Journal of Business Research 188 (2025) 115078

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Business Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jbusres

Exploring my entrepreneurial self at work: How entrepreneurial identity aspiration influences employee intrapreneurial behaviors and work performance

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Employee intrapreneurial behavior
Entrepreneurial identity aspiration
Entrepreneurial self-efficacy
Organizational identification
Work performance

ABSTRACT

Aspirations to be an entrepreneur inspire individuals to take action and engage in new venture creation. It is unclear, however, how these entrepreneurial aspirations might influence individuals working as employees in traditional jobs. We draw from theory on possible selves to predict that entrepreneurial identity aspiration motivates employees to engage in intrapreneurial behaviors within their organizations, subsequently increasing their work performance. Additionally, we argue that individuals' organizational identification and their entrepreneurial self-efficacy will strengthen the relationship between their entrepreneurial identity aspiration and their engagement in intrapreneurial behaviors at work. Results from two studies largely support our predictions.

1. Introduction

Although stories of young entrepreneurs launching successful business ventures make popular headlines in the media, prior research indicates that most entrepreneurs work as paid employees before launching new business ventures (e.g., Sørensen & Fassiotto, 2011). Scholars suggest that those who wish to become entrepreneurs in the future undergo a journey where their identity as an entrepreneur must be formed, and that this journey typically begins while the aspiring entrepreneur is employed (Ireland & Webb, 2007). For instance, studies show that upwards of 90 % of entrepreneurs have worked as paid employees prior to founding a company (Burton et al., 2002; Gompers et al., 2005) and that 40 % of current employees actively contemplate becoming an entrepreneur sometime in the future, a figure that is even higher for younger workers.[1] Recognizing this, scholars acknowledge the importance of studying employees' entrepreneurial identity aspirations (EIAs), which reflect their desire to become entrepreneurs in the future (Farmer et al., 2011; Gregori et al., 2021; Seibert et al., 2021). While we know that EIA drives important behaviors related to employees transitioning from paid employment to launching new business ventures (e.g., Farmer et al., 2011; Seibert et al., 2021), Paterson et al. (2023) highlight that we still know relatively little about how EIA might influence employees' work performance at their current organization.

Understanding the link between EIA and employee outcomes is crucial because there is a growing sentiment that individuals with a proclivity toward entrepreneurship may not be a good fit within established organizations (Feng et al., 2022; Kacperczyk & Younkin, 2022; Waddingham et al., 2024). For example, managers and recruiters tend to assign negative evaluations to individuals with prior entrepreneurial experience (Botelho & Chang, 2023; Mahieu et al., 2021). Yet, research also finds that entrepreneurial individuals are passionate and imaginative (Kier & McMullen 2018; Murnieks et al., 2016) and ostensibly coachable (Ciuchta et al., 2018), which are all valued in paid employment. Given that there is often a significant lag between entrepreneurial aspirations and actually starting a new business venture (e.g., Kwong & Thompson, 2016; Van Gelderen et al., 2015), we contend that such individuals could engage in workplace behavior that produces meaningful benefits for their current organization. Thus, despite the negative preconceptions that exist about individuals who harbor entrepreneurial desires, we ask: can an employee's aspiration to be an entrepreneur in the *future* still produce benefits for their organization in the *present*? Said otherwise, does EIA elevate employee productivity?

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[1] https://www.northone.com/blog/small-business/entrepreneur-statistics;https://www.cnbc.com/2023/10/31/50percent-of-gen-z-wants-to-ditch-corporate-jobs-run-their-own-business-says-report.html.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115078
Received 20 March 2024; Received in revised form 21 October 2024; Accepted 17 November 2024
Available online 25 November 2024

To investigate the connection between EIA and employee work performance, we draw from theory on possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). According to this theory, identity aspirations are powerful drivers of identity-relevant behaviors because they represent who individuals want to be and how they can get there, motivating individuals to experiment with desired possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). In fact, the views individuals have about their "future selves" operate as a key source of information for construing current situations and determining their present actions (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Those seeing themselves as entrepreneurs in the future likely engage in behaviors to help them realize this aspiration in the present. Following this logic, we argue that EIA will prompt employees to engage in and experiment with employee intrapreneurial behaviors (EIBs) – individual-level behaviors and actions where workers in organizations proactively engage in the creation and development of opportunities at work (Blanka, 2019; de Jong et al., 2015) – because paid employees who aspire to become entrepreneurs desire an avenue to explore this entrepreneurial identity before committing to it full time (e.g., Fachin & Davel, 2015; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Paterson et al., 2023). Employees' experimentation with an entrepreneurial identity through EIBs could help their current organization as they discover creative solutions, recognize new work efficiencies, and improve products and services (Gawke et al., 2017; Kotlar & Sieger, 2019; Sieger et al., 2013). During this phase of identity exploration, we propose that EIBs will lead to higher levels of work performance, facilitating a positive indirect effect of EIA on work performance.

Additionally, identity aspirations are only one piece of an individual's view of themselves. Self-concepts are comprised of multiple self-views, including both current and aspired identities and abilities (Gore & Cross, 2014). Current selves provide an important context which permeates the enactment of possible selves because the futures people envision for themselves are informed, restricted, and enabled by their current self-views (Cameron, 1999). Given our focus on current employees who have entrepreneurial aspirations, we propose that this facilitative effect of EIA on EIBs will be moderated by two current self-views: organizational identification, an individual's perceived "oneness with, or belongingness to, an organization where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization in which he or she is a member" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992: 105), and entrepreneurial self-efficacy, an individual's self-confidence in his or her ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks successfully (Newman et al., 2019). Both organizational identification and entrepreneurial self-efficacy are connected to the literature on self-concepts and possible selves (e.g., Cliff, 2022; Robinson et al., 2003), which form the theoretical backbone of our model. While organizational identification speaks to the extent to which their self-concept is intimately connected to their current organization, entrepreneurial self-efficacy addresses individuals' beliefs in their entrepreneurial capabilities. Thus, our research leverages an opportunity to better understand the role of employees' future-oriented entrepreneurial self-views in conjunction with current work-related self-views to provide key insights and boundary conditions associated with the effects of employees' EIA on organizationally-desirable behaviors. We present our theoretical model in Fig. 1.

Our research contributes to entrepreneurship and organizational research in several ways. First, we contribute to the identity literature by extending research on EIA beyond behaviors and outcomes related to new business creation (Farmer et al., 2011; Seibert et al., 2021). Rather than focusing on how employees leave organizations to start new ones, we both extend and answer the call from Paterson et al. (2023) to examine how EIA can influence employee behavior and performance within their current careers at their current organizations. With scholars' overriding focus on how EIA ignites actions tied to starting new business ventures (e.g., Seibert et al., 2021), we lack theoretical explanations for how EIA might actually benefit organizations during employee identity exploration (Paterson et al., 2023). We extend possible selves and EIA theory by revealing additional ways through which employees can experiment with and embody possible entrepreneurial identities within the bounds of their existing organizations without having to leave to start a new company, which has yet to be explored in extant work (e.g., Farmer et al., 2011; Seibert et al., 2021). Second, there is a lack of research surrounding why EIA might benefit current organizational outcomes. Extant research on possible selves links career aspirations to individual-oriented behaviors like career planning and network building (Strauss et al., 2012). This limits our understanding of the range of effects career aspirations, like EIAs, might have on a myriad of behaviors. Our theorizing attempts to correct this by elucidating EIB as an important mechanism that explains how EIA strengthens employees' work performance. This is important because it extends theory on possible selves beyond individual-oriented behaviors to organizationally-relevant ones. By providing a more holistic comprehension of the interplay between employees' envisioned career-oriented identities and their current work-related outcomes, we offer an important counterpoint to managers and recruiters who unfairly penalize individuals with entrepreneurial aspirations and experiences (e.g., Botelho & Chang, 2023; Kacperczyk & Younkin, 2022; Waddingham et al., 2024). We also answer the call from intrapreneurship scholars to provide specific explanations for why certain individual employees are motivated to contribute to intrapreneurial activities that benefit their firms (e.g., Blanka, 2019; Gawke et al., 2019). Lastly, scholars have called for research to consider multiple self-views (Nielsen & Gish, 2023; Ramarajan, 2014), and address questions regarding how current and future work-related self-views may interact to impact employee outcomes. We advance knowledge related to theory on possible selves by considering individuals' aspirations in tandem with their current self-views (i.e., organizational identification and entrepreneurial self-efficacy) to develop generative insights into the dynamic

