

BACKGROUND OF NASCENT¹ ENTREPRENEURS

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¹ *nascent* - beginning to exist or develop The Penguin Macquarie Dictionary

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to discuss a range of sociological and motivational factors that influence an individual's decision to commence a new business venture. The paper is based on research data provided by university students studying an entrepreneurship degree program compared to the responses of a comparison group of non-entrepreneurial students.

In undertaking this research three characteristics have been focused on: need for achievement; risk-taking propensity; and locus of control. It appears from the responses that the entrepreneurship students exhibit these characteristics. They are more achievement oriented than the comparison group, they are much more prepared to take risks, and they are much more prepared to be in control.

It was thought that the 'entrepreneurial' students (nascent entrepreneurs) would be similar to each other in their backgrounds and views about new venture creation and that they would have been encouraged by parents, friends and teachers to start up new business ventures. And it seems that this is so.

It was not apparent that teachers had any significant impact on the desire to commence new ventures. However 'strong encouragement' or 'encouragement' to start a business from their fathers was experienced by approximately two-thirds of the entrepreneurship students compared to less than half of the comparison group experiencing this level of encouragement. Mothers of the entrepreneurial students were only slightly less encouraging. It was also apparent that the nascent entrepreneurs, as a group, strongly felt their parents were 'totally supportive' and 'provided ideas/advice and supported their ideas' whereas the predominant encouragement by parents of the comparison group was to follow the family tradition.

Of the 2003 cohort of entrepreneurial students 75% indicated that they were either strongly encouraged or encouraged by their friends to start a business venture of their own. On the other hand just over 50% of the comparison group indicated encouragement by their friends to commence a business.

In terms of parental background four out of every five entrepreneurship students have parents who have at some stage run their own business. This is compared to three out of every five students from the comparison group.

More evidence is needed to make more definite conclusions about the backgrounds and attitudes of entrepreneurial students however from this research it is possible to conclude that encouragement to commence a venture by parents and friends does have a positive impact on a person's preparedness to 'have a go'.

BACKGROUND

The reasons why entrepreneurs are entrepreneurial have been the subject of much research, discussion and debate over much of the 20th Century. Most tension in the debate has been

between those who believe heredity is the major influence on the development of entrepreneurial characteristics vs those who believe the environment is the major influence. One of the major reasons why this debate continues is the belief that if ways can be found to develop entrepreneurial capacities in people then we have a key to creating more wealth and employment within an economy. The purpose of the research discussed in this paper is to contribute to that debate.

Over the last two years research into this area has been conducted at RMIT University with the following question posed:

What are some of the sociological and motivational reasons why people create new ventures?

In undertaking this research a number of matters had to be resolved.

Defining the entrepreneur

There is a growing number of advocates suggesting that entrepreneurship become a 'legitimate field of academic enquiry' (Bygrave and Hofer 1991) however one of the obstacles in the way of this push has been an inability to define entrepreneurship. Shaver and Scott (1991) briefly discussed the difficulties in defining entrepreneurship and in order to avoid the definitional problem opted to describe entrepreneurship as 'new venture creation'.

As with Scott and Shaver (1991) it was decided to look at the action or outcome of the entrepreneurial action rather than attempting to define the person, hence the focus on creating new ventures.

Psychological approach to understanding entrepreneurial behaviour

Shaver and Scott (1991) discussed how 'a psychological approach based on persons, process, and choice held promise for the future.' They recognized however that there was also a definitional problem surrounding a 'psychological approach' to the study of any phenomenon. In their work they chose to focus on a point of agreement between psychologists, i.e. that psychology is differentiated from other social or behavioural sciences by its focus on an analysis of the individual person. The research that is the subject of this paper also focuses on the individual person and the reasons they provide for being entrepreneurial in their behaviour.

To opt to use the word 'psychological' to describe reasons for acting in a certain way also has the potential to create the need to conduct a literature review into the whole body of psychological research, a daunting prospect indeed. Instead this research has opted to use the term 'motivational reasons' for a decision to commence a new venture rather than 'psychological reasons' for starting a new venture.

