

Towards an Explanation of the Growth in Young Entrepreneur Activities: A Cross Country Survey of Work Values of College Students

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This short exploratory paper aims to study job attitudes of business college students with a view of contributing to the explanation of the reported global growth in young entrepreneur activities. Seven career attitude factors adapted from the theory of planned behavior are used to conduct a comparative study of work attitudes of university business students in the United States and South Africa to establish if there are significant differences across nations. The results show similarity in what the students expect from their future careers but do not necessarily provide an explanation for the observed increase of young entrepreneurs.

INRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is an important career option. In the past few years successive Results Reports from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor indicate that throughout the world entrepreneurs are pursuing new ventures out of both necessity and opportunity. Around the globe public policy rhetoric in the area of job creation in different countries has pronounced a growing interest in undertaking actions to portray entrepreneurship as an attractive alternative to organizational employment among students (Schwarz, et. al., 2009). Interest in entrepreneurship among young people is reported to be growing (Scarborough, et. al, 2009), prompting increased research interest in the area, (Harris, et. al., 2008). This paper aims to study job attitudes of business graduates with a view of contributing to the explanation of the reported global growth in young entrepreneur activities. Starting up a new venture is acknowledged to be an individual decision, (Littunen, 2000). This makes the individual entrepreneur central in the investigation of entrepreneurial activities. Research has encouraged a continuous study and refinement of the entrepreneurial profile. In examining the global landscape, it is clear that some cultures produce many more entrepreneurs than others, and finding possible explanations continues to be of increasing importance in the global economy.

Although significant research has been conducted in the field of entrepreneurship writers continue to emphasize that studies on entrepreneurial motivation are still limited, (Kuratko, et. al., 1997, Van Gelderen, et. al., 2008). Research on work values of young college graduates has shown that they desire work which provides a feeling of accomplishment, job security and the opportunity for advancement. Much of this research has been done in developed and individual country economies. Also with the reported increase in entrepreneurial activity among young people two further research questions that arise are whether the work values reported earlier still hold and whether there are differences across countries.

The objective of this exploratory comparative study is to contribute to entrepreneurship research through establishing the work attitudes of today's undergraduate college business students across

countries. Seven employment attitude factors of job security, workload, social environment, responsibility, opportunity, job challenge, and self direction adapted from the theory of planned behavior, are used to conduct a comparative study of work attitudes of university business students in the United States of America (US) and South Africa (SA) to establish if there are significant differences across nations.

While entrepreneurship is important to all economies, businesses need employees. Some young people opting for entrepreneurship may actually have great potential as employees. A skilled, knowledgeable and committed workforce is an essential resource of successful businesses. Business leaders need to know today's young employee expectations and motivations. Results of this exploratory research make an important contribution in this regard.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopts the approach of previous research providing explanations for entrepreneurial intentions. The focus of this research is on prediction rather than realization of entrepreneurship. In one of the many suggestions of defining entrepreneurship Gartner (1989), views entrepreneurship as a process of organization creation. Scholars have attempted to explain new business formation from a range of perspectives including psychology (Bird, 1992), sociology (Aldrich, 1990), and economics (Douglas and Shepherd, 2000). Career choices have been demonstrated to be cognitive in nature, (Kruger, et. al 2000), evolving as we cognitively process our knowledge, beliefs, and experiences. There are studies that suggest that new ventures emerge because of deliberate choices made by individuals (Shaver and Scott, 1991), and one of the immediate antecedents of behavior is intention, (Ajzen, 1991, Kim and Hunter, 1993). The position taken in this paper is that intention comes before realization.

Entrepreneurship research has attempted to identify the situational and environmental factors that predict entrepreneurial activity. Using the contingency theory Gilad and Levine (1986), proposed the "push" and "pull" theories as possible explanations of entrepreneurial motivation. The "push" theory suggests that a person can opt for entrepreneurship as a result of unfavorable environmental conditions like job dissatisfaction, while the "pull" theory argues that people can find entrepreneurship attractive. Despite research indications that individuals become entrepreneurs mainly because of "pull" factors college graduates and students are reported to be increasingly disenchanted with career prospects as organizational employees, ((Orhan and Scott, 2001), seemingly suggesting a "push" factor scenario.