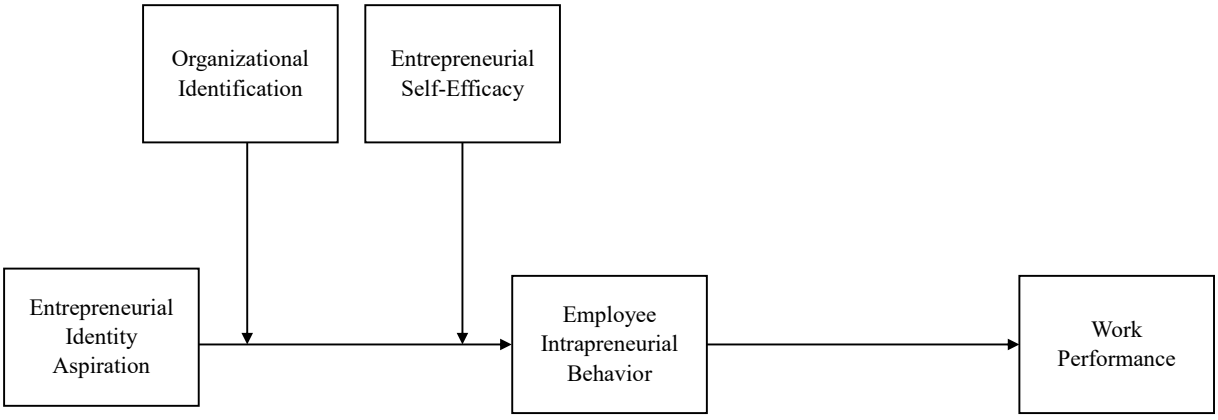

Fig. 1. Theoretical model.

nature of how individuals' self-views, both current and aspired, work together to drive identity-relevant behaviors. This offers important boundary conditions for our theorizing concerning the relationships between EIA, EIB, and work performance.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Employee intrapreneurial behavior

Intrapreneurship – a growing area of interest for entrepreneurship scholars (Amo, 2010; Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003; Blanka, 2019; Gawke et al., 2019; Hernández-Perlines et al., 2022) – refers to the study of employees' entrepreneurial behavior within existing organizations. This differs from other related concepts such as corporate entrepreneurship or corporate venturing because it focuses on entrepreneurial behavior at the individual level, whereas these related concepts focus on innovation situated at the organizational level (e.g., Dess et al., 2003; Kuratko & Audretsch, 2013). While extant research confirms the general benefits of intrapreneurship for organizational-level outcomes such as corporate entrepreneurship and firm performance (e.g., Antoncic, 2007; Bierwerth et al., 2015; Hernández-Perlines et al., 2022; Sieger et al., 2013), researchers argue specific examinations of how intrapreneurship impacts employee outcomes need more attention (e.g., Amo, 2010; Blanka, 2019; Gawke et al., 2018).

Additionally, scholars have identified a number of antecedents of employee intrapreneurial behaviors (e.g., Blanka, 2019; Martiarena, 2013). While this extant research has primarily concentrated on organizational (e.g., management support, resource availability, reward systems) and contextual (e.g., industry, organization type, national characteristics) factors that promote EIBs (Bouchard & Basso, 2011; Brundin et al., 2008; de Jong et al., 2015; Kotlar & Sieger, 2019; Kuratko et al., 2005), scholars have started to reorient their attention on the intraindividual antecedents of these behaviors (Camelo-Ordaz et al., 2012; Muhammad et al., 2016; Parker, 2011). For example, demographic traits (e.g., education; Urbano & Turro, 2013), personality traits (e.g., extraversion; Sinha & Srivastava, 2013; Woo, 2018), and other individual differences (e.g., persistence, risk-taking, proactive motivation; Camelo-Ordaz et al., 2012; Gorgievski et al., 2023) have been studied as antecedents of EIBs. Despite this increased attention on the drivers of EIBs, little is known about the cognitive and identity factors that motivate employees to behave in an intrapreneurial manner. Indeed Blanka's (2019) review concludes that the most prevalent theoretical perspectives being employed to explain EIBs involve theories on intention, social capital and networking, human capital, and social learning (e.g., Ajzen, 1985; 1991; Bandura, 1986; Bicknell et al., 2010). However, given the growing prominence of identity theories (e.g., Mmbaga et al., 2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021) and identity aspiration theories in particular in predicting entrepreneurial behavior (e.g., Paterson et al., 2023; Siebert et al., 2021), we seek to broaden and extend intrapreneurship research by taking a possible selves theoretical approach to focus on employees' entrepreneurial identity aspirations as drivers of their engagement in intrapreneurial behaviors. By focusing on EIBs, we answer calls from scholars to investigate the specific mechanisms through which employees' entrepreneurial desires can influence organizationally-relevant outcomes (e.g., Amo, 2010; Gawke et al., 2018).

2.2. Entrepreneurial identity aspiration and employees' intrapreneurial behaviors at work

Identity aspirations represent individuals' possible selves, which are cognitive self-concepts that contain an individual's desired self-view and plans to obtain it (Cropanzano et al., 1993; Farmer et al., 2011). Possible selves represent who an individual could become as opposed to who that individual currently is, and extant research argues that they are distinct from current selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The construction of the desired self-view and plan to obtain it provide the formation of "a bridge of self-representation between one's current state and one's desired or hoped for state" (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989: 211). Possible selves are important because they individualize future hopes and goals; they take abstract dreams such as "people can become entrepreneurs," and personalize them so that the individual envisions what it would be like to view themself as an entrepreneur (e.g., Markus & Nurius, 1986). Like current identities, these possible selves guide and adjust behavior so that individuals can achieve their aspirations or assess progress in becoming who they aspire to be (vanDellen & Hoyle, 2008). In fact, aspirations towards possible selves help people select identity-relevant behaviors designed to gather information through experimentation and to experience what it would be like to actually be that desired self (Ibarra, 1999). As such, these aspirations are powerful drivers of identity-relevant behaviors. One aspiration that has recently been explored in the literature involves one's ambitions to become an entrepreneur: entrepreneurial identity aspiration (EIA; Farmer et al., 2011; Seibert et al., 2021). Scholars find that EIA leads to engagement in nascent start-up behaviors as a strategy for realizing a desired entrepreneurial identity.

However, starting a new business is not the only path for individuals to behave entrepreneurially; employees can also engage in, and experiment with, entrepreneurial behaviors within their existing organizations (i.e., EIBs; de Jong et al., 2015; Gawke et al., 2017; Sieger et al., 2013). These EIBs, though often overlooked in official statistics of entrepreneurship, are an important type of entrepreneurial action related to the discovery and exploitation of new ideas and opportunities that can benefit an existing organization (Hornsby et al., 2009; Sieger et al., 2013). They typically include employees being proactive, innovating, and taking risks to advance the competitive posture of one's organization through actions such as identifying new means to generate new businesses or reconfigure existing ones (Kotlar & Sieger, 2019; Sieger et al., 2013). Moreover, they often involve proactive attempts to support and stimulate other employees in engaging in entrepreneurial activities as well as the generation of novel ideas for new product development, process improvements, and work-role innovations (de Jong et al., 2015; Kotlar & Sieger, 2019). EIBs pioneer and prompt organizational change (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005), and tend to be the "means through which corporate entrepreneurship is actually practiced and put into action" (Kotlar & Sieger, 2019: 253).

In line with theory on possible selves, we argue that EIBs are important because they serve as an alternative pathway for employees who are aspiring entrepreneurs to begin experimenting with and obtaining their desired entrepreneurial identity (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). Paid employees who think they want to become an entrepreneur need an avenue to experiment with and realize this desired identity because behavioral experimentation is an important step in pursuing possible or desired identities (e.g., Ibarra, 1999). This alternative avenue is especially important given that not all aspiring entrepreneurs decide to start their own businesses (Van Gelderen et al., 2015). These individual-level intrapreneurial behaviors allow employees that already have established careers to still find a way to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations. Thus, given that possible selves are powerful drivers of identity-relevant behaviors, we argue that EIA is an important driver of EIBs for paid employees. Stated formally:

Hypothesis 1. *Entrepreneurial identity aspiration has a positive effect on employee intrapreneurial behaviors.*

2.3. Employee intrapreneurial behaviors and work performance

The effects of employees' EIAs on their intrapreneurial behaviors at work can impact their work performance. That is, we suggest employees' intrapreneurial behaviors mediate an indirect effect of EIA on individual work performance. EIBs are key drivers of competitiveness

and organizational-level performance (Antoncic, 2007; Bierwerth et al., 2015; Hornsby et al., 2002). They include increased work effort geared towards innovating, being proactive, and taking risks to identify and capitalize on new products and processes (de Jong et al., 2015; Junker et al., 2022; Kotlar & Sieger, 2019; Sieger et al., 2013). Through these intrapreneurial behaviors, employees find innovative solutions, generate and exploit new ideas, and increase valuable resources that promote higher levels of employee work engagement, all of which can enhance employees' work performance (de Jong et al., 2015; Gawke et al., 2017; Kotlar & Sieger, 2019). Moreover, as employees with entrepreneurial aspirations experiment with the entrepreneurial identity and engage in intrapreneurial behaviors at work, their work becomes more congruent with their career (entrepreneurial) aspirations, which can boost work performance (Nye et al., 2017; Nye et al., 2018). Since these intrapreneurial behaviors can improve unit functioning and corporate performance (Hornsby et al., 2009), they are often viewed as pro-organizational and are valued by management (Eddleston et al., 2012; Moriano et al., 2014). Therefore, we argue that this increased effort geared towards finding solutions and improving one's work because of one's EIA will lead to increased levels of work performance. Stated formally:

Hypothesis 2. *Employee intrapreneurial behaviors lead to increased work performance.*

Hypothesis 3. *Entrepreneurial identity aspiration has a positive indirect effect on work performance via employee intrapreneurial behaviors.*

2.4. The moderating role of organizational identification

Thus far we have focused on the influence employees' possible selves might have on their engagement in intrapreneurial behaviors. However, individuals' identities are comprised of both current and aspired self-views, and as such, their behaviors are also impacted by their current self-views (Cameron, 1999). Individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups, such as the organizations for which they work (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Considering this and given our focus on how employees' aspirations for a different work role (i.e., entrepreneurship) affect their behavior in their current organization, it is pertinent to examine the extent to which employees' identities are also linked to their current organization. This extent to which one's identity is attached to their organization is reflected in their level of organizational identification (Ashforth et al., 2008; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Organizational identification is a salient and meaningful social identity that represents the degree to which employees define themselves in terms of their organizational memberships, ultimately reflecting a convergence of organizational and individual identities (Galvin et al., 2015; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). It occurs when individuals align their goals and self-views with those of their organization, promoting a desire to stay within their organization and engage in mutually beneficial work behaviors (Ashforth et al., 2008). Indeed, prior research finds that employees who strongly identify with their organizations actively seek ways to exert extra effort in actions that contribute to organizational success (Bartel, 2001; Greco et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2015). Therefore, we suggest that when employees identify strongly with their organization, they will be more likely to channel their entrepreneurial aspirations into proactive work behaviors that benefit their organization, such as EIBs (Gawke et al., 2018).

According to theory, individuals can choose to neglect behaviors directed towards attaining a possible self if those actions are not congruent with other important aspects of one's self-concept (Oyserman & James, 2011). However, individuals also strive to embrace the different aspects of their self-concepts to create synergistic relationships between their existing and aspired identities. In fact, Jiang et al. (2024) show that when aspiring entrepreneurs experience conflict between their aspired entrepreneurial identity and other existing identities, they navigate this perceived identity conflict through experimentation with their aspired entrepreneurial identity in a manner that allows them to embrace and hold on to other aspects of their self-concept. We suggest that EIBs allow employees to engage in such an experimentation with the aspired entrepreneurial identity while being able to do so within the boundaries of their current organization where part of their existing identity is already attached. Therefore, we argue that organizational identification strengthens the positive relationship between EIA and EIBs. Indeed, possible identities are more influential in motivating identity-relevant behavior when they are congruent with other important social identities (Oyserman & James, 2011). Even though EIA represents a specific possible work-self that can motivate employees to engage in new venture creation behaviors (Farmer et al., 2011; Seibert et al., 2021), when this aspired entrepreneurial identity conflicts with strong organizational identification, the aspiring entrepreneur may be less inclined to leave their current organization to start their own venture (Jiang et al., 2024; Oyserman & James, 2011). We suggest that employees experiencing this conflict will engage in more EIBs as a means to seek congruency with their entrepreneurial aspirations while still maintaining their organizational ties. This congruence helps employees perceive alignment between their EIBs, their entrepreneurial aspirations, and their commitment to their current organization. Stated formally:

Hypothesis 4. *Organizational identification moderates the positive effect that entrepreneurial identity aspiration has on employee intrapreneurial behaviors, such that it will be stronger for employees with higher levels of organizational identification.*

2.5. The moderating role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy

It is also important to examine one's aspired entrepreneurial self in tandem with their current self-views related to their beliefs in their ability to perform the behaviors associated with that aspired entrepreneurial self, as the motivational power of possible selves is also determined by individuals' beliefs in their ability to perform the roles and tasks associated with their desired possible selves (Oyserman & Horowitz, 2023; Oyserman & James, 2011). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy represents these competence-based self-views that an individual can perform the necessary tasks and behaviors associated with the entrepreneurial role (Chen et al., 1998; Newman et al., 2019). Following theory on possible selves, individuals' efficacious beliefs can be particularly influential "to the extent they are linked to specific, clearly envisioned possible selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986: 961). That is, self-efficacy that is tied to a specific envisioned possible self can be particularly influential in strengthening individuals' motivations to act in a manner that is congruent with their desired possible self (Hooker & Kaus, 1994 Oyserman & Horowitz, 2023). Thus, we chose to examine entrepreneurial self-efficacy as a moderator because it is uniquely specific to the possible entrepreneurial self. Because we focus on studying employees' desires to be an entrepreneur, we consider it pertinent to also include their beliefs in their entrepreneurial capabilities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the link between EIA and EIB.

Although some studies posit that entrepreneurial self-efficacy drives EIA, scholars are quick to point out this data is primarily correlational in nature, and that the complex relationships here need further exploration. (Gregori et al., 2021; Pfeifer et al., 2016). Scholars have called for more research examining the interaction between the two to provide a more holistic understanding of how they work together to drive entrepreneurial action (Pfeifer et al., 2016). Indeed, possible selves become even more relevant for motivating individuals' current actions when the efficacious beliefs related to their ability to perform the roles and tasks associated with their desired possible selves are high (Oyserman & Horowitz, 2023; Oyserman & James, 2011). Thus, "possible selves influence behavior and beliefs not entirely by themselves, but through the evaluations we make regarding our abilities to achieve or avoid them" (Dark-Freudeman & West, 2016: 141). That is, the outcomes individuals

imagine for themselves in relation to their possible selves are informed and empowered by their current perceptions of their abilities to be that possible self (Cameron, 1999; Oyserman & Horowitz, 2023). Empirical evidence supports this notion, as studies show that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy regarding specific possible selves engage in more behaviors associated with that possible self (Black et al., 2001; Hooker & Kaus, 1994). This underscores that when self-efficacy is tied to a specific possible self, it can be especially influential in enhancing the relationship between individuals' possible selves and their engagement in behaviors that are relevant to that desired possible self (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Horowitz, 2023). Therefore, we argue that the belief in one's abilities to perform the tasks associated with an entrepreneurial identity can serve as a key catalyst that helps translate entrepreneurial aspirations into action (e.g., Ajzen, 2002; Bandura, 2012). In line with the literature on possible selves, we contend that the positive effect of EIA on EIBs will be stronger for employees who feel efficacious about their entrepreneurial capabilities. Stated formally:

Hypothesis 5. *Entrepreneurial self-efficacy moderates the positive effect that entrepreneurial identity aspiration has on employee intrapreneurial behaviors, such that it will be stronger for individuals with higher levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy*.

As articulated in the previous sections, we argue that EIA enhances work performance through EIBs. Furthermore, we predict increased engagement in EIBs from the positive interactions between EIA, organizational identification, and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. As such, we expect both organizational identification and entrepreneurial self-efficacy to strengthen the indirect effect of EIA on an individual's work performance, via EIBs. Stated formally:

Hypothesis 6a. *The indirect effect of entrepreneurial identity aspiration on work performance through employee intrapreneurial behaviors is moderated by organizational identification, such that the indirect effect is stronger when organizational identification is high than when it is low*.

Hypothesis 6b.. *The indirect effect of entrepreneurial identity aspiration on work performance through employee intrapreneurial behaviors is moderated by entrepreneurial self-efficacy, such that the indirect effect is stronger when entrepreneurial self-efficacy is high than when it is low*.

3. Methods

3.1. Overview of studies

We conducted two studies to test our hypotheses. In Study 1, we examined the direct and indirect relationships within our model (Hypotheses 1–3) using a cross-sectional study of full-time employees to develop an understanding of the core theorized relationships in our paper. Then, in Study 2, using a sample of sales workers in the field, we conducted a time-lagged study to replicate and extend the mediation model by examining organizational identification and entrepreneurial self-efficacy as boundary conditions (Hypotheses 4–6).

3.2. Study 1 sample and data collection

We collected data from full-time employees recruited via Prolific Academic, an online data collection platform (Palan & Schitter, 2018).[2] We took several steps in our research design, as recommended by Aguinis et al. (2021), to enhance the scientific validity of our Prolific sample. We pre-screened participants to recruit full-time employees who were over the age of 18, from English speaking countries, and had an 80 % or higher approval rate on Prolific (e.g., Windeler et al., 2017; Zhong et al., 2021). Of the 355 employees that we distributed the survey to, 351 responded and provided usable data (response rate of 98.87 %). On average, respondents were 38 years of age (SD = 10.96), and 56 percent were female. Additionally, participants worked across several broad industries, such as business management and administration (14.81 %), hospitality and tourism (13.68 %), finance (38.46), legal (7.12 %), marketing and sales (10.54 %), and other (15.38 %). Additionally, predictor and response variables were separated in the survey to mitigate participants' ability to rely on prior questions to influence subsequent responses (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Lastly, we assured anonymity, urged honest responses, and used attention check items (Aguinis et al., 2021).