Entrepreneurial Characteristics

Another issue has been the choice of entrepreneurial characteristics or capacities to examine. Research into the characteristics of entrepreneurs tends to focus on three main factors: need for achievement; locus of control; and risk-taking propensity.

In a significant paper on the subject of the antecedents of new venture creation Shaver and Scott (1991) concluded that need for achievement offered the best and most reliable opportunity to discover why people start up new ventures. They found that most research into Risk-taking Propensity involved the use of a Choice Dilemmas Questionnaire (CDQ) and raised serious methodological problems in the application of this measure. Similarly Shaver and Scott raised doubts about the major measure used to test for Locus of Control, the Internal-External Locus of Control scale (IE). Factor analyses of the use of the IE scale revealed that there are usually a multiple of factors that influence the outcomes of the test.

For the purposes of this research therefore, whilst locus of control and risk-taking propensity are addressed, the major focus has been on the reasons why people have developed a need for achievement and its association with new venture creation.

Focus Group

The initial intention of this research was to convene a number of focus groups of existing, or 'practicing', entrepreneurs in order to have them reflect on the factors that influenced their career choice. However recent research by Carter (2002) into reasons why entrepreneurs make the career choices they do raised serious questions about relying on retrospective accounts of entrepreneurs. Golden (1992) also questioned the reliability of this approach in relation to retrospective accounts of managers.

As a result, the focus of this research is on nascent entrepreneurs (as was Carter's) and the reasons they provided for wanting to become entrepreneurial i.e. prospective reasons for behaviour. Carter concluded that entrepreneurs were not qualitatively different from other people who pursued career options. However Carter's research focused on ascertaining the reasons why entrepreneurs created new ventures not on the reasons why entrepreneurs developed this need in the first place.

In view of Carter's work, for the purposes of this research, it was decided to use undergraduate students in RMIT University's Bachelor of Business (Entrepreneurship) (BBE) program as the target group. In order to be admitted to this program potential students need to provide evidence that they are opportunity focused and are prepared to create an organisation to pursue the opportunity i.e. they self-select through providing evidence that they are either currently entrepreneurial or have the intention to be entrepreneurial. A total of 104 first, second and third year BBE students completed the survey instrument.

Students enrolled in RMIT's Bachelor of Business (Business Administration) (BBBA) provided the source of data for a comparison group and a total of 30 students completed the survey instrument. None of these students is undertaking any studies in entrepreneurship.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses are driving this research:

1. That nascent entrepreneurs have similar backgrounds.

2. That encouragement is a key factor in developing a need for achievement and in motivating a person to commence a new business venture.
3. That parents, teachers and peers have an impact on fostering a need for achievement and in encouraging a person to start up a new business venture.

The purpose of this paper is to examine and draw out common factors in the backgrounds and views of nascent entrepreneurs as to why they are entrepreneurial.

METHOD

The Interpretivism method of research was used to establish the hypotheses and quantitative research methodology, using a questionnaire, has formed the basis of the process of testing these hypotheses. As described above it was decided, as did Carter (2002), to target 'nascent entrepreneurs'.

Students studying the BBE program were the target group with a comparison group selected from the BBBA program. These latter students had no exposure to entrepreneurship and entry to the program is based on a ranking based system (ENTER scores²). Entry to the Bachelor of Business (Entrepreneurship) degree program however is based on a ranking against three criteria:

1. School academic performance: as indicated through their ENTER ranking.
2. Entrepreneurial nature: as evidenced by their preparedness to start up new ventures and be involved in entrepreneurial activities.
3. Leadership and initiative: as evidenced by school, sporting and community leadership and initiative.

It is the second of these two criteria that identifies these undergraduate students as 'nascent' entrepreneurs.

