THE NATURE OF EXPERIENCE: A SOCIAL COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE DRIVERS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS (SUMMARY)

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Recommended Citation
Ofstein, Laurel and Renko, Maija (2011) "THE NATURE OF EXPERIENCE: A SOCIAL COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE DRIVERS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS (SUMMARY)," Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research: Vol. 31: Iss. 4, Article 16.
Available at: http://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol31/iss4/16

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THE NATURE OF EXPERIENCE: A SOCIAL COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE DRIVERS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS

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Principal Topic

Entrepreneurial intentions are deeply rooted in the individual’s prior knowledge, gained through experience and through education. The evidence about the nature of this experience, however, has yet to be fully explored. Under social cognitive theory’s representation of learning (Bandura, 1986; Wood & Bandura, 1989), virtually all learning that results from direct experience can occur vicariously through observation. The focus of entrepreneurship research in this area has been primarily on aspects of direct entrepreneurial experience, but we still do not know if vicarious experiences can really compensate for the lack of direct experiences. Hence, the purpose of this research is to understand how various types of entrepreneurial experiences affect entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) and entrepreneurial intentions.

Method

The sample consists of individuals enrolled in Entrepreneurship and non-Entrepreneurship courses at a large, urban, public university, who took the survey at two different points in time (beginning and end of semester), resulting in 531 matched cases. Multiple hierarchical regression analysis was used to test all hypotheses.

Results and Implications

Most hypotheses are supported. Specifically, direct experience (companies started / helped to start) is a positive predictor of entrepreneurial intentions. Vicarious experience is found to be significantly and positively related to intent. ESE is also found to be a positive predictor of intentions. A partial mediation effect was found in that ESE mediates the relationship between having worked for an entrepreneurial firm and intent to start a new business. Also, ESE partially mediates the relationship between having observed a family member or close friend start a business and one’s own intent to start a business. Finally, we observe that both vicarious and direct experiences have a stronger influence on men’s entrepreneurial intentions than women’s. Furthermore, among women ESE is not a significant predictor of intentions.

Our findings support social cognitive theory by demonstrating the importance of vicarious experience in the development of entrepreneurial intentions, and also contributes to social feminist theory in that women and men have different experiential backgrounds as well as different ways of thinking about entrepreneurship (Wilson, Kickul et al. 2007).

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