3.2.1. Study 1 measures

3.2.1.1. Entrepreneurial identity aspiration. We assessed EIA using Farmer et al.'s (2011) six-item scale. One example item is, "It is important for me to express my entrepreneurial aspirations.".

3.2.1.2. Employee intrapreneurial behaviors. We assessed EIBs using Sieger et al.'s (2013) six-item measure of individual-level entrepreneurial behavior to capture employees' intrapreneurial behaviors within their existing organizations (i.e., intrapreneurship; Pinchot, 1985). One example item is, "I devote time to help others find ways to improve our products and services.".

3.2.1.3. Work performance. Work performance was measured using a four-item task performance scale (Harris et al., 2014; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). One example item is, "I met performance expectations.".

3.2.1.4. Controls. We included several controls to help rule out alternative explanations and to increase the predictive validity of our hypothesized results. We controlled for work tenure (years), sex, age (years), and educational level as these variables may be related to EIA, entrepreneurial behaviors, and work performance (de Jong et al., 2015; Farmer et al., 2011; Hochwarter et al., 2000). We controlled for

[2] Prolific is a widely used and valid tool for data collection due to its reliability, with frequent use in organizational research (e.g., Call et al., 2021; Ong & Johnson, 2023). Prolific is an online platform for recruiting participants to take part in paid research studies and has been used by researchers worldwide (Palan & Schitter, 2018). In addition to providing access to demographically diverse participants that are less familiar with common research tasks and therefore less susceptible to demand biases, the platform also provides a pool of participants from diverse organizations and industries, thus increasing the generalizability of findings across different contexts (Peer et al., 2017; Yao et al., 2022). Research notes that participants on Prolific produce high-quality responses (Peer et al., 2017). Indeed, the data collected from online recruitment services like Prolific have "similar psychometric properties and produce criterion validities that generally fall within the credibility interval of existing *meta*-analytic results from conventionally sourced data" (Walter et al., 2019: 425). Moreover, the data gathered from online panels tend to encompass representative and experienced samples (Aguinis et al., 2021; Porter et al., 2019).

entrepreneurial experience by asking participants how many business ventures they had started (Delmar and Shane, 2006; Uy et al., 2013). We also controlled for additional entrepreneurial exposure by asking participants whether a parent or anyone else they knew had ever started their own business (Peterman & Kennedy, 2003).

3.2.2. Study 1 tests of measurement models

Prior to testing our hypotheses, we conducted a set of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to examine the fit of our proposed three-factor model and compared it with several alternative measurement models. To assess the validity of our proposed measurement model, we performed a series of CFAs using the lavaan package in R programming (version 4.1.2; Rosseel, 2012) and model fit recommendations from Hu and Bentler (1999). The CFA results revealed that our hypothesized three-factor model produced acceptable fit: χ^2 (101) = 316.96 (p <.001), CFI =.96, TLI = 0.96, IFI = 0.96, RMSEA =.08, SRMR = 0.04. This model fit better than (1) a two-factor model that combined EIA and EIB χ^2 (103) = 1748.96, CFI = 0.73, TLI = 0.68, IFI = 0.73, RMSEA = 0.21, SRMR = 0.19; (2) a two-factor model that combined EIB and work performance χ^2 (103) = 1547.22 (p <.001), CFI =.76, TLI = 0.72, IFI = 0.76, RMSEA =.20, SRMR = 0.17; and (3) a single-factor model χ^2 (104) = 2992.41, CFI = 0.52, TLI = 0.45, IFI = 0.53, RMSEA = 0.28, SRMR = 0.25. Thus, we proceeded to test our hypotheses. Factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extracted for each key latent construct are reported in Table A in the Appendix.

3.2.3. Study 1 analytical approach and hypotheses testing

The data were analyzed using regression and causal mediation analyses (Imai et al., 2010) in R programming with the mediation package (Hamrick et al., 2023; Müller & Niessen, 2019; Tingley et al., 2014). Causal mediation analysis allows for the simultaneous testing of direct and indirect effects. Following Hayes (2009), all estimates were based on 20,000 bootstrapped samples and we provide a 95 % confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effects.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and correlations of the constructs and variables used in this study. Table 2 reports the regression results. Hypothesis 1 stated that EIA would have a positive effect on EIB. Results support this hypothesis, showing a positive effect of EIA on EIB (b = 0.29, p < 0.001). Hypothesis 2 stated that EIB will lead to increased work performance. We found that EIB had a positive effect on work performance (b = 0.13, p < 0.001), supporting Hypothesis 2. We next examined the indirect effect of EIA on work performance via EIB using 20,000 bootstrapped samples (Tingley et al., 2014). Supporting Hypothesis 3, the indirect effect of EIA on work performance via EIB was positive and significant (b = 0.04, p < 0.001, 95 % confidence interval (CI) [0.02, 0.06]). As a robustness test, we included organizational citizenship behavior directed towards the organization (OCB-O) to operationalize work performance and found consistent results (e.g., Vleugels et al., 2018).

3.3. Study 2 sample and data collection

Although Study 1 provided support for our hypothesized direct and indirect effects, it had two limitations. First, the study was cross-sectional and contained only self-report data. Second, although we relied heavily on theory to support the direction of our hypotheses, causality could not be inferred from the cross-sectional data. In Study 2, we aimed to address these limitations using a time-lagged design in which we studied sales workers in the field and captured their objective sales performance. In addition to addressing these limitations and replicating our results, we sought to extend our findings by examining a moderated mediation model to investigate organizational identification and entrepreneurial self-efficacy as boundary conditions within our model and by including additional theoretically relevant covariates to further rule out alternative explanations for our results.

We conducted a time-lagged study with two waves of survey data collected two months apart and integrated this with 12 additional months of objective work performance data. Our sample consists of real estate salespeople (e.g., Macintosh & Krush, 2014) in the southeastern United States. Respondents were sourced from a professional contact within the top management team at a large real estate organization. This context is fruitful for several reasons. As Macintosh & Krush (2014) mention, real estate represents a large portion of sales careers. Previous studies in organizational research have recognized the utility of sampling real estate salespeople to garner insights on employee behavior (e.g., Chen et al., 2012; Lian et al., 2022). Additionally, as de Jong et al. (2015) emphasize, sales workers represent a good sample to test theory in employee intrapreneurship studies. Indeed, these sales employees are afforded great flexibility and autonomy in task performance and they "maintain external work contacts and have diverse networks, which have been associated with the discovery of opportunities (Shane, 2003) and innovation behavior (de Jong & den Hartog, 2010). They are also known for their strong need to conquer and risk acceptance to reach their targets (Mayer & Greenberg, 2006)" (de Jong et al., 2015: 987). Moreover, our pre-study discussions with the organization's top management team revealed that this context provides a great setting for investigating aspiring entrepreneurs because it is not uncommon for these employees to want to try and start their own real estate business in the future.

After receiving an email list for the employees from the organization, we administered online surveys using Qualtrics. A total of 834 sales employees received our Wave 1 online survey in which they were asked to complete questions about EIA, organizational identification, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, EIB, entrepreneurial experience, and other demographic information. Of those 834 employees, 375 completed this survey. We invited those 375 respondents to complete the Wave 2 survey about their EIBs. Then, we used company records to capture their sales performance for the subsequent 12 months, and matched that data to their survey responses. Our final sample consisted of 182 participants who completed both surveys and had performance data for the 12 months following the Wave 2 survey. The average age and organizational tenure of the participants were 51.07 years (SD = 12.96) and 8.11 years (SD = 8.73), respectively. Among the participants, 56.98 % were female.

3.3.1. Study 2 measures

All variables are identical to those used in Study 1, except for work performance and the addition of the moderators.

3.3.1.1. Organizational identification. We assessed organizational identification using Mael and Ashforth's (1992) six-item scale (e.g., Umphress et al., 2010). One example item is, "When I talk about [X Firm], I usually say 'we' rather than 'they.'".

3.3.1.2. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy. We assessed entrepreneurial self-efficacy using Zhao et al.'s (2005) four-item scale. One example item is, "I am confident in my ability to successfully identify new business opportunities.".