The research instrument was a questionnaire that covered the following areas: Vital data (age, gender etc); Schooling; Parents; Current business activity; Work patterns, perceptions and attitudes. In all, 142 questions were posed in the questionnaire and 106 questionnaires have been completed by BBE students. Thirty students in the BBBA program, the comparison group, completed the questionnaire.

At this point no cross analysis between questions has been done. This paper reports simply on an analysis of the answers provided by the entrepreneurial students to particular questions that bear on the hypotheses being posed and a comparison of these responses to those of the comparison group.

² ENTER scores are the percentile rankings of students as they emerge from their final year of schooling (year112)

RESULTS

Entrepreneurial Nature of the student

Each successive intake of students into the RMIT BBE program was drawn from an increasingly larger group of applicants using criteria that, in part, focused on their entrepreneurial and leadership characteristics. It is to be expected then, if the selection process worked, that with each successive intake the BBE students would exhibit stronger entrepreneurial and leadership characteristics.

Data relating to need for achievement, risk-taking propensity and need for control, is analysed below.

Need for achievement

Each successive intake of nascent entrepreneurs exhibited a greater need to achieve their goals with close to 66% of 2003 students indicating that it was completely or mostly true that once they had set themselves a goal they 'never give up'. This compares to 56% of the non-entrepreneurship or BBBA students.

Table 1 How desperate are they to achieve their goals?

Question: Once you set yourself a goal you never give up.

	A Complete ly true	B Mostly true	Both A + B	C Depend s	D Mostly untrue	E Complete ly Untrue
BBE 2001 intake	11	33	44	50	0	6
BBE 2002 Intake	16	41	57	35	4	4
BBE 2003 intake	16	47	63	29	8	0

BBBA degree students	15	41	56	33	11	0
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Percentage data

Risk taking propensity

The nascent entrepreneurs exhibited a strong tendency to be comfortable when taking financial risks with over 66% saying it was 'completely true' or 'mostly true' whereas only 20% of the non-entrepreneurship students were comfortable.

Table 2 Are they prepared to take financial risks?

Question: You are quite comfortable taking financial risks.

	A Completely true	B Mostly true	Both A+B	C Depends	D Mostly untrue	E Completely Untrue
BBE 2001 intake	22	39	61	33	6	0
BBE 2002 Intake	20	49	69	24	4	2
BBE 2003 intake	22	47	69	28	3	0

BBBA degree students	8	12	20	38	35	8
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Percentage data

Need for control

As evidenced in Table 3 below over 66% of the 'entrepreneurial' students indicated that it was Completely true or Mostly true that they preferred to be in control when working in a team whereas only 40% of the comparison group had the same desire.

Table 3 To what extent do the students like being in control?

Question: When working in a team you prefer to be in control

	A Completely true	B Mostly true	Both A+B	C Depends	D Mostly untrue	E Completely Untrue
BBE 2001 intake	33	39	72	22	6	0
BBE 2002 Intake	20	49	69	24	6	0
BBE 2003 intake	24	39	63	34	3	0

BBBA degree students	8	31	39	42	12	8
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Percentage data

Summary

Clearly on the basis of the above data, and assuming that need for achievement, risk taking propensity and need for control are indicators of an entrepreneurial personality, the nascent entrepreneurs are more entrepreneurial than the comparison group. This outcome would seem to validate the selection criteria and selection process for students into the BBE program.

Encouragement

To what extent is encouragement a cause of the need by people to undertake an entrepreneurship degree program?

As a person moves from primary to secondary school and on to further study or work many people influence the way a person thinks and acts and, in particular, the choice of career. One question that needs to be explored, for the purpose of this research, is the extent to which family, relatives and friends encouraged and influenced the person to start a business venture (as a career choice). This research segmented the source of encouragement into teachers, fathers, mothers and friends.