In our research we use the attitude factor in Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. The theory explains intentions by means of attitudes, perceived behavioral control and subjective norms. We concur with Van Gelderen, et. al. (2008) that Ajzen's (1991) theoretical specification is detailed and consistent and has been tested.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Method

The population is built from graduating students from two partner universities, one in South Africa and one in the US. Country selection is based on the need to have a developing nation and developed nation representation, and the two universities are chosen for ease of access. An existing partnership between the two universities made them a preferred good choice. The sample consists of undergraduate student subjects facing imminent career decisions.

Survey data is collected through a self administered questionnaire, an approach found appropriate given the limited use of alternative methods of data collection like online surveys in developing nations like South Africa and the need for consistency.

Research Instrument

This study draws on the sizable body of comparable studies seeking to explain entrepreneurial intentions. Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior explains intentions by means of attitudes, perceived

behavioral control and subjective norms. Kolvereid (1996) demonstrated that the Ajzen (1991) framework is a solid model for predicting entrepreneurial intentions.

One of the variables that influence intent to perform a behavior is attitude towards the behavior. Our basic proposition is that a partial explanation for the increase in entrepreneurial activity among young people is that compared to organizational employment, entrepreneurship better meets the career aspirations of the young people of today and that this phenomenon cuts across nations. The research instrument is made up of 27 statements adapted from prior research designed to establish what the subjects consider important in choosing a career. For each statement the respondents are asked to choose from three options, agree = 1, neutral = 3, and disagree = 5.

Data Analysis

A basic survey analysis tool is used to generate the career preference patterns. The questions allow assessment of job attitudes along seven identifiable categories. The aggregate tables generated by the two data sets representing responses from the two universities studied are used to discuss the results along seven employment attitude factors of job security, workload, social environment, responsibility, opportunity, job challenge, and self direction. In the analysis we use the overall rating average. For the overall rating average, given that in our scale 1=agree and 5=disagree, the smaller the overall rating average the higher the extent of agreement with the statement and vice versa.

RESULTS

In tables 1 to 7 are comparative responses to the research questions as given by the respondents. For all the tables US students n=71, South African students n=33, and rating scale 1= agree, 3 = neutral, and 5 = disagree.

Table 1 shows the importance attached to job security. Overall attitude to job security is the average response to the two questions related to job security as shown in Table 1. Job security is an important factor in career choice to both the US students (1.48), and South African students (1.44), with the South African students seemingly attaching more importance to job security than the US students.

TABLE 1
IMPORTANCE OF JOB SECURITY AMONG US AND SA STUDENTS

	United States				South Africa			
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Av	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Av
Job security	71.8%	12.7%	15.5%	1.44	72.7%	9.1%	18.2%	1.45
Job stability	63.4%	21.1%	15.5%	1.52	72.7%	12.1%	15.2%	1.42
Overall job security	67.6%	16.9%	15.5%	1.48	72.7%	10.6%	16.7%	1.44

Scale: agree = 1 neutral = 3 disagree = 5

Table 2 shows scores for workload factors. The average score for workload factors is 1.99 for US students and 1.75 for South African students. For the US students surveyed job simplicity has the lowest rating at 2.38. The results show a higher preference for fixed working hours for the South African students (1.48), compared to 1.93 for the US students. The respondents agree on their level of concern for leisure (1.73). The responses also show that for the South African students, job related stress, at 1.76, may be a concern in career choice.