3.3.1.3. Work performance. We assessed work performance using objective raw sales data. Pre-study discussions with the organization's top management team indicated that the industry standard is to use employee sales volume to evaluate performance. Numerous studies attest to the utility of sales data as a valid metric of employee performance (e.g., Bluen et al., 1990; Dahling et al., 2016; Gupta et al., 2013; Robie et al., 2005). This performance data is a measure of individual productivity and goes beyond the usual supervisor reports of individual performance that are typically used. Additionally, this data represents a participant's performance for an entire year following survey completion. We also control for baseline performance levels of a participant's performance for the month preceding survey launch. This increases our

Table 1
Descriptive statistics, reliabilities and correlations (Study 1).

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1. Age	38.20	10.96									
2. Sex	1.56	0.51	−0.24								
3. Education	2.63	1.03	−0.12	0.07							
4. Tenure	7.31	7.94	0.56	−0.20	−0.14						
5. Ent. Experience	0.39	0.67	0.28	−0.07	0.05	0.09					
6. Other's Ent. Experience	0.82	0.74	−0.04	−0.01	0.02	−0.05	0.25				
7. EIA	3.32	1.82	0.03	−0.12	0.02	−0.03	0.38	0.23	**0.97**		
8. EIB	4.38	1.38	0.09	−0.19	0.07	0.07	0.27	0.12	0.44	**0.94**	
9. Work Performance	6.22	0.81	0.03	0.21	0.09	0.02	0.04	0.10	−0.03	0.14	**0.94**

Note. N = 351. All correlations greater than or equal to |0.12| are significant at $p < 0.05$. Alpha reliabilities are reported in bold. Ent = Entrepreneurial. Other's Entrepreneurial Experience is coded 1 = yes, knew a parent/someone else who started a business, 0 = no. Sex is coded 1 = male, 2 = female.

Table 2
Results of regression analysis (Study 1).

	Employee Intrapreneurial Behavior		Work Performance	
Variables	Coefficient		Coefficient	
Intercept	3.56	***	4.73	***
	(0.44)		(0.31)	
Age	0.00		0.01	
	(0.01)		(0.04)	
Sex	−0.36	**	0.40	***
	(0.13)		(0.09)	
Education	0.10		0.05	
	(0.06)		(0.04)	
Tenure	0.01		0.02	
	(0.01)		(0.01)	
Ent. Experience	0.23	*	−0.02	
	(0.11)		(0.07)	
Other's Ent. Experience	−0.01		0.12	*
	(0.09)		(0.06)	
Ent. Identity Aspiration	0.29	***	−0.05	*
	(0.04)		(0.03)	
Employee Intrapreneurial Behavior			0.13	***
			(0.03)	
F (df)	14.93 (7)	***	5.11 (8)	***
Mediation Test	Coefficient		CI Lower	CI Upper
EIA → EIB → Work Performance	0.04	***	0.02	0.06

Note. $N = 351$. Coefficients are unstandardized. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Ent = Entrepreneurial. Significance of indirect effects based on 20,000 bootstrapped samples. CI = 95 % Confidence Interval.
*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$ (Two-tailed).

ability to make causal inferences, reduces concerns about common method bias, and allows us to examine the performance implications of EIBs over an extended period of time (Johnson et al., 2011; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

3.3.1.4. Controls. In addition to the controls used in Study 1 (e.g., age, sex, tenure, etc.), and to rule out alternative explanations and more accurately isolate the effects of EIA on our variables of interest, we added several controls. On top of controlling for the employees' entrepreneurial experience and their exposure to other's entrepreneurial experience, we also controlled for the positiveness of these experiences (Peterman & Kennedy, 2003). Furthermore, we controlled for the baseline levels of EIB and work performance to help alleviate concerns regarding common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and to provide more rigorous evidence for the hypothesized direction and causal order of the model (e.g., Johnson et al., 2011; Lin et al., 2016).

3.3.2. Study 2 tests of measurement models

As in Study 1, prior to testing our hypotheses, we conducted a set of CFAs to examine the fit of our proposed five-factor model and compared it with several alternative measurement models. The CFA results revealed that our hypothesized five-factor model produced acceptable fit: χ^2 (340) = 742.39 ($p < .001$), CFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.89, IFI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.06. This model fit better than (1) a four-factor model that combined EIA and organizational identification χ^2 (344) = 1225.17, CFI = 0.79, TLI = 0.76, IFI = 0.79, RMSEA = 0.12, SRMR = 0.13; (2) a four-factor model that combined EIA and entrepreneurial self-efficacy χ^2 (344) = 1065.21, CFI = 0.82, TLI = 0.81, IFI = 0.83, RMSEA = 0.10, SRMR = 0.11; (3) a four-factor model that combined EIA and EIB (T2) χ^2 (344) = 1653.00, CFI = 0.68, TLI = 0.65, IFI = 0.68, RMSEA = 0.15, SRMR = 0.19; (4) a four-factor model that combined entrepreneurial self-efficacy and organizational identification χ^2 (344) = 996.88, CFI = 0.84, TLI = 0.83, IFI = 0.84, RMSEA = 0.11, SRMR = 0.09; and (5) a single-factor model χ^2 (350) = 2857.44, CFI = 0.39, TLI = 0.34, IFI = 0.39, RMSEA = 0.20, SRMR = 0.19. Thus, we proceeded to test our hypotheses. Factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extracted for each key latent construct are reported in Table A in the Appendix.

3.3.3. Study 2 analytical approach and hypotheses testing

To test our hypotheses, we employed the same analytical methods that were used in Study 1. Additionally, we specified a linear model using OLS regression to analyze relationships with the mediator (i.e., EIB) and we specified a generalized linear model (GLM) using Poisson regression to analyze relationships with the dependent variable (i.e., work performance) because GLMs account for limited dependent variables (e.g., count, multinomial, ordinal, and binary). Given that the dependent variable (i.e., work performance) is a count measure that takes only nonnegative integer values, a Poisson specified GLM is the appropriate analytic method (e.g., Friske & Zachary, 2019;

Schillebeeckx et al., 2019).[3] Overall, we analyzed four models. In Model 1 we included control variables and the independent variables (i.e., EIA and EIB). In Models 2 and 3 we added organizational identification, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and their related interaction terms independently to analyze the moderating effect of each moderator on the relationship between EIA and EIB, (e.g., Lam et al., 2017). In Model 4, we added both entrepreneurial self-efficacy and organizational identification (and their interactions) to test our moderating hypotheses using our full hypothesized model.

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and correlations of the constructs and variables used in this study. Table 4 reports the regression results. Hypothesis 1 stated that EIA would have a positive effect on EIB. Model 1 exhibited support for this hypothesis, showing a positive effect of EIA on EIB ($b = 0.08$, $p = 0.027$). Hypothesis 2 stated that EIB will lead to increased work performance. We found that EIB had a positive effect on work performance ($b = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 2.

We next examined the indirect effect of EIA on work performance via EIB using 20,000 bootstrapped samples (Tingley et al., 2014). Table 5 reports these indirect effects. Supporting Hypothesis 3, the indirect effect of EIA on work performance via EIB was positive and significant ($b = 0.22$, $p = 0.025$, 95 % confidence interval (CI) [.03, 0.47]). For the moderation hypotheses, we first tested the interaction effects on the mediator, as reported in Table 4. Results in Model 4 show a nonsignificant positive interaction between EIA and organizational identification in predicting EIB ($b = 0.03$, $p > 0.10$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is not supported. As for the moderating effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, results show a positive interaction ($b = 0.08$, $p = 0.011$), supporting Hypothesis 5. To facilitate interpretation, we plotted the interaction effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and EIA on EIB, as shown in Fig. 2.

Finally, we examined the conditional indirect effects using high (+1 *SD*) and low (–1 *SD*) levels of our moderators (Table 5). Given that we did not find support for organizational identification as a moderator, we were precluded from examining the conditional indirect effect involving organizational identification. Thus, Hypothesis 6a is not supported. In support of Hypothesis 6b, the indirect effect of EIA on work performance via EIB was stronger when entrepreneurial self-efficacy was high ($b = 0.44$, $p = 0.001$, 95 % CI [.15, 0.80]) than when it was low ($b = -0.01$, $p > 0.10$, 95 % CI [-0.30, 0.27]).

4. General discussion

Our research offers novel insights into the work-related implications of EIA by investigating how it shapes employees' entrepreneurial behaviors and subsequent work performance. Our studies show that (1) EIA is positively associated with employees' intrapreneurial behaviors at work; (2) EIBs are positively associated with work performance and facilitate an indirect effect of EIA on work performance; and (3) individuals' entrepreneurial self-efficacy strengthen these relationships.