Teacher encouragement

As evidenced in the table below the greatest level of encouragement by teachers was experienced by the first intake of BBE students. Eighty two percent of these students indicated they were either strongly encouraged or encouraged to apply for the degree program. A probable reason for this was that the students were advised of the existence of the BBE program by enthusiastic teachers in schools who had heard about the course and its commencement through direct marketing by the University. Entry into the BBE program in 2001 was direct entry not through the central agency (the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre – VTAC). In subsequent years the program has been promoted and notified through a more general internet based promotional campaign as well as by word of mouth and entry has been centrally administered through VTAC.

The data for teacher encouragement does not demonstrate a significant difference between the last two intakes of BBE students and the comparison group indicating that the encouragement of teachers was not a substantial reason why they undertook an entrepreneurship program as against a traditional business degree program.

Table 4 Teacher encouragement

Question: Have any of your teachers encouraged you to, or discouraged you from, starting a business venture of your own?

	A Strongly encoura ged	B Encoura ged	A and B Both	C Passi ve	D Discoura ged	E Strongly discouraged
BBE 2001 intake	29	53	82	18	0	0
BBE 2002 Intake	6	27	33	65	2	0
BBE 2003 intake	11	19	30	65	5	0

BBBA degree students	0	26	26	67	4	4
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Percentage data

Parental encouragement

It is generally acknowledged that parents have a significant influence on the career choice of their children and certainly on the choice of degree program to undertake. So it was expected that parents would also have an influence on the decision of a son or daughter to start a business. It was thought that many of them would be running businesses themselves and would like to see their son or daughter 'continue the business' or 'follow in their footsteps'.

Father's encouragement

As evidenced in the table below, 'Strong encouragement' or 'encouragement' to start a business by their fathers has been experienced by approximately two-thirds of the entrepreneurship students however less than half of the comparison group experienced this level of encouragement. This would indicate that encouragement by fathers is a significant factor in the reason why a person decides to be an entrepreneur.

Table 5 Father's encouragement

Question: Did your father encourage you to, or discourage you from, starting a business venture of your own?

	A Strongly encourage ment	B Encourage ment	Both A + B	C Passi ve	D Discoura ged	E Strongly discoura ged
BBE 2001 intake	41	24	63	29	6	0
BBE 2002 Intake	28	38	66	30	4	0
BBE 2003 intake	27	41	68	30	3	0
BBBA degree students	19	26	45	52	0	4

Percentage data

As evident in Table 6 below, it seems that mothers were not as encouraging of their children as the fathers although the proportion of students who were Strongly Encouraged by their mothers was higher for both the 2002 and 2003 intakes. However encouragement by their mothers is an influencing factor in the decision by a person to become entrepreneurial. Encouragement by mothers was still significantly above the comparison group responses particularly for the first and third cohorts of BBE students.

Table 6 Mother's Encouragement

Question: Did your mother encourage you to, or discourage you from, starting a business venture of your own?

	A Strongly encoura ged	B Encoura ged	Both A and B	C Passiv e	D Discourag ed	E Strongly discoura ged
BBE 2001 intake	28	33	61	28	11	0
BBE 2002 Intake	32	22	54	40	6	0
BBE 2003 intake	38	24	62	35	3	0

BBBA degree students	19	26	45	48	0	7
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Percentage data

How were they encouraged by their parents?

This is an important follow on question that might provide some clues as to how parents might act in encouraging a sense of entrepreneurialism amongst their children.

Nature of encouragement

Question: If either of your parents ENCOURAGED you to start a business venture can you briefly describe how your mother or father encouraged you to consider starting your own business.

	Nascent entrepren eurs	Comparis on Group
Saw the same opportunity - that there was money to be made	3	8
Follow your passions/heart	9	8
Follow the family tradition	12	23
Will invest in the business	13	8
Provided ideas/advice and supported ideas	25	8
Saw the potential in the son/daughter	6	15
Totally supportive	44	0
Coaching and teaching	4	0
Better than working for others	5	8
Provided books and resources including capital	11	0
Provided employment in their business	1	8

Number of suggestions

As evidenced from this table it is apparent that the nascent entrepreneurs, as a group, strongly felt their parents were 'totally supportive' and 'provided ideas/advice and supported their ideas'. On the other hand the predominant encouragement by parents of the comparison group was to follow the family tradition.