TABLE 2
WORKLOAD INFLUENCES AMONG US AND SA STUDENTS

	United States				South Africa			
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Av	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Av
Not having long hours	30.0%	45.7%	24.3%	1.94	42.4%	24.2%	33.3%	1.91
To have leisure	43.7%	39.4%	16.9%	1.73	45.5%	36.4%	18.2%	1.73
To have fixed working hours	35.2%	36.6%	28.2%	1.93	60.6%	30.3%	9.1%	1.48
Not to have a stressful job	31.0%	42.3%	26.8%	1.96	48.5%	27.3%	24.2%	1.76
To have a simple job	11.3%	39.4%	49.3%	2.38	36.4%	36.4%	27.3%	1.91
Overall rating	30.2	40.7%	29.1%	1.99	46.7%	30.9%	22.4%	1.75

Scale: agree = 1 neutral = 3 disagree = 5

Table 3 shows the scores for work social environment. The social environment construct takes care of people as social beings. The overall ratings that can be read from Table 3 for the groups are close at 1.8 and 1.9 and lean more towards being neutral than having a clear positive concern. Although the overall averages are close on the individual items the South African students show a higher concern to be part of the social environment (1.5) than the US students with only 1.77 agreeing with the statement.

TABLE 3
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT INFLUENCES AMONG US AND SA STUDENTS

	United States				South Africa			
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Av	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Av
Participate in social environment	39.4%	43.7%	16.9%	1.77	60.0%	30.0%	10.0%	1.50
Be member of a social miliew	25.7%	55.7%	18.6%	1.93	35.5%	22.6%	41.9%	2.06
Overall rating	32.6%	49.7%	17.8%	1.85	47.8	26.3	26	1.78

Scale: agree = 1 neutral = 3 disagree = 5

The responses in table 4 show the respondents disagreeing with statements suggesting avoiding responsibility as a factor in career choice, an average of 2.59 for US students and 2.57 for South African students.

TABLE 4
ATTITUDE OF US AND SA STUDENTS TOWARDS RESPONSIBILITY

	United States			South Africa				
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Av	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Av
Avoid responsibility	11.3%	18.3%	70.4%	2.59	12.1%	3.0%	84.8%	2.73
Not taking on too much responsibility	8.5%	23.9%	67.6%	2.59	9.4%	25.0%	65.6%	2.56
Avoid commitment	11.3%	19.7%	69.0%	2.58	18.8%	21.9%	59.4%	2.41
Overall rating	10.4%	20.6%	69.0%	2.59	13.4%	16.6%	69.9%	2.57

Scale: agree = 1 neutral = 3 disagree = 5

Table 5 shows results of responses to organizational human resources management practices of rewarding employees. From Table 5 it can be seen that opportunity as represented by promotional possibilities is 1.37 for US students and 1.33 for South African students surveyed. The South African students show a high concern for compensation based on merit, 1.24, against 1.66 for United States students.

TABLE 5
IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTION, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND MERIT BASED COMPENSATION TO US AND SA STUDENTS

	United States				South Africa			
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Av	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Av
Promotion	78.9%	5.6%	15.5%	1.37	78.8%	9.1%	12.1%	1.33
Economic opportunity	69.0%	16.9%	14.1%	1.45	87.9%	6.1%	6.1%	1.18
Compensation based on merit	49.3%	35.2%	15.5%	1.66	81.8%	12.1%	6.1%	1.24
Overall Rating	65.7%	19.2%	15.03%	1.49	82.8%	9.1%	8.1%	1.25

Scale: agree = 1 neutral = 3 disagree = 5

Job challenge and interest are variables that address intrinsic rewards linked to job satisfaction. The results in table 6 show an average overall rating closer to agreeing than neutral 1.43 for US students and 1.23 for South African students.

TABLE 6
JOB CHALLENGE PERCEPTION AMONG US AND SA STUDENTS

	United States			Av	South Africa			Av
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree		Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
Challenge and excitement	67.1%	21.4%	11.4%	1.44	84.8%	3.0%	12.1%	1.27
Interesting and motivating job	71.8%	14.1%	14.1%	1.42	87.9%	6.1%	6.1%	1.18
Overall rating	69.5%	17.8%	12.8%	1.43	86.4%	4.6%	9.1%	1.23

Scale: agree = 1 neutral = 3 disagree = 5

The final set of variables addresses entrepreneurial orientation construct. They are about self direction as represented by the freedoms associated with the entrepreneurship career. The results are summarized in Table 7. The overall rating for US students is 1.63, and for South African students is 1.52. The specific entrepreneurial area where the US students score highest is the desire to create something new (1.57). Results in the other three areas of evidence of being one's own boss, independence, choosing one's own tasks and exploiting personal creativity are close averaging 1.65. For the South African students the lowest score is in the area of choosing one's own tasks (1.76), with the other three areas very close at 1.45.

