

Entrepreneurial employees

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter we intend to analyse the characteristics of entrepreneurial employees. These employees show characteristics of dynamism, innovation, personal development and ongoing adaptation, which allow the concept of entrepreneur to move beyond the traditional concept linked exclusively to business people. In the literature we can find studies of different models explaining entrepreneurial conduct both as regards personal characteristics and the cultural characteristics of the societies to which organisations belong. In addition, there are organisational variables which may develop entrepreneurial behaviour. Both factors (individual and organisational) constitute a promising future area for study and research in the area of organisations.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of "entrepreneur" has traditionally been associated with that of "business person". However, although they may be related, these two concepts are absolutely independent. This chapter aims to address the variables associated with entrepreneurial behaviour inside the organisation, among the employees themselves, as a positive and enriching characteristic of those employees.

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Entrepreneurship is an attitude, a vision for understanding the environment and acting accordingly. It is a quality, an adjective associated with the person who carries it out. As an adjective it is therefore linked to a name, a noun, in short, a person (business person, employee, a volunteer in an NGO etc). Its nature is not therefore associated with the figure of the business person, even though there are clearly many entrepreneurial business people (as there are also a large number of business people who are not entrepreneurial and whose activity is exclusively focused on managing their business).

Business person and entrepreneur therefore become two differentiated concepts. While the former refers to ownership of a commercial activity, the latter will describe a type of leadership, a way of relating to, and understanding, the world around us with which we interact, in short, a type of behaviour.

Bearing in mind these characteristics, over recent years entrepreneurial employees have started to be defined as "intrepreneurs" in contrast to business people, who were classified as "entrepreneurs". These types of employees are clearly highly valuable for organisations as they provide those organisations with employees who do not only perform well, but who also provide added value to the organisation (drive, initiative, creativity etc). In this regard, organisations should create strategies both to attract (and select) these profiles, who will provide new competencies in addition to those required for the job, and also to retain them in the organisation as their entrepreneurial nature makes them highly likely to change and leave the organisation.

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These entrepreneurial employees in organisations will be characterised by their dynamism, innovation, personal development and ongoing adaptation, going beyond the traditional concept of adventure, expedition and conquest.

However, the existence of these profiles will not be positive for the organisation in every case. It is important for the organisation to provide these people with mechanisms, tools, opportunities and spaces in which to develop their entrepreneurial attitude as otherwise negative results may arise including the entrepreneurial employees suffering from burnout, lacking motivation, suffering a fall in their well-being and leaving the company.

However, despite the importance of these types of employees, there is currently little literature on entrepreneurial behaviour inside organisations and so this behaviour has often been studied indirectly by assimilating entrepreneurial behaviour with business behaviour and assuming that the characteristics of entrepreneurs/business people are the same as, and can be extrapolated to, entrepreneurs.

We shall therefore begin this chapter by reviewing the classic studies on entrepreneurs and their extrapolation to the area of employees.

Classic studies on entrepreneurs

One of the first debates in the field of study of entrepreneurs was determining the definition of the term. Although the concept was introduced by Richard Cantillon in the 18th century taken from the French word "entrepreneur", it was not until the work by J.A.Schumpeter that it took on the meaning as we understand it today.

Schumpeter (1934) considered the entrepreneur as an agent of change. According to this author, this change will be manifested through the introduction of a new good, a new method of production, a new organisation or the opening of new markets, which the author calls "new combinations".

According to this author, the desire to make these changes is an essential and differentiating characteristic of the entrepreneur. He therefore believes that they belong to a special type of person who possesses personal qualities (what he will sometimes call leadership) which distinguish them from the rest of society. This is perhaps the starting point for subsequent social studies on the figure of the entrepreneur.

From this starting point, several studies have profiled a set of characteristics which are necessary to successfully develop entrepreneurial conduct, indicating several dimensions.

Not all these dimensions are necessary or deterministic. In other words, there may be entrepreneurs which possess some or all of these characteristics. What these classifications do allow us, however, is to indicate how the learning process is influenced by set of factors which are internal to the entrepreneur, but also, and above all, external to the entrepreneur, which is known as a pull and push process. That is, it will be connected both with the internal variables of the entrepreneur (which "push" him/her) and also the external variables (which "pull" him/her, motivating the entrepreneur to undertake new activities).

Push variables

The relationships between certain personality traits and entrepreneurial conduct have been fairly well studied in the literature (Muller and Gappisch, 2005; Zhao and Seibert, 2006), with entrepreneurial conduct thought to be dependent on personality traits, especially the need for achievement and the locus of control (Lee and Tsang, 2001; Díaz and Rodríguez, 2003).

