Participant 15 Interview Transcript

**Participant 15:** Transcribe it, no problem, as long as you don’t show this (pointing at face) to anyone. Sorry, I didn’t make myself pretty for you.

**Interviewer:** I will record this only for transcription purposes. So I will be writing this (the recording) down.

**Participant 15:** OK, yeah, no worries.

**Interviewer:** So yeah, as you probably read from the participant information sheet, I look for people who are not involved with entrepreneurship or have not been involved in the past. And I want to hear your opinions about extremely successful entrepreneurs and how they kind of manage to get that extremely successful. And yeah, this will not be shared with anyone. I will just transcribe it. Your name will not be affiliated with the data I get from you. Only for categorisation purposes, can you again tell me your age, occupation and educational level.

**Interviewer:** Age?

**Participant 15:** 29.

**Interviewer:** And then occupation?

**Participant 15:** A Business International Partnerships Manager.

**Interviewer:** OK. And educational level?

**Participant 15:** A degree. So Bachelor’s honours.

**Interviewer:** OK. To begin our conversation, can you tell me a bit more about your personal and professional life?

**Participant 15:** Yeah, So, OK. Personal life…I’m just trying to think. What kind of things would you like to know?

**Interviewer:** Whatever you are comfortable sharing. Whatever pops into your mind first.

**Participant 15:** So I live on the south coast in Hampshire. I have a little house, live with my partner. I love the beach, I like the outdoors, like camping, and travelling, and hiking. We really want to get a dog but we really shouldn’t and yeah, I’m just trying to think what else? That’s probably a little bit about my personal life, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, that’s great. How about your professional life?

**Participant 15:** My professional life, so I have been working in education for over ten years, within HE, so Higher Education, FE – Further Education. I’ve also worked with children, with translation and interpreting, with languages, also within Education-sector based organisations, such as the British Council. So yeah, my experience’s all sort of been education related and I’m a big champion of inclusive education for all and access to global education and my work at the moment involves partnership management, so really supporting international students and international relationship management and driving opportunities for international education for students, you know, from all over the world.

**Interviewer:** That’s fantastic. And have you had any experience with entrepreneurship?

**Participant 15:** No. I…Well, I guess so, I have done some freelance work in the past, so sort of, as if I was running my own little business, so in a way I kind of was but nothing sort of professionally. So I was living and studying and working abroad, and I was sort of running my own language translation and interpreting sort of side business, so sort of like private tutoring.

**Interviewer:** That’s great. And when did that happen and what kind of mindset were you back then?

**Participant 15:** So that happened 6-7 years ago. The mindset I had pretty much saying ‘yes’ to opportunities and, you know, making money essentially. So my focus was lots of travelling, so lots of kind of income to be able to do that and saying yes to kind of opportunities to build my professional development, as I was still sort of trying to build my experience to come back to finish my final year at university and then going to the world and start, you know, looking for work. So I sort of just took it as an opportunity to create some experience for myself and see where it goes.

**Interviewer:** Great. At the outset, let’s pin a definition of what is an entrepreneur. I define it as someone who sets up a business or businesses, taking on financial risks in the hopes of profits. What do you think about this definition?

**Participant 15:** Yeah, so, did you say that’s your definition, or that’s a technical definition?

**Interviewer:** It could be a technical definition. There are different definitions out there but it is the one I adopted for this.

**Participant 15:** Yeah, I think you’re right in a way. I definitely agree with sort of what you said. I think I also see it…I think there are different types of entrepreneurs, so I think that you could definitely be an entrepreneur, you know, sort of creating a non-, you know, not-for-profit type and a concept in a way. It could be very much a concept, rather than just sort of a business or it could be sort of a a direction that people are sort of adopting. I think even in this day and age essentially sort of becoming, you know, influencing people for becoming a sort of an influencer, sort of an entrepreneur in an area or a trend. Yeah, so I think that sort of another side to It that I see.

**Interviewer:** And when you think of an extremely successful entrepreneur, what crosses your mind? Or who crosses your mind?