TABLE 7
NEED FOR SELF DIRECTION AMONG US AND SA STUDENTS

	United States			Av	South Africa			Av
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree		Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
Freedom, independence, own boss	49.3%	38.0%	12.7%	1.63	69.7%	12.1%	18.2%	1.48
Ability to choose own work tasks	47.9%	36.6%	15.5%	1.68	54.5%	15.2%	30.3%	1.76
Create something new	54.3%	34.3%	11.4%	1.57	69.7%	18.2%	12.1%	1.42
Take advantage of creative needs	47.9%	40.8%	11.3%	1.63	68.8%	21.9%	9.4%	1.41
Overall rating	49.9%	37.4%	12.7%	1.63	65.7%	16.9%	17.5%	1.52

Scale: agree = 1 neutral = 3 disagree = 5

In this final section we use results from responses to the 27 questions unbundled to show the top rated preferred career attributes. Top for the South African students is an interesting and motivating job, (1.18), with promotional opportunities (1.18). These fall into two categories, the nature of the job, and potential rewards from the job. In second place is economic opportunity (1.24). A close third position at 1.27 is the challenge and excitement associated with the job. This attribute, as with interest and motivation, is about the nature of the job. Fourth is opportunity for career progress (1.33), and the last in the top five is job security and stability both at 1.45.

TABLE 8
SCORES FOR ALL FACTORS CONSIDERED IN CHOOSING A CAREER
AMONG US AND SA STUDENTS

	United States				South Africa			
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	AV	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	AV
Job security	71.8%	12.7%	15.5%	1.44	72.7%	9.1%	18.2%	1.45
Job stability	63.4%	21.1%	15.5%	1.52	72.7%	12.1%	15.2%	1.42
Not having long hours	30.0%	45.7%	24.3%	1.94	42.4%	24.2%	33.3%	1.91
To have leisure	43.7%	39.4%	16.9%	1.73	45.5%	36.4%	18.2%	1.73
To have fixed working hours	35.2%	36.6%	28.2%	1.93	60.6%	30.3%	9.1%	1.48
Not to have a stressful job	31.0%	42.3%	26.8%	1.96	48.5%	27.3%	24.2%	1.76
To have a simple job	11.3%	39.4%	49.3%	2.38	36.4%	36.4%	27.3%	1.91
Participate in social environment	39.4%	43.7%	16.9%	1.77	60.0%	30.0%	10.0%	1.50
Be member of social milieu	25.7%	55.7%	18.6%	1.93	35.5%	22.6%	41.9%	2.06
Avoid responsibility	11.3%	18.3%	70.4%	2.59	12.1%	3.0%	84.8%	2.73
Not taking on too much responsibility	8.5%	23.9%	67.6%	2.59	9.4%	25.0%	65.6%	2.56
Avoid commitment	11.3%	19.7%	69.0%	2.58	18.8%	21.9%	59.4%	2.41
Have opportunity for career progress	81.4%	2.9%	15.7%	1.34	78.8%	9.1%	12.1%	1.33
Promotion	78.9%	5.6%	15.5%	1.37	87.9%	6.1%	6.1%	1.18
Economic opportunity	69.0%	16.9%	14.1%	1.45	81.8%	12.1%	6.1%	1.24
Compensation based on merit	49.3%	35.2%	15.5%	1.66	75.0%	6.3%	18.8%	1.44
Keep large proportion of the result	36.6%	53.5%	9.9%	1.73	69.7%	18.2%	12.1%	1.42
Challenge and excitement	67.1%	21.4%	11.4%	1.44	84.8%	3.0%	12.1%	1.27
Interesting and motivating job	71.8%	14.1%	14.1%	1.42	87.9%	6.1%	6.1%	1.18
Freedom, independence, own boss	49.3%	38.0%	12.7%	1.63	69.7%	12.1%	18.2%	1.48
Ability to choose own work tasks	47.9%	36.6%	15.5%	1.68	54.5%	15.2%	30.3%	1.76
Have decision making power	62.0%	19.7%	18.3%	1.56	69.7%	18.2%	12.1%	1.42
Have authority	57.7%	26.8%	15.5%	1.58	69.7%	18.2%	12.1%	1.42
Realize one's dreams	66.2%	21.1%	12.7%	1.46	66.7%	24.2%	9.1%	1.42
Create something new	54.3%	34.3%	11.4%	1.57	69.7%	18.2%	12.1%	1.42
Take advantage of creative needs	47.9%	40.8%	11.3%	1.63	68.8%	21.9%	9.4%	1.41
Participate in the whole process	45.1%	40.8%	14.1%	1.69	78.8%	12.1%	9.1%	1.30