One of the first classic models in the study of entrepreneurial traits was conducted by McClelland (1961) based on his achievement motivation theory.

For McClelland, all human conduct is driven by three needs: affiliation, power and achievement. The need for achievement is the most relevant of the three for understanding and analysing any conduct. The need for achievement would be defined by McClelland as a drive towards excellence (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark and Lowell, 1953). According to this theoretical model, the people with the greatest achievement need are more interested in those tasks which they consider challenging and difficult given that achieving them will provide greater satisfaction than other simpler tasks (in contrast with people with a low need for achievement, who will prefer simpler tasks).

The parallels between this idea and entrepreneurship were clear and, therefore, years later McClelland performed a cross-cultural study to observe the link between the need for achievement and entrepreneurial conduct (McClelland, 1961). For McClelland, the need for achievement is partly responsible for the economic development of nations. Therefore, societies which have a generally high level of need for achievement (n achievement) will produce a higher number of entrepreneurs, which will lead to faster economic development.

The link between the need for achievement and entrepreneurial conduct has been widely studied subsequently and confirmed by numerous research studies (McClelland, 1965; Hornaday and Aboud, 1981; Ahmed, 1985; McClelland, 1987; Sagie and Elizur, 1999; Collins, Hanges and Locke, 2004; Stewart and Roth, 2007).

However, McClelland's theory has been severely criticised as it considers this need to be an attribute learnt only in the first stages of human development, without taking into other subsequent social factors and influences (Sutherland and Veroff, 1985). Accordingly, there are currently theories based on the need for achievement model, but which also take into account other components such as expectations, self-concept, perceptions, causality and task value (Spence, 1983).

Another of the theoretical models for entrepreneurial personality traits is the locus of control theory (Rotter, 1966). The theory establishes a classification for people based on the extent to which they believe they can control events that affect them. Accordingly, Rotter classifies people who believe that their actions are mainly the result of personal characteristics as having a high internal locus of control (and low external). On the other hand, Rotter defines people who believe that their actions are the result of luck, opportunity, fate or the power of other people as having a high external locus of control (and low internal). In short, people with internal locus of control believe that they can exercise some control over events and over their environment, and therefore tend to have more self-confidence and to be more independent.

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Obviously, the relationship between locus of control and entrepreneurial conduct has been fairly well studied. Most research has verified that entrepreneurs score high in internal locus of control, with this being a key distinctive aspect of entrepreneurs (Brockhaus, 1982; Venkatapathy, 1984; Ahmed, 1985; Perry, 1990; Chay, 1993; Gatewood, Shaver, and Gartner, 1995; Schiller and Crewson, 1997).

Furthermore, various authors have found that a high internal locus of control is not only a distinctive trait of entrepreneurs, but also of leaders. Brockhaus (1980) observed that senior managers in companies scored high in internal locus of control. In addition, Cummings et al. (1972) in another study with 3600 executives in 14 countries in Europe, America and Asia, observed the aforementioned relationship, although with significant cultural differences between countries.

However, the locus of control theory has also been significantly criticised, especially with regard to its stable nature, as many believe it may be developed (Santiago and Tarantino, 2002; Hansemark, 2003) and would therefore be subject to cultural and socialisation processes based on the surrounding social context (Smith, Trompenaars and Dugan, 1995; Kauffman, Welsh and Bushmarin, 1996; Mueller and Thomas, 2000).

Therefore, these personal characteristics will not only be influenced by variables of their close environment (family, school, socialisation), but also by other cultural variables of the macro-environment and the local culture and society where the entrepreneurs live. In other words, the conditioning factors of local culture and society where entrepreneurs live will also influence their cognitive and decision-making mechanisms (Mueller and Thomas, 2000; Rotefoss and Kolvereid, 2005).

Consequently, another of the traits studied in entrepreneurial behaviour has been its relationship with values and their hierarchy. Values are a central theme in the field of social sciences since it is essential to analyse them in order to understand human conduct as they play a central role in configuring personality. From this point of view, it will be our values which determine attitudes, which, in turn, will guide our conduct. However, the fact that values are not directly observable makes them difficult to study and conceptualise.

One of these first models was developed by Rokeach (1973). Rokeach's theory largely conditions subsequent values models. Rokeach states that values form a hierarchical structure referred to as a value system ("enduring organisation of beliefs on modes of behaviour or desirable end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance"). These values will be equal and universal, although with different levels of intensity in each country or territory i.e. all people share the same values although with a different hierarchy depending on social and cultural conditioning.