Our work makes several important contributions to the literature. First, we contribute to organizational research by integrating theory in entrepreneurship and management to investigate the work-related implications of employees who are aspiring entrepreneurs. Extant research tends to ignore the influence of entrepreneurial identity aspirations on employee performance in traditional work contexts (Paterson et al., 2023). Our research extends extant work by showing that EIA can lead to behaviors that are beneficial for companies because they inspire better work performance. Thus, concerns about the commitment and fit of entrepreneurially-minded individuals working in more traditional corporations may be overblown (e.g., Botelho & Chang, 2023; Kacperczyk & Younkin, 2022); in fact, if innovation is a priority, perhaps corporations should target these types of individuals. After all, an EIA is a representation of a desired *possible* self, it is not a guarantee that the individual will leave the organization to become an entrepreneur in the future (Farmer et al., 2011). Since most entrepreneurs transition to ventures from a career as a paid employee (e.g., Hoang & Gimeno, 2010), a sizable portion of individuals working as employees may possess EIAs, and understanding how these aspirations impact their current work-related behaviors and outcomes is crucial.

Relatedly, we extend theory on future work selves, which are a subset of all possible selves (Strauss et al., 2012). Research on future work selves has focused almost exclusively on individuals' broad hopes and aspirations and how these hopes and aspirations drive broad career-oriented behaviors (e.g., career planning, career consulting, network building; Strauss et al., 2012), while ignoring more specific types of future work selves. We investigate a specific type of future work self (i.e., EIA) that is not necessarily desired by one's current organization (e.g., Waddingham et al., 2024) and show how EIA drives a very specific type of behavior at work (i.e., EIB). Future research could benefit from further exploring the impact of other types of specific future work selves on these organizations as well.

Second, our research contributes to the literature on EIA by extending this stream of research to examine an additional route – intrapreneurship (i.e., individual-level entrepreneurship within an existing organization) – through which employees can experiment with and fulfill this desired entrepreneurial self (de Jong et al., 2015; Pinchot, 1985). Extant EIA literature argues that entrepreneurial aspirations motivate individuals to engage in new venture start-up behaviors as a way to verify a desired entrepreneurial identity (Farmer et al., 2011; Seibert et al., 2021). This emphasis on behaviors outside an employee's current organization tends to ignore alternative forms of entrepreneurship (i.e., intrapreneurship) in which individuals can behave entrepreneurially and fulfill their possible entrepreneurial selves at work (de Jong et al., 2015; Pinchot, 1985; Seiger et al., 2013). Indeed, despite the documented benefits of employee intrapreneurial behaviors (e.g., Blanka, 2019; Gorgievski et al., 2023), research has yet to examine the influence of EIA on employees' engagement in these behaviors at work. Our results illuminate the importance of considering alternative forms of entrepreneurship that individuals may pursue to experiment with or obtain their desired entrepreneurial self.

Third, we build on the literature on EIA and employee intrapreneurial behavior by extending the nomological network surrounding both the antecedents and outcomes of EIBs. Extant research on the antecedents of individual-level intrapreneurial behaviors has primarily focused on organizational and contextual factors (Bouchard & Basso, 2011; Brundin et al., 2008; de Jong et al., 2015; Kotlar & Sieger, 2019; Kuratko et al., 2005). Additionally, research on the outcomes of EIBs has been primarily situated at the organizational level (Antoncic, 2007; Bierwerth et al., 2015; Honig, 2001). By considering individuals'

[3] We analyzed our data using a Poisson specified GLM for the outcome model, which is preferred because it is more robust than the negative binomial (e.g., clustering of standard errors) and because overdispersion of our dependent variable is not a concern within our data given that the mean dispersion (1.09) is less than the suggested 1.30 threshold (Hoetker & Agarwal, 2007), indicating that the ratio of the standard deviation does not exceed 130 percent of the mean (e.g., Friske & Zachary, 2019; Luo et al., 2020; Schillebeeckx et al., 2019). Additionally, Poisson modelling is preferable to negative binomial modelling, as it is a fully robust estimator of conditional mean parameters, regardless of the dispersion of the dependent variable (Wooldridge, 2010). Lastly, we chose to report Poisson results for theoretical reasons (e.g., Luo et al., 2020). Negative binomial modelling is sensitive to outliers (Guo & Trivedi, 2002; Luo et al., 2020), which are likely to be the relatively small number of top performers who are responsible for most of the output (i.e., sales; O'Boyle & Aguinis, 2012). Not accounting for these influential cases (i.e., top performers) negatively impacts the inferences to be made about the population. It is particularly important to understand the degree to which employees' EIA and their EIBs positively influence their subsequent work performance. The EIBs that aspiring entrepreneurs engage in are likely to facilitate high levels of sales and top performance. Thus, it is meaningful to account for the long tail of the relatively small number of top performers, rather than treating them as statistical noise (e.g., Luo et al., 2020).

Table 3
Descriptive statistics, reliabilities and correlations (Study 2).

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age	51.32	13.00														
2. Sex	0.57	0.50	0.00													
3. Education	1.78	1.01	−0.11	−0.03												
4. Tenure	8.42	9.14	0.39	−0.05	−0.09											
5. Ent. Experience	1.13	1.63	0.02	−0.18	0.01	0.01										
6. Other's Ent. Experience	1.47	0.60	−0.04	−0.02	0.07	−0.07	0.13									
7. Positiveness of Ent. Experience	0.87	0.33	−0.20	−0.20	0.08	−0.17	0.17	0.10								
8. Positiveness of Other's Ent. Experience	0.92	0.28	−0.10	−0.14	0.15	−0.07	0.13	0.17	0.55							
9. Baseline EIB (T1)	5.43	1.01	−0.12	−0.18	−0.07	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.08	0.13	**0.90**					
10. Baseline Performance (T1)	0.90	1.44	0.03	−0.01	−0.04	0.19	−0.07	0.02	0.08	0.03	0.21					
11. EIA (T1)	4.54	1.78	−0.32	−0.27	−0.03	−0.22	0.34	0.16	0.38	0.15	0.31	−0.01	**0.97**			
12. Organizational Identification (T1)	5.89	1.01	−0.01	−0.03	0.14	−0.12	−0.15	−0.07	0.03	0.03	0.09	0.02	0.06	**0.85**		
13. Ent. Self-Efficacy (T1)	5.65	0.97	0.04	−0.04	0.01	−0.04	0.00	0.00	−0.15	0.07	0.23	0.08	0.12	0.25	**0.84**	
14. EIB (T2)	5.31	1.05	−0.12	−0.22	−0.08	0.02	−0.01	0.19	0.10	0.15	0.75	0.21	0.34	0.11	0.20	**0.93**
15. Work Performance (T3)	11.26	12.31	−0.06	0.05	−0.03	0.20	0.03	0.06	0.00	−0.13	0.14	0.68	−0.04	−0.07	0.02	0.17

Note. N = 182. All correlations greater than or equal to |0.15| are significant at 0.05 level. Alpha reliabilities are reported in bold. Ent = Entrepreneurial. Other's Entrepreneurial Experience is coded 2 = yes, knew a parent or someone else who started a business, 1 = no. Positiveness of entrepreneurial experience is coded 1 = positive, 0 = negative. Sex is coded 1 = male, 0 = female.

Table 4
Results of regressions analysis (Study 2).

Variables	Employee Intrapreneurial Behavior (T2)				Work Performance (T3)			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	0.94*(0.47)	2.13*(0.95)	3.39***	3.72**	3.05***	3.08***	2.97***	3.01***
			(0.96)	(1.15)	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.23)
Age	0.00(0.00)	0.00(0.00)	0.00	0.00	−0.02***	−0.02***	−0.02***	−0.02***
			(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.00)
Sex	−0.17(0.11)	−0.14(0.11)	−0.18†	−0.16	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
			(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Education	−0.04(0.05)	−0.04(0.05)	−0.04	−0.04	−0.05*	−0.05*	−0.06*	−0.05*
			(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Tenure	0.00(0.01)	0.00(0.01)	0.04	0.004	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Ent. Experience	−0.07*(0.03)	−0.05(0.03)	−0.06†	−0.05	0.10***	0.10***	0.10***	0.10***
			(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Other's Ent. Experience	0.24**(0.09)	0.23**(0.09)	0.24**	0.24**	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
			(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Positiveness of Ent. Experience	−0.18(0.20)	−0.19(0.19)	−0.28	−0.29	0.21*	0.21*	0.24*	0.24**
			(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Positiveness of Other's Ent. Experience	0.22(0.22)	0.22(0.22)	0.22	0.23	−0.70***	−0.69***	−0.72***	−0.72***
			(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Baseline EIB (T1)	0.70***(0.05)	0.68***(0.05)	0.71***	0.70***	−0.04	−0.04	−0.04	−0.04
			(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Baseline Performance (T1)	0.04(0.04)	0.05(0.04)	0.04	0.04	0.26***	0.26***	0.26***	0.26***
			(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration (T1)	0.08*(0.04)	−0.24	−0.45*	−0.56**	−0.12***	−0.12***	−0.12***	−0.12***
		(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Organizational Identification (T1)		−0.18		−0.08		−0.01		−0.01
		(0.14)		(0.14)		(0.02)		(0.02)
EIA (T1) X Organizational Identification (T1)		0.05†		0.03				
		(0.03)		(0.03)				
Ent. Self-Efficacy (T1)			−0.43**	−0.39**			0.02	0.02
			(0.15)	(0.16)			(0.02)	(0.03)
EIA (T1) X Ent. Self-Efficacy (T1)			0.10**	0.08*				
			(0.03)	(0.03)				
EIB (T2)					0.16***	0.16***	0.16***	0.16***
					(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
F (df)	25.08 (11)	21.84 (13)	22.90 (13)	19.88 (15)				
R^2	0.619***	0.628***	0.639***	0.643***				

Note. N = 182. Coefficients are unstandardized. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Ent = Entrepreneurial.
*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; † $p < 0.10$. (Two-tailed).

