehow I made it a force”. How a disabled entrepreneur leveraged his self-identity in the workplace as a competitive advantage?**

---

Catherine Lejealle\* and Julien Billion

ISC Paris,  
22 Boulevard du Fort de Vaux,  
75017 Paris, France  
Email: clejealle@iscparis.com  
Email: jbillion@iscparis.com  
\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** This case study delves into the achievements of Medhi, a disabled entrepreneur who has defied the odds to succeed. In 2022, driven by the desire to empower others, Medhi sought to comprehend the key factors contributing to his own success. This investigation primarily centres on the effectual decision-making processes employed by the disabled entrepreneur, as well as the development of his self-identity within the workplace. This case study highlights how a disabled entrepreneur can transform his disability into a competitive advantage through the shrewd management of his self-identity. By exhibiting flexibility in how his self-identity is perceived across varying contexts, Medhi adeptly navigates these dimensions. He strategically chooses when to disclose or conceal his disability, thus leveraging it to his advantage. The findings of this research offer practical and social implications for entrepreneurs who diverge from the conventional able-bodied archetype.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship; effectuation theory; disability; resources; self-identity at work.

**Reference** to this paper should be made as follows: Lejealle, C. and Billion, J. (2024) “Somehow I made it a force”. How a disabled entrepreneur leveraged his self-identity in the workplace as a competitive advantage?, *Int. J. Teaching and Case Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp.240–255.

**Biographical notes:** Catherine Lejealle holds a PhD in Sociology (Paris Sorbonne University). As a Professor and researcher at ISC, her field of interests are adoption of innovative technologies from consumers and brands. She is the author of peer-to-peer research articles and books in journal such as *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, *Innovation2*, and *Journal of Knowledge Management*.

Julien Billion holds a PhD in Sociology (EHESS), PhD in Management Sciences (Institut Polytechnique de Paris), and Habilitation in Management Sciences (Institut Polytechnique de Paris). As a Professor and researcher at ISC, he specialises in the areas of social innovation and social entrepreneurship. He is the author of articles, books, and documentaries in these fields. Notably, his work has been published in reviews such as the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, and *Management International*.

---

## **1 Introduction**

According to INSEE (2014), approximately 10% of individuals aged 20 or older residing in the Paris area report feeling disabled. Despite this prevalence, people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to accessing the job market. This leads to a dual marginalisation, where they encounter challenges both in securing employment and within the workplace itself (Revillard, 2019). Entrepreneurship emerges as a viable solution for individuals with disabilities, offering a pathway to personal autonomy and growth by tapping into their skills and potential through the establishment of their own professional endeavours. Creating one’s own business not only opens doors to employment opportunities but also fosters financial independence, breaks barriers in career advancement, fosters societal integration, and facilitates personal fulfilment.

Entrepreneurship acts as a source of inclusion and, importantly, can foster feelings of pride, esteem, dignity, and recognition for disabled individuals. Access to employment and entrepreneurship enhances the scope of individual agency, enabling them to exercise greater control over their own professional pursuits and lives. Furthermore, when entrepreneurs employ other individuals, regardless of their disability status, they actively contribute to the local, national, and potentially international economies.

Medhi, a 32-year-old French entrepreneur with a motor disability, faced the task of constructing a self-identity within his work environment, where his disability assumed a central role. By 2022, Medhi aspired to be inspirational for many people and present a distinct perception of disability, deviating from the prevailing societal understanding. He needed to understand the key factors of his success.

## **2 Conceptual background**

### *2.1 Effectuation theory*

Sarasvathy (2004) places the entrepreneur at the core of the entrepreneurial process, challenging the prevailing focus of current theories that solely link entrepreneurial success to the success of the company. Such an approach is deemed illogical for three key reasons: first, existing company-centric theories fail to distinguish between the entrepreneur and the business entity; second, they oversimplify the entrepreneur’s objectives, overlooking the diversity of motivations driving entrepreneurial actions; and third, these theories rely on assumptions of opportunities being present at both the individual and business levels of analysis. In contrast, effectuation theory introduces an alternative perspective, recognising the significance of unpredictable factors, particularly during the inception of a business. This theory proves valuable in problem-solving when the future is uncertain, objectives remain indefinite or unknown, and the business environment is intricately intertwined with the decisions made by the entrepreneur (Sarasvathy, 2001). Effectuation entrepreneurs demonstrate a preference for imaginative fiction over analytical forecasting, utilising creative thinking to transform existing information into new and innovative possibilities. By embracing the principles of effectuation, entrepreneurs are better equipped to navigate the intricacies of an unpredictable business landscape and discover novel avenues for success.