**Participant 15:** I guess I think of sort of the biggest private companies, who… you know this big names, so I think of sort of, you know, Bezos and Amazon, I think of like Tesla and Elon Musk. I think of Richard Branson and Virgin Atlantic. I mean what else? It’s those sort of companies that I think of. And I think part of it is because they’re very well publicised and they’re very much always sort of in the news and in your face essentially in terms of social media too and marketing. And they’re always doing sort of super relevant evolved sort of futuristic things, you know, that are very relevant and exciting. So yeah, it’s those types of companies and people. It’s very much when I think of entrepreneurs. I think at the moment it’s… I think of tech. But it really depends on sort of what I’m reading and what I’m doing, because of obviously sometimes it varies, you know, it could be sort of entrepreneurs in fashion or in beauty or you know in education, but I think a lot of the time it’s to do with tech.

**Interviewer:** And what do you think about Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson?

**Participant 15:** I think that they probably are…I think when you sort of look at their backgrounds, they’re very different to each other, so I think, you know, having read a little bit of history and background on for example Richard Branson, I know he sort of started from sort of nothing and you know, built it all himself. And I think, you know, it was like a few hundred pounds from his family member. I think Elon Musk came from a sort of a more privileged background, but I think; so I think he maybe had some sort of a help, a larger helping hand and the platform to sort of start with but obviously his, you know, intelligence in terms of what he’s been able to achieve with the science side of things is also sort of you know through his own merit. And then I don’t know much about Bezos to be honest. So, yeah, I guess I suppose they’re admirable in terms of what they’ve achieved, their success, so I definitely admire people that, you know, that achieve this sort of success and I totally appreciate, you know, in terms of being lucky enough to kind of have an opportunity or a platform to start building from and of course there’s a lot more to admire of those that haven’t and really started from the bottom and really worked their way up themselves. I do also think that these three in particular probably spread maybe a little bit of…how do you say? Maybe not the best image of entrepreneurs. I think especially when they’re coming across, you know, in sort of a greedy sense. At least I think that’s how it’s kind of seen throughout the media and how they are presented as well. Especially when their discussions like, you know, these entrepreneurs coming together could feed up a whole country and you know, there’s obviously, you know, starvation and there’s all these sort of really awful things that are going on in the world and just thinking about you know solving these global and human issues, other than sort of feeding their own kind of agenda and plans and actually contributing to the carbon footprint and maybe other problems. So it’s sort of a mix in terms of yeah how I think and feel about these entrepreneurs. I think for me now it's really important to really truly admire an entrepreneur, sort of looking at, kind of what their background is, how they’re giving back, how mindful they are of sort of everything that’s going on in the world, along with what they’re managing to achieve and sort of how they’re trail-blazing. So yeah and I think that it’s an area that newer and especially younger generations are really kind of aware of and really sort of connected with and I think everybody is really starting to care about these things and are super hyper aware about these companies’ kind of values and missions and I think they’re very self-aware of this too because I think they have to make an effort to sort of be as connected to these wider issues as possible.

**Interviewer:** And what do you especially like about them? Or entrepreneurs in general?

**Participant 15:** I like that they’re risk-takers. Like that they are doing things to the beat of their own drum in a way. I like that they are not sort of stuck in I suppose the, I don’t know, the corporate rat race or that you know they didn’t fall victim in a sense to a sort of an education structure or sort of you know how you’re supposed to live, what you’re supposed to do and how you sort of just take your place in society and you get a job and you sort of just contribute to, you know, the world going, or the nations sort of functioning. So you know you might just be one little person in an organisation of you know 3000 and that’s your little contribution to the sort of bigger machine. And I think that’s sort of what people are encouraged to be part of from a really young age, also through sort of the curriculum and so I really admire the entrepreneurs because they tend to be the ones that sort of think, what more, I have this idea, why can’t I make it happen? I’m going to take a risk, yes, you know, I might not succeed and not make anything out of this and you know the smart thing to do is to kind of go to university and find a normal job and have, you know, security and you know just be part of this machine and just live my little life and you know not take too many risks and really just have that stability. So I think entrepreneurs tend to have the mindset, they tend to be sort of creators and a little bit more artistic and you know, free-thinking and definitely risk-takers, and they tend to be the ones trail-blazing, the you know sort of, the trend-setters, the ones that have really made things happen and yeah, I think that’s really sort of how I think of them. They’re definitely worth, you know, admiring, especially when they’re helping sort of society evolve and sort of the world, sort of achieve the next stage in our kind of growth.