Friends encouragement

It is clear from the table below that each subsequent intake of entrepreneurial students into the program indicated a stronger impact by friends on their decision to start business ventures. Of the latest cohort three out of four indicated that they were either strongly encouraged (29%) or encouraged (45%) by their friends to start a business venture of their own. On the other hand just over 50% of the comparison group indicated encouragement by their friends to commence a business.

Table 8 Encouragement by friends

Question: Have any of your friends encouraged you to, or discouraged you from, starting a business venture of your own?

	A Strongly encouraged	B Encoura ged	Both A and B	C Passiv e	D Discourag ed	E Strongly discoura ged
BBE 2001 intake	38	13	51	38	13	0
BBE 2002 Intake	31	29	60	35	6	0
BBE 2003 intake	29	45	74	16	5	5

BBBA degree students	15	38	53	31	8	8
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Percentage data

Business background of parents

It might be expected that parents who encouraged their children to become involved in establishing business ventures may in fact themselves be involved in running businesses. Table 9 below backs this up.

Table 9 Have parents ever run a business?

Question: Have your parents **ever** worked for themselves or run their own business, alone or together?

	Yes	No
BBE 2001 intake	83	17
BBE 2002 Intake	74	26
BBE 2003 intake	82	18

BBBA degree students	69	31
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Percentage data

Four out of every five entrepreneurship students have parents who have at some stage run their own business. This is compared to three out of every five students from the comparison group. Clearly seeing, and perhaps experiencing, their parents running a business has had a positive impact on their decision to undertake an entrepreneurship degree program.

Student Background/Characteristics

Are there any other common characteristics of the entrepreneurial students?

Age

Do students who want to commence an entrepreneurial program have a particular age profile?

It was believed by the program developers that, eventually, the 'typical' average age of students (nascent entrepreneurs) undertaking the entrepreneurship degree would be mid-twenties. It was thought that if, as expected, the degree program became more popular there would be greater competition to meet all criteria and the emphasis on conducting entrepreneurial ventures (Criteria 2) would play a greater role in selecting students. It was thought that younger applicants would not have had the same opportunity to have started business ventures. Table 10 below indicates that there has been some ageing of the student cohort but more data will be required over the next few years to draw firm conclusions.

Table 10 Age of students in first year

	18-19	20-21	22-23	24-25	26 >
BBE 2001 intake	72	11	11	0	6
BBE 2002 Intake	54	22	6	10	8
BBE 2003 intake	61	17	6	14	3

BBBA degree students	30	30	26	7	7
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Percentage data

The students undertaking the (BBBA) courses are on average older. Possible reason for this is that a large proportion of Asian and international students comprise this group and they tend to have a higher age profile.

Gender of students

Does gender influence the decision of a person to undertake an entrepreneurship program?

It has been obvious from the first intake of students into the entrepreneurship program that males made up the greatest proportion of enrolled students and over the three years the percentage of males/females have remained reasonably constant at 33% females and 66%

males. However it is the reverse in the comparison group. Over 60% of BBBA students are female almost the reverse of the BBE data.

Table 11 Gender of students

	Female	Male
BBE 2001 intake	28	72
BBE 2002 Intake	30	70
BBE 2003 intake	32	68

BBBA degree students	63	37
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Percentage data

Birth Order

Does birth order influence a person's preparedness to undertake an entrepreneurship degree program?

On the basis of the data obtained (Table 12 below) it appears just over 50% of students studying business courses are latter born i.e. not first born or only children. This is more evident with the BBBA comparison group. More data will be needed here to draw valid conclusions.