Sarasvathy (2008) outlines five fundamental principles of the effectuation theory. The first principle centres on leveraging available resources as the starting point for

entrepreneurial action, wherein entrepreneurs use their means to create new opportunities and outcomes. Instead of relying on predictions, effectuation begins with what is currently at hand. The second principle is that of acceptable losses, which empowers entrepreneurs to assess and determine the level of risk they are willing to bear when making decisions about their envisioned business. By embracing acceptable losses, entrepreneurs reduce their dependence on uncertain predictions, allowing for more proactive and adaptive decision-making. The third principle emphasises the significance of strategic partnerships. Effectuation highlights the role of forming alliances and committing to relationships as effective ways to mitigate and even eliminate uncertainty in the entrepreneurial process. This approach stands in contrast to the traditional emphasis on systematic competitive analysis. The fourth principle involves the exploitation of contingencies. In contrast to causal models, which seek to avoid or mitigate unexpected events or deviations from predetermined goals, effectuation takes advantage of contingencies as potential avenues for innovative solutions and opportunities. The fifth principle centres on non-predictive control of the future. While causation emphasises predicting and planning for the foreseeable aspects of an uncertain future, effectuation focuses on exerting control over the aspects of the future that can be influenced and shaped, even in the face of unpredictability.

Dew et al. (2009) present findings from an empirical investigation involving interviews with experts in entrepreneurship and M.B.A. students. The study illustrates that entrepreneurial experts employ the principles of effectuation in their decision-making processes. Specifically, they exhibit a reduced reliance on predictive information and prioritise resource-related considerations instead.

Numerous independent studies, apart from Sarasvathy's work, further substantiate the significance of the effectuation theory. Parris and McInnis-Bowers (2014) exemplify this by examining social enterprises in their research, revealing how these ventures align with the principles of effectuation. Entrepreneurs employing effectuation principles challenge established norms and initially identify accessible resources. In the context of the examined company, the entrepreneurial process initially adheres to a causation paradigm but subsequently transitions to an implementation paradigm. During this shift, the primary focus changes from profit-seeking to advancing the organisation's social mission, driven by the motivation to address societal issues.

Werhahn et al. (2015) delve into the notions of individual-level and company-level perspectives by conducting an extensive literature review, pre-tests, and two studies focused on German companies. They propose that at the corporate level, effectuation can be regarded as a strategic orientation that embodies a mindset fostering entrepreneurial behaviours among employees. Within this context, effectuation serves as a guiding principle driving the organisation's overall direction. On the other hand, at the individual level, effectuation empowers individuals to adapt effectively to swift and dynamic changes prevalent in competitive business environments. It equips them with the tools and approaches to navigate uncertainty and achieve success amidst challenging circumstances.

Ye (2016) investigates the impact of effectuation on entrepreneurship, specifically taking into account the perspective of experimental biases. His research reveals that effectuation can yield adverse outcomes, as entrepreneurs may display limited commitment and make ineffective decisions, leading to the destruction of value rather than its creation. Despite these drawbacks, Ye acknowledges the potential potency of

effectuation, as it motivates entrepreneurs to capitalise on available opportunities in their ventures.

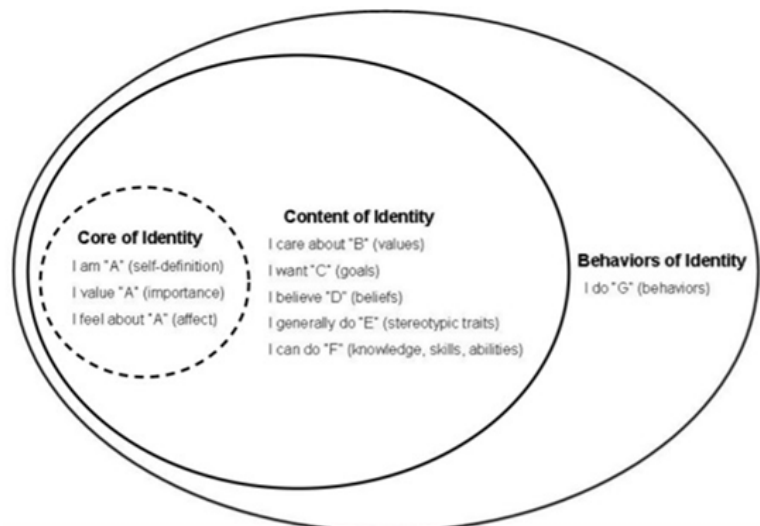
Sarasvathy’s effectuation theory places the entrepreneur at the forefront of the entrepreneurial journey, enabling the recognition of their distinct characteristics and resources, particularly when these attributes are unique, as exemplified by disabled entrepreneurs. The theory highlights the significance of tapping into the entrepreneur’s identity and personal capabilities to identify resources. In this context, the entrepreneur’s identity can serve as a vital asset in the entrepreneurial process. By and large, “*in the effectuation theory, the individual identity is traditionally perceived as one of the given pre-conditions or means which initiates the entrepreneurial process*” [Nielsen and Lassen, (2012), p.374].