Table 5
Indirect and conditional indirect effects on work performance (Study 2).

Indirect effect	Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy	Estimate		95 % CI
Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration → Employee Intrapreneurial Behavior → Work Performance		0.22	*	0[.03, 0.47]
	Low	−0.01		[-0.30, 0.27]
	High	0.44	**	0[.15, 0.80]

Note. $N = 182$. Significance of indirect effects based on 20,000 bootstrapped samples. Because no significant interaction was found between EIA and organizational identification in predicting EIB, these conditional indirect effects are omitted. CI = 95 % Confidence Interval. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

cognitive aspirations about their possible entrepreneurial selves, we expand the nomological network of EIBs by introducing EIA as an antecedent of these behaviors and by suggesting that EIBs can also predict work performance at the individual level. This illustrates how employees' desires to be an entrepreneur in the future can actually benefit their current organizations in the present. Moreover, while extant research shows that intrapreneurial behavior contributes to creativity, innovation, and firm performance (e.g., Antoncic, 2007; Gawke et al., 2018; Sieger et al., 2013), scholars point out that the majority of these studies rely on self-reports and would benefit from more objective performance data to analyze these relationships (e.g., Blanka, 2019). Thus, we answer this call by capturing employees' objective performance in Study 2.

Lastly, we advance knowledge related to EIA by providing insight into when aspiring entrepreneurs are more likely to engage in EIBs. By examining entrepreneurial self-efficacy as an important moderator of the effect of EIA on EIBs, we reveal that aspiring entrepreneurs who have higher levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy are more likely to engage in intrapreneurial behaviors at work, which subsequently increases their work performance. Prior research on possible selves has primarily focused on how individuals work towards obtaining their desired identity without investigating the role that current self-views play in influencing individuals' aspiration-related behaviors. This oversight could be significant because, as Fig. 2 indicates, entrepreneurial self-efficacy is an important catalyst for strengthening aspiring entrepreneurs' engagement in intrapreneurial behavior, particularly when aspiring entrepreneurs' levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy are high versus low. That is, the influence of EIA on EIB is enhanced by the efficacious beliefs that actions taken to explore or realize the entrepreneurial aspirations will be successful (e.g., Gielnik et al., 2020), as individuals who hold higher levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy are more likely to feel as though mobilizing their efforts towards intrapreneurial activities at work will result in successful fulfillment of their desired entrepreneurial self. Indeed, as indicated in our results and depicted in Fig. 2, high levels (as opposed to low levels) of both EIA and entrepreneurial self-efficacy increase employees' engagement in EIBs, and their subsequent work performance. This is because beliefs in one's ability to execute EIBs successfully are less powerful if the individual does not possess a desire to undertake the behavior in the first place (e.g., Ajzen, 2002; Bandura & Cervone, 1983), while the power of EIA to drive EIBs can be diminished by individuals' lack of confidence in their ability to successfully perform those behaviors in the first place (i.e., entrepreneurial self-efficacy). This reinforces a prominent assertion from motivation theory concerning the importance of perceived capability in intensifying the link between aspirations and behaviors (e.g., Ajzen, 1991; 2002); namely, increased self-efficacy elevates the probability of aspirations transforming into actual behaviors (e.g., Bandura, 1991; Chouchane et al., 2023). Our findings open the door for more research on the facilitating role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in this context. Research shows that individuals with greater perceived entrepreneurial capability are quicker to act, less risk averse, and more persistent in pursuing entrepreneurial actions (McGee et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2007). Thus, the facilitating effect we uncover could occur across more dimensions than the quantity of EIBs, but also with respect to the quality and perseverance with which efficacious individuals are willing to pursue intrapreneurial actions within their organizations. This also emphasizes the importance of corporate training for creativity and innovation activities among employees. As such, our research creates opportunity for additional explorations into how entrepreneurial self-efficacy can influence employees' work in non-entrepreneurial contexts (e.g., Hamrick et al., 2024; Newman et al., 2019).

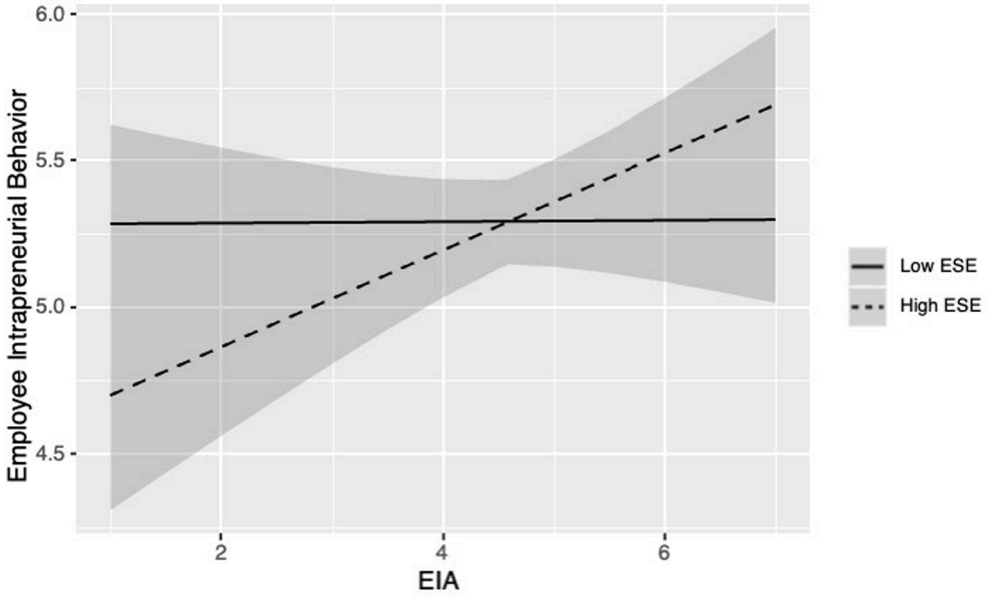

Fig. 2. Interaction Between entrepreneurial identity aspiration (EIA) and entrepreneurial self-efficacy on employee intrapreneurial behavior (Study 2).

4.1. Practical implications

Our research has several implications for practice. First, human resource managers and organizations should consider cultivating EIAs within their workforce. Our findings suggest that EIA motivates EIBs which subsequently increases individuals' work performance. Prior research shows entrepreneurial behaviors are important for an organization's economic growth, competitive advantage, and overall success and performance (Antoncic, 2007; Bierwerth et al., 2015; Honig, 2001; Parker, 2011). Additionally, organizations and hiring managers should seek to identify individuals with EIAs in the recruiting process. This suggestion runs counter to existing practices among hiring professionals who tend to actively avoid hiring aspiring entrepreneurs because of commitment-related concerns (Botelho & Chang, 2023; Kacperczyk & Younkin, 2022). In fact, our research indicates that avoiding these individuals might hinder the attainment of a variety of benefits that entrepreneurially-driven individuals can bring to an organization. Furthermore, knowing that these aspirations can also lead to nascent start-up behaviors (Farmer et al., 2011), managers should strive to provide employees with opportunities to verify their entrepreneurial identities within their current jobs to not only minimize the threat of these individuals exiting the organization (Feng et al., 2022) but to also maximize the benefits related to their entrepreneurial behaviors.

4.2. Limitations and future research opportunities

Although there are several strengths of our current work, including the replication of our results across two studies, certain limitations warrant further discussion. First, even though we demonstrated mediation across two different samples, we are cautious about inferring causality regarding the direction of our hypothesized relationships. We employed a time-lagged design, controlling for our outcome variables' baseline levels, which can improve interpretations related to causality (e.g., Cook & Campbell, 1979; Xu et al., 2022). Moreover, we grounded our hypothesized relationships in arguments from theory on possible selves that supports the causal direction of our conceptual model. Nevertheless, future research should utilize an experimental design to enable stronger causal inferences (Williams et al., 2019). Additionally, several variables were measured using individual self-reports, which can arouse concerns about common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, we collected multi-source data (i.e., objective performance) and controlled for baseline levels of our mediator and dependent variable to help alleviate concerns related to the effects of transient sources of common method bias (Doty & Glick, 1998). While the use of sales volume as an objective and multi-source performance measure is a strength of our study, individual differences in sales performance can be influenced by factors outside employees' control, such as market fluctuations, seasonal trends, and other environmental factors (Chonko et al., 2000). We encourage future research to consider alternative measures and time periods for performance to assess the robustness of our model. Additionally, the exclusive emphasis on objective sales volume might unintentionally fail to account for other aspects of employees' performance, such as client satisfaction ratings or organizational citizenship behaviors, that might provide valuable insights into the broader impact of EIA and EIBs on work performance. Thus, future studies examining the effects of EIA and EIBs on employee work performance might consider a broader and more comprehensive measure of work performance.