However, Rokeach's model has been criticised for its ethnocentrism as it does not take cultural differences into account (Holt, 1997). It is clear that values and culture have an interdependent relationship in such way that there are different values between countries or territories. Similarly, the culture of a country will also be conditioned by the predominant values of its citizens.

We should frame the models developed years later in the 1980s by Hofstede (1980) and Triandis et al. (1988) within the assumption of the existence of differentiated cultural values. In both cases, the innovation of these models is based on the assumption of cultural

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differences, as well as the incorporation of new dimensions, in particular, the individualism-collectivism continuum.

Hofstede (1980) built his model based on a macro-survey given to 116,000 IBM employees in offices in 64 different countries. After analysing the data, the author proposed the existence of values shared by all the employees although with differences in the ranges of each one depending on the country.

Hofstede initially grouped these values into four major dimensions: individualism-collectivism; uncertainty avoidance; power distance; and masculinity vs. femininity (he subsequently added a fifth dimension of long-term orientation versus short-term orientation). Each one of these dimensions has been related to entrepreneurial conduct, although the individualism-collectivism dimension is the one that has been most studied. We shall now take a look at each one of the dimensions in detail, together with their relationship with entrepreneurial conduct.

Individualism-collectivism is the degree to which the culture emphasises independence and individual needs as compared with collectivism in which the emphasis is placed on satisfying group needs. Individualist societies expect conduct aimed at promoting the individual, whereas in collectivist societies people are organised within strong ties which will protect their members over their life in exchange for a system of loyalty. Hofstede believed that a culture had a predominance of individualistic values when it encouraged people to stand up for themselves, while, on the other hand, in collectivist cultures the individual is expected to be protected by the closest in-group. Various studies have shown that entrepreneurs have a

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greater tendency towards individualistic values (Fagenson, 1993; Holt, 1997; Thomas and Mueller, 2000).

Power distance is the extent to which a culture and its members accept greater or lesser distance and differentiation between those who have power and the rest of the group. In cultures with a high level of power distance, relationships are based on hierarchy, whereas cultures with a low level of distance are more based on participation and delegation in decision making. Various authors have found a relationship between low power distance and entrepreneurial conduct (Shane, Kolvereid and Westhead, 1991; Scheinberg and McMillan, 1988). According to this assumption, those organisations in which the power distance is closer would develop more participative leadership styles, which will encourage the appearance of more entrepreneurial behaviour among all the members of the organisation. It also seems reasonable to think that those structures with less power distance will promote greater empowerment of their members, as well as their initiative, which are characteristics of entrepreneurial people.

Masculinity-femininity is conceptualised by Hofstede as the extent to which a culture emphasises assertiveness, independence and domination (masculinity) or caring and support for others (femininity). McGrath et al. (1992) found a link between entrepreneurial attitudes and masculine values according to Hofstede's typology. Those cultures which emphasise feelings of independence against the group would favour the development of entrepreneurial activities.

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Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which the culture tolerates deviation from established norms and values. No evidence has been found of a link between this valued dimension and entrepreneurial behaviour.

However, Hofstede's model has been criticised for bias as it uses the data collected from IBM employees to build the model, which cannot be taken as a full representation of the sample countries. In addition, the grouping made by some authors into large categories hides the differences which exist between countries (is a North American the same as an Australian? And is a Mexican the same as an Argentinean?). Therefore in recent years a whole series of trans-cultural research has been conducted aimed at analysing entrepreneurial behaviour between countries. The papers of Mitchell and other authors (Mitchell, Smith, Morse, Seawright, Peredo and McKenzie, 2002; Mitchell, Smith, Seawright and Morse, 2000) are framed within this trend.

Later, Triandis et al. (1988) introduced a new psychological approach to Hofstede's concept of individualism-collectivism by differentiating between the cultural dimension and the psychological dimension. They refer to the second type as allocentrism-idiocentrism. Accordingly, according to this author, there will be collectivist and individualist cultures and idiocentric and allocentric individuals. Under this new approach, we find that an idiocentric person may develop well in individualist or collectivist cultures. According to Triandis, in a collectivist culture, allocentric people will find a cognitive match as there is an identification between their hierarchy of personal values and the cultural values, which leads to greater general satisfaction. The same happens for idiocentric people in individualist cultures. But, what will happen with these people in collectivist cultures? In this case, the model predicts a cognitive mismatch (or a clash between the personal and cultural hierarchy of values) which

will in turn lead to dissatisfaction. Triandis goes on to indicate that this inconsistency will be greater with idiocentric people in collectivist cultures than with allocentric people in individualist cultures.