## 2.2 Self-identity theory

Self-identity has garnered considerable attention not only among entrepreneurs but also within the realms of human resource and management research. Recently, there has been a growing fascination with self-identity due to its significant role in elucidating organisational commitment and success (Afshari, 2023). Researchers have identified self-identity as a prominent factor influencing various organisational outcomes, with particular emphasis on its strong positive impact on companies’ performances (Lee and Rees, 2020). Identity refers to

“The meanings that individuals attach reflexively to their selves as they seek to answer questions such as: How shall I relate to others, hat shall I strive to become and how will I make the basic decisions required to guide my life” [Brown, (2015), p.21]. People experiment with “possible selves” (Markus and Nurius, 1986), “potential selves” (Gergen, 1972) and “provisional selves” (Ibarra, 1999) before they claim a specific identity through rhetorical constructions (Coupland and Brown, 2012).

**Figure 1** Identification process



Source: from Ashforth et al. (2008)

According to Ashforth et al. (2008), identities can be understood as the integration of perceived characteristics of individuals and the perceived characteristics of the target, such as an organisation. This process of identity identification is visualised in Figure 1, wherein Ashforth et al. depict a continuum ranging from a narrow formulation (core of identity) to a broader formulation (behaviours of identity), with the content of identity positioned in between these two extremes.

Previous research asserts that individuals' social identities manifest in the form of self-narratives (Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991), which may occur as internal soliloquies or interactions with others (Beech, 2008). Consequently, researchers can capture self-identities through discursive conversations and the wide range of narratives that individuals provide (Brown and Toyoki, 2013). As a result, the framework proposed by Ashforth et al. (2008) can be enriched and supplemented with narratives gathered from interviews with individuals, allowing for a deeper understanding of identity processes and dynamics.

### *2.3 Self-identity for entrepreneur*

Identity is closely intertwined with one's affiliation to a particular profession or organisation (Müller, 2017; Vlachopoulos et al., 2011). Positive identification occurs when there is a strong alignment between an individual's self-concept and the attributes associated with the target entity, be it a profession, organisation, or other context. This alignment fosters a coherent and well-defined sense of self (Afshari, 2023). Additionally, entrepreneurial self-identity is not a fixed and rigid essence but rather a dynamic and evolving concept that changes over time and in different contexts (Down, 2006). Identities are not static; they are actively shaped and influenced by ongoing interactions with others (Coupland and Brown, 2012). Giddens (1991) points out that self-identity is constructed and organised through both intra – and interpersonal interactions. As such, one's identity as an entrepreneur is shaped and developed in relation to broader social structures, encompassing various settings, such as small Canadian towns (Anderson et al., 2019).

For entrepreneurs and company founders, self-identity plays a crucial role due to its significant impact on the success of their ventures. Scholars have utilised the concept of self-identity to study entrepreneurs (Anderson and Warren, 2011; Down, 2006; Down and Warren, 2008; Watson, 2009). In the examination of entrepreneurship portrayals, masculine traits are also emphasised (Nicholson and Anderson, 2005). Entrepreneurial myth remains resolutely male (Hamilton, 2014). This entrepreneurial myth persists predominantly as a male norm often depicted with a heroic representation (Anderson and Warren, 2011). But researchers have delved into the challenges faced by entrepreneurs who do not fit the conventional white Caucasian male stereotype (Ahl, 2005; Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Essers and Benshop, 2017; Hamilton, 2014; Reveley and Down, 2009). Gender, ethnicity and age have been studied but not disability. Our aim is to elucidate how an entrepreneur with disabilities will cope with it, make it a central aspect of his identity and a valuable asset in his interactions with others.

## **3 Company background – Medhi's business**

The best introduction to Medhi is by himself. He used to present himself as:

“I am a 32 year-old entrepreneur. I have a master degree in human resources. I began entrepreneurship through his mother’s association. I lectured on the professional integration of people with disabilities in France and Morocco, notably at the World Human Rights Forum in Marrakech, in front of 7,500 people. This experience led me to my entrepreneurial idea in 2013. Afterwards, to go from the idea to the project is a job”.

Upon enrolling in a Master’s program, Medhi became a member of a pre-incubator located in Nanterre, which provided comprehensive instruction on fundamental business principles, effective working methodologies, and networking techniques. In 2017, he achieved recognition by securing an entrepreneurship prize for his project, which bolstered his visibility in the field. However, despite these accomplishments, he encountered a sense of stagnation in France concerning opportunities for entrepreneurs with disabilities. Medhi perceived a lack of receptiveness and attention towards this segment of entrepreneurs. Consequently, he sought new avenues and ventured to Morocco. Additionally, during his stay in Morocco, a fellow entrepreneur recommended that he apply to the prestigious Station F incubator in France, renowned as the largest startup campus globally. This suggestion remained etched in Medhi’s memory as a pivotal moment in his entrepreneurial journey:

“And that really advanced my entrepreneurial adventure. That’s what really started even though I already had my prototype when I arrived”.