Another possible limitation concerns the generalizability of our results from Study 2. We only had access to sales employees in a specific industry (real estate) and through a specific organization within a region of the United States. That said, real estate salespeople represent a large portion of sales workers and have been shown to be an appropriate sample for conducting management and organizational behavior research (e.g., Chen et al., 2012; Lian et al., 2022; Macintosh & Krush, 2014). Additionally, we corroborate our findings in Study 2 with the consistent results in Study 1 using an online platform that provides a pool of participants from diverse organizations and industries, thus enhancing the generalizability of our research (Peer et al., 2017; Yao et al., 2022). Nevertheless, future research should seek to replicate our findings across different work contexts and cultures. We also note that both interaction terms occur in the predicted direction in our theoretical model when estimated independently, but when all are included in one model, as we have presented, the interaction between EIA and organizational identification becomes non-significant. Theoretically, this may be because entrepreneurial self-efficacy is the more important psychological factor in bolstering the effect of EIA on EIBs, thus overshadowing any potential moderating effects of organizational identification. Statistically, this pattern of results may also be due to a lack of power that stems from simultaneously testing multiple interactions with a sample of the size of ours (e.g., Lovelace et al., 2001; McClean et al., 2013). Given the smaller sample size in Study 2, it is also possible that the true effect sizes are smaller than the observed ones. Replication with more power might help show these effects more clearly.

In terms of other future research directions, our work can be extended in several ways. We show that individuals with EIAs engage in EIBs as a pathway that allows for the experimentation with, and self-verification of, identity aspirations in a context outside traditional entrepreneurship. That said, there is even broader heterogeneity across the avenues through which individuals can potentially explore and verify an entrepreneurial identity, such as hybrid entrepreneurship and side hustles (Asante et al., 2022; Sessions et al., 2021); gig and freelance work (Greidanus & Liao, 2021; Ravenelle, 2019); informal entrepreneurship (Siqueira et al., 2016); crowdfunding and investing (Short et al., 2017); and artisan entrepreneurship (Greidanus & Liao, 2021). Many of these contexts also involve individuals who seek to be entrepreneurial in a manner that does not necessarily involve self-employment.[4] Future research could examine how entrepreneurial aspirations might influence innovative behavior where self-employment or firm ownership is not the primary goal. For example, social entrepreneurs are motivated to use entrepreneurial activities to improve the welfare of others (e.g., Bonfanti et al., 2024; Miller et al., 2012). Some social entrepreneurship research indicates that aspired social identities could be important drivers in founder decision-making (e.g., Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Powell & Baker, 2014). Yet, we know little about how these social entrepreneur identity aspirations permeate to the employees of the firm or how these aspirations might influence their own individual work performance. While these avenues for engaging in entrepreneurship were outside the scope of our research, further exploring the entrepreneurial paths in which aspiring entrepreneurs may seek to experiment with or verify their EIAs will be an important area for future research.

In addition, given that our research shows that EIA can prompt intrapreneurial behavior in addition to the new venture creation behaviors highlighted by prior studies on EIA (Farmer et al., 2011; Seibert et al., 2021), a fruitful opportunity for future research would be to examine both of these entrepreneurial paths (intrapreneurship versus entrepreneurship) simultaneously. Understanding the factors that drive employees to engage in more EIBs versus new venture creation behaviors can provide deeper insights into the interplay between entrepreneurial aspirations and organizational contexts. For instance, research highlights displacing work events, such as a pay cuts or having an idea ignored, as prompting aspiring entrepreneurs to transition from paid employment to business ownership (Seibert et al., 2021). Conversely, could more positive workplace experiences, such as receiving a pay raise or a promotion, curtail new venture creation behaviors in favor of EIBs? Exploring these dynamics can help delineate how different work-related experiences influence the entrepreneurial trajectories of employees.

Relatedly, future research may also benefit from an investigation

[4] We thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point to us.

into the underlying mechanisms that drive when aspiring entrepreneurs engage in employee intrapreneurial versus start-up behaviors. For example, Berg et al. (2010) used an inductive approach to propose that individuals can proactively craft their jobs or their leisure to pursue desired occupational identities. Thus, future research might examine how proactively crafting of one's work or leisure facilitates one's engagement in either intrapreneurial or start-up behaviors. If individuals have the freedom to craft their job in a manner that allows them to pursue aspirational identities at work, perhaps this might encourage EIBs. Conversely, crafting leisure activities to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations might encourage pursuit of startup behaviors, creativity and new idea generation, or the recognition of new business opportunities (Hamrick, 2022; Hamrick et al., 2023; Petrou et al., 2024). Future research that explores the underlying mediating mechanisms that drive the connection between EIA and subsequent entrepreneurial behavior is needed.

5. Conclusion

Drawing on theory on possible selves, we develop and empirically test a conceptual model to expand the focus of extant EIA research from nascent entrepreneurship to its implications for individuals' intrapreneurial work. Across two studies, we shed light on why and when EIA is associated with employees' contributions to their organizations in the form of EIBs and increased work performance. We find that strong EIAs are positively related to EIBs, which are subsequently associated with heightened levels of work performance. Furthermore, we find that this process is bolstered by individuals' entrepreneurial self-efficacy. We hope future research will continue to concentrate on the work-related and intrapreneurial implications of entrepreneurial identity aspirations.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Alexander B. Hamrick: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Charles Y. Murnieks:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Jacob A. Waddingham:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Investigation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A

Table A1
Factor Loadings, Scale Reliabilities, and Average Extracted Variance for Key Constructs.

Entrepreneurial Identity Aspiration *(1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree)*	Study 1	Study 2
I often think about becoming an entrepreneur.	0.918	0.921
I would like to see myself as an entrepreneur.	0.915	0.947
Becoming an entrepreneur would be an important part of who I am.	0.918	0.943
When I think about it, the term "entrepreneur" would fit me pretty well.	0.917	0.883
I am always thinking about becoming an entrepreneur.	0.930	0.898
It is important for me to express my entrepreneurial aspirations.	0.946	0.874
Cronbach's Alpha	0.970	0.970
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	0.854	0.830
Employee Intrapreneurial Behavior	Study 1	Study 2
(1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree)		
I often make innovative suggestions to improve our business.	0.842	0.836
I often generate new ideas by observing the world.	0.843	0.930
I often think of new ideas when observing how people interact with our products and services.	0.926	0.895
I often generate new ideas by observing our customers.	0.877	0.891
I boldly move ahead with a promising new approach when others might be more cautious.	0.797	0.741
I devote time to help others find ways to improve our products and services.	0.789	0.753
Cronbach's Alpha	0.940	0.930
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	0.718	0.692
Work Performance	Study 1	Study 2
(1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree)		
I fulfilled the responsibilities specified in my job description.	0.927	NA
I performed the tasks that are expected as part of the job.	0.913	NA
I met performance expectations.	0.887	NA
I adequately completed responsibilities.	0.823	NA
Cronbach's Alpha	0.940	NA
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	0.794	NA
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy	Study 1	Study 2
(1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree)		
I am confident in my ability to successfully identify new business opportunities.	NA	0.699
I am confident in my ability to create new products.	NA	0.847
I am confident in my ability to think creatively.	NA	0.651
I am confident in my ability to successfully commercialize an idea or new development.	NA	0.863
Cronbach's Alpha	NA	0.840
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	NA	0.643
Organizational Identification	Study 1	Study 2
(1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree)		
When someone praises [X Firm], it feels like a personal compliment.	NA	0.781
When someone criticizes [X Firm], it feels like a personal insult.	NA	0.670

(*continued on next page*)

Table A1 (*continued*)

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy *(1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree)*	Study 1	Study 2
When I talk about [X Firm], I usually say "we", rather than "they".	NA	0.749
[X Firm's] successes are my successes.	NA	0.891
I am very interested in what others think about [X Firm].	NA	0.791
If a story in the media criticized [X Firm], I would feel embarrassed.[a]	NA	0.313
Cronbach's Alpha	NA	0.850
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	NA	0.519

Note. [a]Results do not change in significance or direction if this item is removed, thus, for completeness, we retained the full scale.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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