**Interviewer:** And what do you especially dislike about them if anything?

**Participant 15:** So I think really sort of the greed aspect. I think when you sort of, I mean, the things is I suppose not all entrepreneurs can be connected to just a company or an organisation. Again going back to the different models of entrepreneurs and sort of the different concepts that they create but I think when they tend to be linked to companies and when they start something, they become this huge multi-billion pound company or organisation, I think it’s the fact that many of them and like I mentioned contribute to sort of the negative impact onto the environment and you know looking at the carbon footprint, also maybe not doing enough and giving back, not working together, to solve, you know, global issues. And also essentially making up the 1% in terms of, you know, looking at who’s really kind of successful. I also think, I think now there’s more diversity than before but I definitely think when you look at sort of the most successful entrepreneurs and these, you know, companies, they tend to still be sort of male, you know, white privilege, so you definitely still don’t see as many kind of women or ethnic minorities or the LGBTQX community represented, so I think there’s, you know, still a lot of disparity in terms of who’s succeeding and how and you know sort of the platform they’re presented with and the support and also maybe the power that they hold. I think that’s changing, I think there’s obviously a lot more now that’s been done to ensure that these voices are being heard and that these communities have an opportunity. And actually I think a lot of it starts withing Higher Education. I think, you know, these really incredible entrepreneurship incubators within universities are really brilliant, so yeah, that’s really what I think.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think diverse groups are the ones that don’t achieve that extreme success in comparison to the other group of people?

**Participant 15:** I think because of the risk factor really. I think it’s… it tends to be that mentality that you tend to want more stability, less risk, you want to also not feel. I feel as though communities, you know, more of a diverse background tend to feel that there is more risk and there’s sort of safety net, compared to sort of the male, you know, whit privilege especially. Especially in sort of the kind of, you know, in the western countries. Obviously they’re multi-cultural communities exist in comparison to you know, and even when you’re looking sort of globally in sort of other nations, it still tends to be sort of the male especially that sort of holds the largest share of successful companies and sort of the entrepreneurial position.

**Interviewer:** Great, not let’s hear your thoughts about what stands behind extreme success. The next question may be a bit difficult to answer with certainty but what do you think made Bezos, or Richard Branson’s success possible? What stands behind their success?

**Participant 15:** I guess, well again, I suppose, I think because I’m aware of some of the differences in their background, sort of the privilege, you know. For example Musk has had in comparison Branson but I think collectively some of the key aspects I definitely think, obviously one having sort of an award-winning concept, a trail-blazing concept, you know, the successful idea. But you know like most entrepreneurs I wouldn’t be surprised if they’d had a few ‘no’s’ before receiving the ‘yes’. So, I think having the right investment, the right people listening to them and supporting and backing their ideas. I also think you know being in a sort of, kind of a male-dominated sector in terms of entrepreneurship, I think their voices would probably be heard a lot louder and clearer when presenting ideas and sort of looking for investment. And I definitely think a key to their success is that they have presented solutions. I think that’s always the key to a successful business is creating a solution to a problem or sort of improving a challenge sort of in society or sort of, you know, when we think of I guess accessibility, you know, making things as convenient and as accessible as possible and, you know, connecting sort of the world or people in a way so I think obviously that’s true with Amazon and true with sort of the electric, you know, vehicle movement and sort of everything else that’s really sort of following the green, the environmental sort of direction of the future too. And then of course when you’re looking at Virgin, that sort of very historic, which you know, was sort of achieving another level of travel prior to you know lots of sort of companies, so yeah, I think really it’s very much down to the ideas that they presented and how well that sort of presents a solution that will cover sort of a majority community or sort of a global concept and yeah.