As a point of comparison, Medhi recounted the tale of one of his acquaintances and his twin brother, both of whom suffer from the same medical condition and share disabilities. Surprisingly, despite their similar circumstances, their experiences in the job market differ significantly. While the twin brother has managed to secure employment, Medhi’s friend has encountered persistent challenges in finding a job, persisting for nearly a decade. This situation prompted Medhi to recognise the need for proactive intervention. Drawing on his proficiency in human resources, as he explained, he resolved to create a job opportunity specifically tailored to accommodate his friend’s abilities and aspirations:

“I had to use my solution to help all the other people who were disabled or do not to find work because I also come from the suburbs and there are a lot of mostly able-bodied people who are part of my community and who have a hard time finding a job. My company will allow people to find work or to find people who will help them to improve their skills”.

As an entrepreneur, Medhi exhibited a unique and remarkable perspective regarding his disability. Rather than perceiving it as a hindrance, he embraced it as a compelling marketing asset when engaging with his clients. He confidently asserted that his disability empowered him to enhance his clients’ brand image and improve their market positioning. Moreover, Medhi firmly believed that obtaining the adapted company approval, a distinctive classification in France that mandates the employment of at least 80% disabled workers, would unlock significant tax benefits for his clients. This conviction underlined the tangible advantages that an adapted company status could offer to businesses. He concluded by:

“Somehow I made it a force. I did not receive any income associated with his entrepreneurial activity yet. However, I consider himself at an advantage, since I’ve received social assistance. I have the right to the disabled adult allowance, I have the right to all social aids because we are in a country where social protection is very good. I’m a bit of an entrepreneur who is lucky when I look

around, because I don't have to worry about how I am going to eat tomorrow. It is just that today, in fact, my lifestyle is normal, it hasn't changed."

He reached the conclusion that residing in France, a nation that provided him support and well-established social protection, represented an advantageous opportunity. Furthermore, he expressed perplexity over the limited presence of entrepreneurs with disabilities. In fact, he believed that the entrepreneurial risks for individuals with disabilities are comparatively lower than those faced by able-bodied individuals.

He stated that being a disabled entrepreneur could play a pivotal role in fostering a positive shift in the perception of disability within the realm of entrepreneurship. He confidently asserted the following:

"Disability is a good excuse. I have several examples in mind but as people with disabilities can swim and get married, so why can not they be entrepreneurs? I think that there are not enough people like me, who can be identified as entrepreneurs with disabilities. I would like future parents on the verge of having a disabled child to think: if Medhi is successful, then my daughter or my son can also be. We're kind of like laboratory rats. Yeah, you have to show us a bit and everything."

He experienced considerable concern as he felt the need to demonstrate his ability to work on par with able-bodied individuals. Additionally, he provided examples of other entrepreneurs with disabilities whose businesses were related to disability, and they claimed to possess legitimacy in their ventures. However, he, personally, took pride in being endorsed by two prominent corporations, Randstad and L'Oréal, as it signified his achievement of establishing legitimacy in his own entrepreneurial pursuits.

If his disability facilitated obtaining funds and access to subsidies, it likely played a significant role in shaping his identity in the workplace. The narratives surrounding his entrepreneurship provided valuable insights into the extent to which his disability influenced the overall process. Medhi also highlighted adverse aspects associated with his disability:

"I am a start-upper. That is why I am where I am today because I have to be able to do all the appointments, etc. beyond just having the idea. Indeed, we have made good progress. I think that I constantly have to demystify it in front of other able-bodied people. I need to re-educate people every time, to educate people about the fact that we can do things, to show that we are like everyone else. The difficulties I may encounter are more in relation to my partners or my future partners or the people who will see me arrive and the stereotypes they have. My potential partners also often assume that my entrepreneurial activities are disability-oriented. There is a whole logic to deconstruct, there is a whole thing to explain to them so yeah the difficulty, it is for example for the communication of what we do".

Medhi's company, HandyCatch (Appendix 1), has developed a mobile application that facilitated job searches for people and provided coaching to enhance their skills. However, there was a potential issue with the name 'HandyCatch' as it could be interpreted ambiguously. 'Handy' in English suggests practicality, but 'handi' could also be associated with 'handicap,' leading to potential misunderstandings. When Medhi personally met and introduced his company to others, the presence of his wheelchair could create biased perceptions. However, when he sent a sales representative to promote the product on his behalf, the same individuals might not raise the same questions,



resulting in a different impact on their perception of the company. As Medhi summarised it: ‘*In fact my job today is to show that we are like everyone else*’.

Towards the conclusion of 2022, Medhi endeavoured to assess his accomplishments in the context of guiding fellow disabled individuals towards entrepreneurship. He sought to examine the initial steps he took and the significance of his self-identification as a disabled person in this journey. In order to inspire others, he recognised the necessity of comprehending, from a theoretical standpoint, the factors contributing to his achievements thus far.