Table 12 Birth Order

	Only	First	Second	Third	Other
BBE 2001 intake	0	33	44	11	11
BBE 2002 Intake	6	50	28	12	4
BBE 2003 intake	8	39	36	11	6

BBBA degree students	0	27	46	15	12
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Percentage data

Where do students reside

Is the abode of students influential on the decision of a student to undertake a program that assists them become an entrepreneur?

The majority of students live at home with their parents. Partly this is because of the youth of the students. The data for the BBBA students is also influenced by the number of Asian international (onshore) students in the cohort and by the fact that they tended to be older. (see Table 10). It would be anticipated that as the age of the students studying the program increases (as expected)

a greater percentage of students will live away from the home and parents. Because most still live at home their recollections of encouragement are all the more valid.

Table 13 Abode

	Parents	Friends	On own	Other
BBE 2001 intake	56	28	11	6
BBE 2002 Intake	60	20	8	12
BBE 2003 intake	59	19	14	8

BBBA degree students	48	26	11	15
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Percentage data

The fact that a majority of entrepreneurship students still live at home may well help explain the impact of encouragement by parents on the decision of students to undertake an entrepreneurship program, i.e. they are still being encouragement and/or their recollection is of recent encouragement.

Where did students go to school

Does going to a non-government school make a person more prepared to become an entrepreneur?

As evidenced in Table 14 below students overwhelmingly come from a private school background and this is particularly the case for the non-entrepreneurial business students 16% of whom are International students. More data is required to be able to look at the impact of schooling on the decision to undertake an entrepreneurial degree program.

Table 14 Schooling

	Gov	Non Gov
BBE 2001 intake	41	59
BBE 2002 Intake	40	60
BBE 2003 intake	26	74

BBBA degree students	28	72
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Percentage data

Years before deciding to study

Is there any evidence that having some time off between school and tertiary study impacts on a person's ability to be selected into an entrepreneurship degree program i.e. the time out makes them more entrepreneurial?

The trend evidenced in Table 15 below indicates that an increasing proportion of students being admitted to the entrepreneurship program have spent one or more years working or traveling etc before applying for and being accepted into the program. It may also indicate that the selection criteria focusing on entrepreneurial nature (for admission to the BBE program) is having a greater impact on selection of students.

Table 15 Years out of school

	None	One	Two	Three	More
BBE 2001 intake	72	0	11	11	6
BBE 2002 Intake	38	18	12	8	24
BBE 2003 intake	37	29	13	3	18

BBBA degree students	4	26	19	30	22
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Percentage data

CONCLUSION

In their paper Shaver and Scott articulate how over the years studies of the personological characteristics of entrepreneurs have resulted in them being debunked, discarded or found to be immeasurable (effectively). As a result studies of new venture creation have tended to concentrate on the external stimuli such as economic circumstances, social networks, teams, marketing, finance and public agency assistance. However none of these alone will create a new venture. 'For that we need a person in whose mind all possibilities come together, who believe that innovation is possible, and who has the motivation to persist until the job is done'. Shaver and Scott argue that to find this answer we need a truly psychological perspective on new venture creation. In this paper the focus has been on encouragement as a source of motivation on an individual to commence a business venture.

In relation to hypotheses 1 seems clear from this research that, in particular, nascent entrepreneurs do have similar backgrounds. Four out of every five entrepreneurship students have parents who have at some stage have run their own business. Males are the predominant gender of students enrolled in the BBE program and the majority still live at home with their parents. It also seems, though more data is needed to confirm this, that going to a non-government school impacts on the decision to undertake study to become entrepreneurial. In addition it seems that having some time between secondary school study and entrepreneurial study is becoming more common and influences the ability of a person to be selected into the entrepreneurship program.

It is also clear that parental encouragement (Hypotheses 2) has a clear impact on the decision of a person to undertake a degree program that results in a person becoming an entrepreneur. This is not surprising. Parents do have an impact on career choice of their children. It is also clear that friends have an influence but not so teachers.

This paper is limited to describing backgrounds and simple analysis of data arising from particular questions. Cross analysis is now required to determine and validate the preliminary findings.

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