**Interviewer:** And how do you think this understanding or knowledge to have an idea and to present it to create a product. How do you this comes about?

**Participant 15:** I used to think that, you know, you had to really sort of know what you were doing and you know that these people are sort of very unique and you know sort of very kind of intelligent and you know very…that they’re all very similar or have something in common in terms of, you know, how they’ve managed to sort of do this. And I’ve come to learn and realise that actually that’s not the case and that they are… imagine they started the same way sort of entrepreneur start now with a very sort of basic and draft idea and sort of really not knowing how to do things or where to go and really just now there’s so many sort of opportunities and so many places and partnerships and organisations that offer you the support to bring your concept to life and how, you know, you would seek investment and create, you know, a business and sort of become successful in your entrepreneurship, you know, idea. So I know now there’s a lot more support and help actually involved in the success of these ideas and organisations. And yeah but this is down to sort of having some rich access to knowledge, you know, as of recent times, compared to before, so I think that’s why now there’s so many more people using sort of incubators and pitching proposals of businesses and so many more entrepreneurs because there’s so much access to knowledge in terms of, you know, you can just google something, in terms of how do I do this, or how do I become a freelancer for this, or how do I set up my own business to do with this, or, you know, who do I need to contact or where can I bid for some investment, so yeah, I think access, accessibility to knowledge really is the key here.

**Interviewer:** And do you think people like Bezos and the other people from your examples, Elon Musk, do you think they were in control over achieving their extreme success?

**Participant 15:** Not completely, no. I definitely think they were the driving force for sure and they probably hold a lot of kind of power and in terms of sort of the creative kind of direction and in terms of the goal but actually I think to have achieved the success that they have now, they probably sort of gone to a level where they needed to sort of bring in and hire the right people to manage, you know, the next level of success, yeah.

**Interviewer:** And what do you think can they control? What is within their control?

**Participant 15:** I guess, I mean, again, I suppose being very politically aware in terms of sort of, you know, what can go wrong in terms of the working cultures and the corporate world. I imagine if they still hold the majority of the control within the organisations, I think, the sort of the mission, the vision, sort of the charity and sort of the ultimate goal is… these are probably the things that are still very much within their control. Yeah, I mean, I think ultimately anything sort of impactful, I think would ultimately still be within their control? Yeah.

**Interviewer:** And the next question is important for me to fully capture on extreme entrepreneurial success, so what do you think is their contribution to our society?

**Participant 15:** I guess sort of, well I guess improving, you know, improving society in terms of the way we do things, the way we connect. Again, convenience and accessibility, so I think obviously these can be seen as positives. They can probably also be seen as negatives, too in sort of becoming over-reliant on these types of kind of solutions and sort of expecting, having expectations as well. But also then sort of thinking about the, you know, disparity internationally because it’s not sort of the same, you know, in other parts of the world in terms of, you know, you can’t expect to sort of go somewhere and assume that there’s an Amazon, that there’ll be a delivery tomorrow for something that you’re looking for. So I think also, I guess the positives that they’re really helped improve efficiency and helped, you know, things like sort of accessibility like Amazon for example really help us know have access to the things we need and maybe a bit more efficient and focused on the things that matter to us rather than sort of spending time on you know, shopping for example. But at the same time the negative side of it is that it’s probably made people a little bit, I suppose lazy in a sense. It’s also probably taken the joy out of such casual leisure activities and it’s probably made us all a little bit disconnected too. But I think there are definitely more positives than negatives. Again, thinking about sort of all of these entrepreneurs and others, you know, thinking about sort of tech and education and just accessibility and convenience. All of these types of concepts and businesses I think ultimately help improve our lives. So I do think, you know, they’re sort of…their contribution has really helping evolve the world. And I’d like to think, again, I don’t know, but I’d like to think that they’re also part of their work and success that they’re able to give back a lot and really focus on the communities around the world, that, you know, need sort of a life-improving solutions, so maybe, you know, a little bit more I guess humble, you know, for example Bill Gates and his foundation. They work on, you know, sort of water improvements and supplies in some third world countries, so now something they’re able to do with their success. So yeah, I think ultimately there’s a lot of positive contribution but again I’m sort of ignorant to all of the negatives, I’m sure. You know, I’m sure we’d be shocked probably to know sort of the impact on, you know, the issues that we all care about and maybe the contribution from these extreme entrepreneurs.