#### 4 Questions of the issues

Based on a disabled-entrepreneur’s success and wish to understand this success in order to help others, the following questions help solve the case. Each question corresponds to the mentioned learning objective as follows:

- Q1 By employing the effectuation theory, identify the resources that Medhi, utilised during the inception of his business venture.
- Q2 Applying the Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley identification process, analyse how Medhi constructed his self-identity within his work environment. Examine the role his disability played in shaping and influencing this development.
- Q3 Analysing how he manipulates his self-identity within the given context, asserting it when advantageous and concealing it when it presents a disadvantage.

#### References

- Afshari, L. (2023) ‘Identification through meaning-making: identity enactment towards organisational commitment’, *Human Resource Development International*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp.1–22.
- Ahl, H. and Marlow, S. (2012) ‘Exploring the dynamics of gender, feminism and entrepreneurship: advancing debate to escape a dead end?’, *Organization*, Vol. 19, No. 5, pp.543–562.
- Ahl, H.J. (2005) ‘The construction of the female entrepreneur as the other’, in *Casting the Other*, pp.64–71, Routledge, London.
- Anderson, A.R. and Warren, L. (2011) ‘The entrepreneur as hero and jester: enacting the entrepreneurial discourse’, *International Small Business Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 6, pp.589–609.
- Anderson, A.R., Warren, L. and Bensemann, J. (2019) ‘Identity, enactment, and entrepreneurship engagement in a declining place’, *Journal of Small Business Management*, Vol. 57, No. 4, pp.1559–1577.
- Ashforth, B.E., Harrison, S.H. and Corley, K.G. (2008) ‘Identification in organizations: an examination of four fundamental questions’, *Journal of Management*, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp.325–374.
- Beech, N. (2008) ‘On the nature of dialogic identity work’, *Organization*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp.51–74.
- Brown, A.D. (2015) ‘Identities and identity work in organizations’, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp.20–40.
- Brown, A.D. and Toyoki, S. (2013) ‘Identity work and legitimacy’, *Organization Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 7, pp.875–896.
- Coupland, C. and Brown, A.D. (2012) ‘Identities in action: processes and outcomes’, *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp.1–4.

- Dew, N., Read, S., Sarasvathy, S.D. and Wiltbank, R. (2009) 'Effectual versus predictive logics in entrepreneurial decision-making: differences between experts and novices', *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp.287–309.
- Down, S. (2006) *Narratives of Enterprise: Crafting Entrepreneurial Self-Identity in a Small Firm*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Camberley.
- Down, S. and Warren, L. (2008) 'Constructing narratives of enterprise: clichés and entrepreneurial self-identity', *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp.4–23.
- Essers, C. and Benschop, Y. (2007) 'Enterprising identities: female entrepreneurs of Moroccan or Turkish origin in the Netherlands', *Organization Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp.49–69.
- Gergen, K.J. (1972) 'Multiple identity: the healthy, happy human being wears many masks', *Psychology Today*, Vol. 5, No. 12, pp.31–35.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late. Modern Age*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Hamilton, E. (2014) 'Entrepreneurial narrative identity and gender: a double epistemological shift', *Journal of Small Business Management*, Vol. 52, No. 4, pp.703–712.
- Ibarra, H. (1999) 'Provisional selves: experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4, pp.764–791.
- INSEE (2014) *Les Personnes En Situation De Handicap En Ile-De-France*, Rapport.
- Lee, Y.S. and Rees, C.J. (2020) 'Perceptions of organization development in South Korea: the use of a sensemaking approach', *Human Resource Development International*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp.238–258.
- Mallett, O. and Wapshott, R. (2015) 'Making sense of self-employment in late career: understanding the identity work of old entrepreneurs', *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 2, pp.250–266.
- Markus, H. and Nurius, P. (1986) 'Possible selves', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 41, No. 9, pp.954–969.
- Müller, M. (2017) 'Long lost: the emotional side of identification – complementing SIT with psychoanalytic insights', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp.3–16.
- Nielsen, S.L. and Lassen, A.H. (2012) 'Identity in entrepreneurship effectuation theory: a supplementary framework', *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp.373–389.
- Parris, D.L. and McInnis-Bowers, C.V. (2014) 'Social entrepreneurship questioning the status quo: waste as a resource', *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp.359–366.
- Reveley, J. and Down, S. (2009) 'Stigmatization and self-presentation in Australian entrepreneurial identity formation', in *The Politics and Aesthetics of Entrepreneurship*, Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Revillard, A. (2019) *Handicap Et Travail*, Presses de Sciences Po, Paris.
- Ricoeur, P. (1991) 'Narrative identity', *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp.73–81.
- Sarasvathy, S.D. (2001) 'Causation and effectuation: toward a theoretical shift from economic inevitability to entrepreneurial contingency', *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp.243–263.
- Sarasvathy, S.D. (2004) 'Making it happen: beyond theories of the firm to theories of firm design', *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Vol. 28, No. 6, pp.519–531.
- Sarasvathy, S.D. (2008) 'Effectuation', *Elements of Entrepreneurial Expertise*, Edward Elgar, Northampton.
- Sarasvathy, S.D. (2009) *Effectuation: Elements of Entrepreneurial Expertise*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton.
- Vlachopoulos, S.P., Kaperoni, M. and Moustaka, F.C. (2011) 'The relationship of self-determination theory variables to exercise identity', *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp.265–272.