Scale: agree = 1 neutral = 3 disagree = 5

As can be seen in Table 8 the responses from US students show a strong preference for opportunities in the career. In first place is opportunity for career progress (1.34), and second is promotion opportunity (1.37). In third place are two factors in different categories. The students are interested in a job that is interesting and motivational (1.42), a job characteristic factor, and job security (1.42). In fourth position, at 1.44, is challenge and excitement. Last in the top five preferences for the US students is the importance

of economic opportunity (1.45). Table 9 is a summary of the top ranked preferred career attributes as found by this study of college students in the United States and in South Africa.

TABLE 9
TOP RANKED PREFERRED CAREER ATTRIBUTES AMONG US AND SA STUDENTS

Rank	United States	South Africa
1.	Opportunity for career progress	Promotion, Interesting and motivating job
2.	Promotion	Economic opportunity
3.	Interesting and motivating job, Job security	Challenge and excitement
4.	Challenge and excitement	Opportunity for career progress,
5.	Economic opportunity	Job security, Job stability

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the results of this exploratory study reveals two interesting patterns. First is the universality of the broad career expectations of today's young people, and second are the important differences in attitude in the South African and US students. This is consistent with Harris and Gibson (2008) finding that collectively the students exhibit similar attitudes but that differences do exist.

As can be seen from Table 9, globally college students desire a career that recognizes and rewards performance, provides opportunities for growth, is challenging and exciting and provides security. This finding is consistent job design theory. While these preferred career attributes do not necessarily all highlight entrepreneurial orientation, the attitude towards economic opportunity is interesting. Kolvereid (1996b) found that individuals who emphasize economic opportunity involve themselves in self employment activity rather than organizational employment. This study shows that economic opportunity is one of the top considerations in career choice.

It is our view that collectively the top rated career attributes could be met by either organizational or self employment. Prior research on work values of young college graduates has shown that they desire work which provides a feeling of accomplishment, job security and the opportunity for advancement (Douglas, 2000, Schwartz, et. al., 2009). Early comparative studies of entrepreneurs and organizational employees use security and risk indicators, suggesting a tradeoff between risk and return.

From the overall ratings of job security as shown in Table 1, to both groups in the study job security is an important career consideration with a score of 1.48 for US students and 1.44 for South African students. Table 5 also shows that the opportunity associated with a potential career is an issue to young people faced with a career decision. The overall average ratings, while showing concern for reward systems by both groups of students, the South African students show a higher concern with an overall rating of 1.25 compared to 1.49 for the US students. A research question is can today's young people find careers with a positive relationship between security and reward?

