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“TRYING” TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR? A “GOAL-SPECIFIC” CHALLENGE TO THE INTENTIONS MODEL (SUMMARY)

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“TRYING” TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR?
A “GOAL-SPECIFIC” CHALLENGE TO THE INTENTIONS MODEL

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Principal Topic

Research into entrepreneurial intentions focuses on theory-driven models of behavioral intentions such as Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). While TPB has proved robust in studying what drives entrepreneurial action this study challenge the model, assuming that intentions represent a dynamic process where intent and its ‘antecedents’ influence each other reciprocally. We integrate the theory of hierarchy of goals organizing behavior in three levels (Lawson, 1997) and the Theory of Trying (Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1990) thereby accommodating for a broader theory of goal-pursuit. Thus, intent is a dynamic process emphasizing personal goal hierarchies.

The dominant models of intention assume: (i) action is preceded by a deliberative process leading to conscious decisions to act and (ii) absence of impediments to acting. If impediments exist, the behavior is more properly considered a goal. The key question is therefore: Are an entrepreneur’s intentions actually goals? Goals tend to assume a sequence of behaviors, such as barriers to overcome or resources to acquire which represent the hierarchy of intermediate goals. Our models of intentions toward a behavior assume that the behavior is proximal and without unreasonable obstacles. Where actual action is problematic, the completion of an action can be seen as an intermediate goal en route to the primary goal (of launching a venture).

Method

Students (421) facing career decisions responded: 173 undergraduate students from a university in southwest Finland (68 female), 48 undergraduates from a polytechnic college in southwest Finland (8 female), and 200 high-school students from southwest Finland and Ostrobothnia (123 female). We test the hierarchy of goals and the relational patterns using structural equation modelling. We analyze the sequencing of goals and deploy multiple competing models to test for reciprocal relationships along the pathways to intent.

Results and Implications

Our results demonstrate a parsimonious, elegant model that indicates that a hierarchy of goals and reciprocity indeed exists, which increases explanatory power.

The Theory of Trying offers more realistic insights of better mechanisms for understanding perceived barriers to entrepreneurial actions. Entrepreneurial intent must reflect the complex and dynamic hierarchy of goals. This model offers opportunities for new pedagogical innovations to increase “informed” intent.

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