- Watson, T.J. (2009) ‘Entrepreneurial action, identity work and the use of multiple discursive resources: the case of a rapidly changing family business’, *International Small Business Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp.251–274.
- Werhahn, D., Mauer, R., Flatten, T.C. and Brettel, M. (2015) ‘Validating effectual orientation as strategic direction in the corporate context’, *European Management Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 5, pp.305–313.
- Ye, Q. (2016) ‘Effectual approaches and entrepreneurship outcome: from a perspective of behavioural biases’, *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 28, No. 5, pp.401–411.

## Appendix 1

HandyCatch introduces a highly innovative approach by establishing direct communication between clients and employers. The primary aim is to foster a unique form of proximity and enhance integration opportunities. This application represents a modern job board, leveraging geolocation and video technologies to connect job seekers directly with potential employers. Additionally, it offers access to coaching and training services and facilitates the organisation of job events in a swift manner. The ultimate goal is to combat unemployment, precarious work situations, and social exclusion by simplifying the understanding of the employment process and by surmounting obstacles through skill enhancement. Notably, the platform incorporates a video tool that improves the quality of job applications for clients. Furthermore, geolocation features allow users to instantly view the location of employers and identify nearby physical or virtual events related to employment opportunities.

## Teaching note

### *1 Synopsis of the case*

Medhi is a remarkable entrepreneur who faces the challenge of a motor disability. His entrepreneurial endeavour aims to create job opportunities that benefit all job seekers. His unique situation as a disabled entrepreneur is characterised by a positive outlook on his disability, and he seeks to leverage it as a competitive marketing advantage for his clients. Despite receiving social assistance, he considers himself successful and believes that his status as a disabled entrepreneur can positively influence the perception of disability within the entrepreneurship realm. However, Medhi encounters misconceptions from others, particularly able-bodied individuals and potential partners, who often assume that his entrepreneurial activities are disability-focused. He feels compelled to continually demystify his disability and emphasise his capacity to enhance his clients’ brands. For the year 2022, he wants to help other individuals, whether disabled or not, by understanding the key elements that contributed to his success and reflecting on how these insights can inspire and assist others. The case study employs effectuation and self-identity theories to structure Medhi’s introspective thoughts and identify patterns that can be valuable in aiding others. By leveraging these theoretical frameworks, Medhi aims to offer insights into his journey, offer guidance to others, and foster a positive impact on the lives of individuals facing similar challenges or aspirations in entrepreneurship.

## *2 Teaching objectives and target audience*

Learning outcomes have been explained at the beginning of the case. This case targets both undergraduate and postgraduate students who are studying entrepreneurship. It centres around the conceptual frameworks of effectual logic, which are fundamental for entrepreneurship students, and emphasises the importance of self-identity as a prerequisite for these concepts. Self-identity, particularly in the context of work, represents a crucial topic that all students must thoroughly comprehend.

The case focuses on three key learning objectives, as highlighted by the three questions presented earlier. It can be used in two ways: either as an individual examination or as part of a class activity. If used in a class setting, students should be divided into groups of no more than four members. They are then tasked with collectively discussing the questions using the materials provided in the case and relevant literature. Through this interactive approach, students will be able to engage in deeper analysis, exchange ideas, and draw insights from both the case study and existing academic resources. They can develop a comprehensive understanding of these critical concepts, preparing them for their future roles as entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial-minded professionals.

## *3 Teaching approach and board plans*

This case study serves as an ideal foundation for students to explore the concepts of effectuation theory and self-identity within the context of a disabled entrepreneur, seldom addressed in educational settings. It offers novel insights to foster a comprehensive discourse on the self-identity of entrepreneurs who do not conform to the conventional archetype of abled-bodied entrepreneurs. By applying classroom-based theories to an authentic real-world scenario, the case study actively encourages active participation in the learning process.

Whenever feasible, the classroom setup should consist of desks arranged in a semicircle or a similar configuration, facilitating face-to-face interaction and collaborative work in small groups. This arrangement will enhance the ease of direct exchange of views among students. To initiate the teaching process with this case study, students are requested to read it either at the beginning of the class or before the session, depending on the tutorial's duration. Prior to delving into the discussion, the lecturer should provide a brief 5- to 10-minute introduction to the case. This introduction should emphasise that the entrepreneur possesses certain means at their disposal while venturing into a business endeavour and underscore the significance of self-identity as a valuable resource in this context.

