UNDERSTANDING ENTREPRENEURIAL, PROFESSIONAL AND LEADERSHIP CAREER ASPIRATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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Principal Topic

Using a within-individual perspective, we examine (a) in what ways an individual’s entrepreneurial aspirations are either enhanced or eroded by professional and leader/managerial career aspirations; (b) how personality traits and values explain entrepreneurial career intentions in relation to motivation and efficacy; and (c) how primarily entrepreneurially-motivated students are more boundaryless in their career mindset than professionally- or leadership-motivated students. We propose a three-dimensional “career space”, which builds on Kanter’s (1989) proposal of three principal career forms in society – bureaucratic (or leader/managerial), professional, and entrepreneurial careers – as a framework to illuminate connections among careers beyond extant individual-psychological or organizational perspectives.

Method

We are conducting a five-year longitudinal study on university students’ relative motivations for entrepreneurial, professional and leadership (E, P, L) careers in the 21st century context of boundaryless career mindsets. In our pilot study, we drew extensively on Chan and Drasgow’s (2001) three-factor model of leadership motivation to develop a self-report measure of E, P, L motivations, efficacies, career intentions and career choice, and nascent entrepreneurial activity. All 31,661 undergraduate and postgraduate students in a public university in Singapore were invited to participate in an online survey, of which 11,324 (36%) responded, and 10,326 (92%) provided valid data for regression analyses. From this group, 272 students participated in a follow-up study that captured boundaryless work attitudes (Briscoe et al., 2006) and dispositional variables.

Results and Implications

Entrepreneurial career aspiration related negatively with professional career aspiration, suggesting that entrepreneurial and professional careers could be perceived as competing career options. Entrepreneurial intent was predicted not only by entrepreneurial motivation and efficacy but also by low professional motivation. An individual’s entrepreneurial career choice and nascent entrepreneurial activities were positively predicted by entrepreneurial motivation and efficacy, but negatively predicted by professional career motivation and efficacy. For personality traits, extraversion significantly predicted entrepreneurial intent. Moreover, those who desired entrepreneurial jobs after graduation scored significantly higher on “self-directed career attitude” than those who wanted professional or leader/managerial jobs, indicating that those holding entrepreneurial career aspirations also have a high level of boundaryless career mindset. Our research contributes to the entrepreneurial career aspirations literature by jointly examining the overlaps and differences among entrepreneurial career aspirations with professional and leader/managerial careers from a within-person approach. We highlight the challenges of nurturing entrepreneurship in countries where the general education system continues to focus on producing highly specialized professions versus one that cultivates a boundaryless career mindset.

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