An important contribution of this study is the finding that job excitement is an important consideration. Results of this exploratory research appear to suggest competition between job excitement and job security. Also, as reflected in the results in Table 7 the students attach some importance to self direction. The variables considered important with relatively equal ranking by the students include the need to realizing one's own dreams, creating something new, exploiting creative ability, to have authority and decision making power. A possible conclusion arising from this finding is that failure to get the expected attributes in the jobs on the market "pushes" the young people into entrepreneurship, especially given the added incentive of the opportunity for self direction. The findings can lead to the conclusion that the graduating students have a first preference for what organizational employment may offer, but disappointment with organizational employment may lead them to enterprise.

Entrepreneurship theory suggests that the entrepreneurial career is demanding (Scarborough, et. al., 2009). Popularly held generalizations bill today's young adults as people who avoid responsibility. Through results reflected in Table 4 this research has found that the young graduates are not attracted by responsibility avoidance. Also, job security and stability, while perceived to be important, cannot come at the expense of personal fulfillment and career challenges. Therefore, increased entrepreneurial activity among today's young people may not necessarily be a result of an increased preference for entrepreneurship, but rather an alternative strategy to fulfillment of desired life preferences. Using Gilad and Levine (1986) "push" and "pull" theories a possible explanation for the observed increase in entrepreneurial activities among young people is the "push" coming from organizational employment's failure to meet expectations of the young employees, and, although not necessarily investigated in this study, the "pull" effect of the potential rewards of entrepreneurship.

From table 2 it can be seen that to both groups studied workload might not be a decisive factor, with an average rating score closer to neutral than to agree in both groups of students. Comparative analysis shows the South African students having a higher concern about workload than the US students. The South African students seemingly have a significant preference for fixed working hours (1.48), compared to 1.93 for US students. These differences are an interesting result worthy of further investigation. A further research question arising from the comparative analysis of the workload scores is why the US students may be more tolerant of job stress (1.96) than the South African students (1.76).

In responding to the question of responsibility and commitment the students surveyed do not agree with suggestions of responsibility avoidance, responsibility limitation or commitment avoidance. A comparative analysis of the findings shows a more consistent attitude towards responsibility and commitment among the US students surveyed, whereas the message from the South African students appears to suggest a greater willingness to take on responsibility than willingness to commit oneself.

Although, overall, the career expectations of the students are similar for the South African and US students the comparative results show important differences in career expectations of the students in the different countries. A possible explanation for the differences found in the ranking of the career attitudes may be Abbey's (2002) finding that cultural differences, particularly between individualistic and collectivist cultures, can influence motivational preferences of individuals. However this study did not specifically investigate this relationship. It is interesting to note that in its report on entrepreneurship during the recession the 2009 attitudes Results Report from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor indicate a positive trend in perceived entrepreneurial opportunities for South Africa, and a negative trend for the US.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This research makes three important contributions. First, it brings out what young business students expect from their careers. Second, it provides a comparative perspective of the career preferences of young people. The important role of entrepreneurship to any economy is widely acknowledged. Economic and community development hinges on growing business formation and growth. To encourage economic development in the form of new businesses it is necessary to have information on factors that exert a positive influence on attitudes towards self employment Information that helps enhance entrepreneurship should be of interest to a range of stakeholders including researchers, educators and policy makers. Understanding differences in work attitudes across nations will make a contribution towards explaining differences in rates of firm startups across nations an important consideration in this age of globalization.

Third, the research has a message for business leaders. There is a need for a paradigm shift if organizations are going to attract and retain top talent. Today's young people believe they can take a heavy workload provided it is exciting. They also have the propensity to look for alternative opportunities if the organization fails to meet their expectations. A possible contribution of this study is that in addition to the traditional rewards organizations should consider making the work environment an interesting place.

One limitation of this exploratory study is its cross sectional nature. It does not provide a direct link between job attitude and active business founding. As such conclusions linking job attitudes to levels of entrepreneurship are theoretically based. Another limitation is that because of the survey nature of the research, it has not been possible to make follow up questions to uncover the reasoning behind the attitudes. The results suggest potentially interesting explanatory research to provide detailed information of the career intentions of today's business students and country differences as shown by this study and attempt to answer the questions raised in the discussion section above. It is also important to provide longitudinal studies in this area to follow the career paths of the respondents.

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