After the introduction, the lecturer may divide the class into teams comprising three to five students, considering the total number of students present. Each team should engage in discussions and provide summaries of their responses to the questions presented in the case study. One representative from each team will be chosen to present their team's summary to the entire class. Over the next two hours, a student will be randomly selected to present the case study and the various answers to the questions. Another student will be designated to lead and encourage debate among the class, while

simultaneously noting interesting ideas that emerge on the board. Throughout the session, the teacher’s role is to supervise the course’s progress, highlight important theoretical and practical concepts, and actively participate in the discussions by generating interactions, posing questions, and providing insights into specific queries. The lecturer should guide the discussion beyond mere listing of solutions and encourage students to explore their personal interests in comprehending the effectuation theory and the self-identity model as they relate to their future endeavours. To conclude the session, the lecturer might consider either having students report back in their groups or individually, summarising what they perceive as the main learning outcomes from the session. Additionally, students could be asked to take a few minutes to express their own thoughts about the key points raised in the case. An essential aspect of the conclusion is to have students assess the case’s usefulness in their studies, which aids in their self-assessment of learning progress. This interactive and participatory approach to teaching the case study fosters collaborative learning, encourages critical thinking, and empowers students to apply the theories to their own professional aspirations.

#### *4 Analysis and conclusion*

Students ought to be provided reassurance in the event of their responses exhibiting some variation. The notion of a single definitive solution is not applicable in this context. As long as their answers remain pertinent to the information presented in the case, they are deemed entirely acceptable. The case serves as a starting point to initiate discussions pertaining to the primary concerns highlighted within. Nonetheless, students are encouraged to engage in thoughtful contemplation concerning a real-life scenario that bears relevance to the central character and the prevailing circumstances. In particular, their responses to the posed questions should take into account the following point:

Q1 By employing the effectuation theory, identify the resources that Medhi, utilised during the inception of his business venture.

Medhi’s entrepreneurial journey can be described as effectuation. Instead of being driven by specific goals, he relied on his imagination and dreams while taking decisive actions. His approach was pragmatic as he utilised available resources to grow his business. He possessed various resources, including academic and professional qualifications, holding a master’s degree, and acquiring complementary skills in human resources. Integration into incubators helped him further enhance his skills. The strategic location of his business in the Ile-de-France region, a significant economic territory in France and Europe, contributed to its development. Medhi’s pragmatism was evident in his problem-solving approach, addressing real needs and finding solutions based on his abilities and competencies. His personal attributes played a crucial role; he exhibited reactivity, determination, creativity, and a strong passion for social justice. When faced with resistance, he demonstrated adaptability by changing the orientation of his business and even relocating to a different country. Furthermore, Medhi adeptly navigated his environment, leveraging both his family’s resources and actively creating opportunities. Through these experiences and encounters, he moulded his entrepreneurial identity, refining his resources and skills along the way.

**Table A1** Medhi's identification process

<i>Core of identity</i>	<i>Content of identity</i>	<i>Behaviours of identity</i>
"I am an entrepreneur"	"I also come from the suburbs and there are a lot of mostly able-bodied people who are part of my community and who have a hard time finding a job"	"In fact my job today is to show that we are like everyone else"
"I am a start-upper"	"Somehow I made it a force"	"I had to use my solution to help all the other people who were disabled or do not to find work"
"I found that there were a lot of concerns and that there were things that I could solve with my skills"	"I am a bit of an entrepreneur who is lucky when I look around, because I do not have to worry about how I'm going to eat tomorrow. It is just that today, in fact, my lifestyle is normal, it has not changed"	"We're kind of like laboratory rats. Yeah, you have to show us a bit and everything"
"I have the right to the disabled adult allowance, I have the right to all social aids because we are in a country where social protection is very good"	"The difficulties I may encounter are more in relation to my partners or my future partners or the people who will see me arrive and the stereotypes they have"	"My company will allow people to find work or to find people who will help them to improve their skills"
	"To re-educate people every time, to educate people about the fact that we can do things"	"That is why I am where I am today because I have to be able to do all the appointments, etc. beyond just having the idea"
	"To show that we are like everyone else"	"Indeed, we have made good progress"

Medhi effectively utilised his available resources to establish networks and form numerous partnerships with various entities, including associations, companies, and public authorities. He capitalised on his cultural background and family connections to forge connections. Expanding his network across two countries, France and Morocco, he leveraged maternal networks to promote both himself and his venture, HandyCatch, ultimately leading to the formation of partnerships. As a lecturer, Medhi strategically positioned himself, gaining visibility, which significantly expedited the process of building partnerships with companies. Additionally, he successfully established partnerships through the support and affiliation with two incubators that backed his business. Winning an award and receiving collective recognition through constructive communication further strengthened his contacts and reputation, facilitating valuable political and business partnerships. As a result of these strategic collaborations, his company experienced accelerated development and growth.

Q2 Applying the Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley identification process, analyse how Medhi constructed his self-identity within his work environment. Examine the role his disability played in shaping and influencing this development.

