

Chapter 19

Enterprise as a Career Choice: A Multi-National Study

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ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment is growing throughout the world due to a collection of conditions including but not exclusively: economic restrictions, anachronistic teaching and learning methodologies, and inadequate career guidance structures and support. These factors are the usual suspects and offer all stakeholders an easy way out in terms of the challenges associated with business start-ups and business initiations. That the contemporary educational environment is not effectively geared to support the emerging entrepreneur and is severely constrained by the limits of teacher training and curriculum flexibility is well recognised. With the growing demand for graduates to embrace an entrepreneurial ethos, the impact of support structures on the development of students is becoming more central to the required discourse in higher education, more especially, in developing countries without effective welfare structures. Central to this debate is the role of student attitudes towards the entrepreneurial route as a viable and achievable alternative to the conventional career pathways. Demands to generate a return from their education, familial expectations, and the need to develop as an individual can act as a further encumbrance to the embrace and exploration of business start-up opportunities. This study has generated a dataset of the dominant student attitudes to enterprise as a career pathway and general perspectives on enterprise and entrepreneurial activities. Through a number of partners, a cross section of students were invited to take an online survey addressing questions pertaining to entrepreneurship.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2952-3.ch019

INTRODUCTION

Some people dream of great accomplishments, while others stay awake and do them—Anonymous

Many people do not recognize opportunity as it is disguised as hard work—Ann Landers (American Advice columnist 1918-2002)

The term ‘entrepreneur’ has become a much used term in the modern globalisation lexicon; this leads to the inevitable questions: ‘are 企业家¹ born or made?’ and are you a ²مقاول, مبادر, أ. متعهد, ملتزم?

The term entrepreneur was first coined by J.S. Mill, his definition of an entrepreneur was built around the functions he saw as “direction, supervision, control, and risk taking” (Brockhaus and Horwitz 2002:260). Brockhaus and Horwitz observe that: “Mill appears to feel that risk bearing is the main distinguishing feature between the manager and the entrepreneur” (ibid). Since Mills introduction of the term it has become a complex and extensive area of study and debate. While this chapter is not focused on an analysis of the state of the discipline, it is important to offer a coherent backdrop against which to analyse the data collected by the research team.

Any discussion on entrepreneurship would not be completed without some reference to the contribution made by Schumpeter through his work on economic development. Key to his perspective was the entrepreneur as the source of creative destruction. The entrepreneur “introduces a new good or a new method of production, opens new markets or discovers a new source of supply, or carries out a new organization of an industry... upsets the conventional way of doing things” (Braguinsky et al 2009:1). Braguinsky et al continues and highlights those factors that have been identified as playing a role in entrepreneurship: “the role of risk taking (Kihlstrom and Laffont 1979), managerial ability (Lucas 1978), wealth (Evans and Jovanovic 1989), and preferences for

the control, flexibility and other job attributes that come with being one’s own boss (Hamilton [2000]) as the primary motivations for entrepreneurship” (Ibid).

Whichever characteristics are accepted, the key element of the creative destructive concept is to become liberated from the routine; “...[i]n eschewing routine, Schumpeter’s entrepreneur also avoids the need to reduce all behavioural responses to ‘what is strictly calculable’...” (WR1). This observation should not be treated in a fundamental way, as much of what a successful entrepreneur does is by definition of a routine nature. Rather it’s the eschewing that generates the opportunities and start-up initiatives. The research study in this chapter aimed to present a window into students’ views on entrepreneurship and the opportunities to start their own initiatives. The overall objective of this study was to inform stakeholders of the perceived effectiveness of enterprise and entrepreneurship offerings.

In order to develop a coherent response to student enterprise needs and to mobilise their interests the Petchey Centre for Entrepreneurship designed a basic online survey, which can still be accessed at http://www.kwiksurveys.com?s=HOIDFI_b0c6c526. The survey was distributed across the United Kingdom and a number of partners through RDBS international network were invited to co-operate in the research exercise. At all partner institutions the information regarding the location of the survey and the goal was published in selected media. The result in terms of the relatively low number of participants itself offers some insight into the general state of student attitudes to enterprise as a career choice.

The survey was compiled of 25 questions that focused on student attitudes to enterprise as a viable and realistic career choice given their respective contexts. The key partners were Pakistan (Usman Institute of Technology), United Kingdom (RDBS), China (Shanghai Institute of Foreign Trade) and South Africa (Rhodes University), there were a number of other partners who had

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