**Interviewer:** That’s great. What are your thoughts on money being an indicator for how much an entrepreneur has contributed to our society?

**Participant 15:** I guess it really sort of depends. I guess… I mean, if we’re looking at sort of the success of an economy or a nation, then yeah, probably a major company that’s sort of headquartered in that country or sort of started or does most of their business, would have a huge contribution to the, you know, to the economy. And, so, yes, I agree, it probably is a key performance indicator, but I think, I think it’s probably based on, sort of what are the goal and the mission of the company is and what is its purpose. I suppose if that’s sort of how they are, you know, measured, then yes, that makes sense, but if the goal and the mission is to contribute more than sort of just the… sort of the money side of things and perhaps, you know, I don’t know whether it’s impactful a community’s well-being or sort of, you know, mental health or access to education or something like that, then I would say that’s probably the KPI. So, I think it really just depends.

**Interviewer:** Well, the next question may sound a bit controversial. Some people would say that extremely successful entrepreneurs have been simply lucky to achieve that extreme success and they don’t deserve their profits. So, what would you respond to those people?

**Participant 15:** I don’t think that’s true. I think probably people that think that, you know, sort of sometimes, I don’t think they maybe have the full kind of picture, or the full information. They probably haven’t done their research, you know, haven’t really educated themselves enough. But I do think there are examples of where, you know, luck has definitely been on some entrepreneur’s side. Again, I think a lot of that comes with those that have already started with a privileged background and I think definitely at the time where access to investment was sort of less accessible than it is today. You know, so I think… I don’t agree with that completely, no.

**Interviewer:** And what do you think is luck’s role. So you mention those that started from a privileged place but is there any other place for luck in someone achieving extreme success?

**Participant 15:** Yeah, I mean I’m sure that there are probably examples of sort of people being at the right place at the right time. And all sort of the, you know, connections. I also think… I think for example, now I think some companies and some entrepreneurs may have had… may have been those that were sort of lucky in a sense may have been differently sort of in the past where there wasn’t as much competition or visible competition as there is today. I feel as though today, because of again we have access to everything, and we can sort of research and google and everything’s sort of on social media, I think there’s a lot more competition and I think we’re able to see what sort of exists and where and when and how. So I think sometimes those looking to become entrepreneurs and start businesses sort of feel inferior to something that already exists and somebody’s already doing really well. And so it’s hard to sort of find your place in that but I feel as though in the past when there wasn’t as much visibility, you can sort of have, you know, your own thing and it could be successful because, you know, you weren’t aware of sort of others, who were doing this. But at the same time, I suppose you could say that today there’s again more opportunity and more knowledge to help you be successful. But because of that I do think that there’s obviously more competition. I think some of the really large organisations started a long time ago during this time of lesser visibility and sort of in a… you know, before social media, perhaps if they started today, it would be different, so yeah.

**Interviewer:** That’s great. I really appreciate your willingness to participate in this and I really liked that you talked about extremely successful entrepreneurs in so much detail, you elaborated on your points. So, I have one last question. Is there anything else about extreme entrepreneurial success that you would like to share with me, and I didn’t ask?

**Participant 15:** No, I think you’ve asked some really good questions and I hope I’ve been helpful.

**Interviewer:** Yes, you have been plenty helpful. So I would really like to go in-depth with my investigation and if you have anyone that you potentially think could give me interesting insights, then feel free to share their contact with me.

**Participant 15:** No problem.

**Interviewer:** Great, I’ll stop the recording now.