Using Ahforth, Harrison and Corley’s identification process, Medhi’s narratives are displayed in Table 1.

Medhi’s narratives, as depicted in Table 1, unambiguously illustrate how his disability constituted the central aspect of his identity. He delineated his self-concept and business endeavours in relation to his disability, drawing comparisons with ‘able-bodied’ individuals to elucidate how he transformed it into a driving force. Furthermore, the name of his company, HandyCatch, bears a dual reference, symbolising both his handicap and the practical accessibility of his products or services. Medhi exhibited a multifaceted identity, embodying various roles simultaneously. He as not only a man and an entrepreneur but also an individual living with a disability.

Q3 Analysing how he manipulates his self-identity within the given context, asserting it when advantageous and concealing it when it presents a disadvantage.

Table 2 presents Medhi’s exact statements concerning his self-identity in various situations. Depending on the situation, he openly embraced his disabled self-identity, while on others, he concealed it.

**Table A2** Medhi’s narratives context-related

<i>Context</i>	<i>Disabled self-identity is claimed</i>	<i>Disabled self-identity is hidden or rejected</i>
To get entrepreneur help when starting his business		To join Station F main French incubator
To get disabled allowances and awareness at public events	To be part of the lecture at the World Human Rights Forum in Marrakech  To get allowances granted to persons with a disability	
To convince potential partners		Medhi struggles to explain that his disability do not slow his business and that he leads a normal life => regarding his ability to work  He has to explain that his entrepreneurial activity is NOT disability-oriented. Partners assume so => regarding his company

Table 2 elucidates the advantages and disadvantages associated with Medhi’s disability in the establishment and growth of his business. By leveraging his disability as a unique selling point, he set himself apart from potential competitors. Consequently, partner companies were motivated to collaborate with him, as his disability became a compelling marketing and communication asset. This strategic advantage provided him access to crucial resources, such as the Station F incubator, which played a pivotal role in the development of his business.

In spite of all, his disability also presented obstacles. He encountered stereotypes and faced challenges in establishing a positive reputation within collective perceptions. Due to societal biases, he was not automatically viewed as a model of social and economic success. To overcome these preconceptions, Medhi had to demonstrate exceptional skills and capabilities, showcasing that he could perform on par with able-bodied individuals in the field of entrepreneurship. Medhi pursued entrepreneurial ventures beyond the disability market, where he could be seen as more credible and legitimate. He had to work harder to prove his competence and establish his authenticity as an entrepreneur.

From the perspective of his company, there seemed to be a fusion between the product offered and the concept of disability. Effective and transparent communication played a pivotal role in elucidating the nature of the product and services provided. He demonstrated adaptability by making necessary adjustments to his offerings in response to varying circumstances and adeptly capitalised on diverse environments, encounters, and opportunities that came his way. Through a combination of resourceful tinkering and astute manoeuvring, he skilfully navigated the entrepreneurial landscape to maximise the potential of his business. He demonstrates strategic thinking, where his identity becomes an integral part of his business development strategy. Accordingly, he skilfully navigates different contexts by manipulating and expressing his identity in diverse ways to suit the situation.

## **Feedback**

The case has undergone rigorous testing and has proven to be a valuable teaching tool for postgraduate programs in entrepreneurship. Its versatility extends beyond entrepreneurship programs, making it suitable for other fields of study, including Master's degrees in enterprise and innovation, as well as enterprise and services marketing. Additionally, the case can be effectively utilised in Executive/MBA courses and with doctoral students. Given its adaptability and depth of content, the case holds potential for various instructional approaches. It can serve as a basis for written assessments, examinations, role-playing exercises, and other educational purposes. Its broad applicability and capacity to stimulate critical thinking make it an excellent resource for fostering learning and facilitating discussions across different educational contexts.

The feedback received from the students can be divided into two main aspects. Firstly, the students displayed positive and enthusiastic responses towards comprehending the connection between entrepreneurship and disability. Secondly, the topic of minorities had a profound impact on them, particularly given that a considerable number of students in the classes were of African descent. During the discussions, they made connections between the experiences shared by the entrepreneurs and their own personal experiences.

## **Epilogue**

One year later, Medhi provided us with an update:



“I am becoming what I always wanted to be, that is, a person who sets up a project and becomes the project of others. My goal is for the people around me to take ownership of the project, its social utility and its impact. Basically, I just become a person who has passed on his vision to others. My team grows while at the beginning I was alone with one co-founder. Today there are about ten people working on the project every day and making it evolve. I do not have dreams, I only have goals. When people see me on the street, they think I need help. When people see me at Station F, they see me as an entrepreneur. I wish people would stop limiting us and boiling us down to our condition and let us tell our story. That is it. By helping anyone willing to start a company, I make my disability a force. I try to coach people and be an inspirational driver. If I’ve done it, why cannot they do it too”.