Finally, a fundamental structure favouring entrepreneurial behaviour will be the school, which, together with the family, will form the areas where a large part of the initial processes of socialisation and acquisition of conduct take place. This has been another of the variables studied in the literature on entrepreneurs, although more from a demographic and descriptive point of view than as a process of socialisation and acquisition of values.

Several authors (Carr, 1996; Jacobowitz and Vidler, 1982) have demonstrated that entrepreneurs tend to have a higher educational level than the rest of the general population. However, it is still not well known how education affects psychosocial processes for developing entrepreneurial conduct (Carter, 2003); i.e. it is not known if the educational level of entrepreneurs influences the cognitive processes which will develop said entrepreneurial conduct. Researchers believe that education offers the person greater self-confidence in their own capacities and resources with the consequent internalisation of perceptions of success, which in addition generates greater motivation towards reaching and achieving goals (Khanlou and Crawford, 2006; Singh, 1989).

We have therefore seen several personal variables which make up and drive entrepreneurial behaviour. It is clear that these characteristics, given their internal nature, will be much more difficult to develop in the context of organisations. However, we should take them into account in our policies for acquiring and selecting human talent so as to identify them and measure them between the different candidates.

Pull variables

However, together with these "push" variables, we should also consider other "pull" variables which make people develop entrepreneurial behaviour to a greater or lesser extent. These are therefore, organisational variables which encourage (and discourage) the appearance of entrepreneurial behaviour inside the organisation.

Having said this, and considering that we all have certain capacity to undertake and promote different actions (including business, sporting, charity or simply leisure activities), one of the key responsibilities of different organisations should be to provide the resources necessary to try to "pull" these potential entrepreneurs.

One of these variables for promoting entrepreneurial behaviour is the empowerment process.

Kanter (1977, 1993) conceptualised empowerment as those practices carried out by the company's management aimed at giving greater autonomy, control and self-efficacy to employees. However, subsequent authors have started to consider that empowerment should not only be conceptualised from the perspective of the organisational structure, but also as a psychological state which the employees should experience when the management's empowerment interventions are appropriate (Spreitzer, 1995), thus establishing two types of empowerment: structural and psychological. *Structural empowerment* refers to a series of management techniques which can be universally applied throughout organisations with a meaning of effective action with modern needs in modern organisations (Lashey, 1999). On the other hand, psychological empowerment includes all those beliefs which a worker

possesses based on their performance, their level of autonomy and the results which their work may have in the organisation (Spreitzer, 1995).

One of the first models on psychological empowerment was that developed by Conger and Kanungo (1988). Their most important contribution was to conceive empowerment more as a motivational construct than a simple delegation of power, understanding that enabling involves creating conditions which make it possible to increase motivation for performing tasks by developing a strong sense of personal efficacy.

Subsequently, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) designed the psychological empowerment construct, which would be composed of four basic cognitions:

- impact
- competence
- meaning, and
- autonomy or self-determination

The *impact* cognition refers to the intensity with which an individual may influence the strategy, management and the operating results of the work (Ashford, 1989). The *competence* variable would be the level to which a person may perform the activities required by the task with sufficient skills when he or she attempts to. *Meaning* would be the value of a goal or purpose, judging it in relation to the individual's own ideas or standards (Thomas y Velthouse, 1990), involving a feeling between the requirements of a work role and beliefs, values and behaviours (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Finally, *autonomy* or *self-*

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determination would be the individual feeling of having choice in initiating and regulating actions (Deci, Connell and Ryan, 1989).

In summary, we can see that there are several characteristics, both push and pull, which favour the development of entrepreneurial behaviour within the organisation. These will be both internal factors of the employee as well as external factors. In order to implement the former, it would be advisable to improve recruitment and selection processes, incorporating an assessment of entrepreneurial behaviour as a competence to be measured and taken into account. With regard to external processes, developing measures which favour empowerment through human resources policies relating to decentralisation, autonomy and support will act as a fuse for those entrepreneurs which we may have inside our organisations.

Only by combining both strategies will we be able to achieve non-spontaneous entrepreneurial behaviour, with the organisation thus attaining employees who do not only perform to a high standard but who also provide new creative and innovative elements which will enrich the organisation. We will most likely see new developments in this regard in the coming years.

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