



# The future of research on entrepreneurial intentions<sup>☆</sup>



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 1 April 2013

Received in revised form 1 October 2013

Accepted 1 November 2013

Available online 17 December 2013

### Keywords:

Directions  
Entrepreneurship  
Intention  
Knowledge

## ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurial intention is a rapidly evolving field of research, with a growing number of studies using entrepreneurial intention as a powerful theoretical framework. Some authors, however, are now calling for scholars to rethink the future of research on entrepreneurial intentions. This paper addresses this issue and, on the basis of a number of knowledge gaps in the literature, proposes future directions for research.

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## 1. Introduction

The publication of Shapiro's seminal works some 30 years ago (Shapiro, 1984; Shapiro & Sokol, 1982) marks the point at which the literature on entrepreneurial intentions begins its current period of rapid growth. Soon after that, some independent contributions emerge in the field of entrepreneurship, as more authors begin to recognize the potential value of the intention approach (Bird, 1988). A shift in the focus of entrepreneurship research toward a process view (Gartner, 1985, 1989; Shaver & Scott, 1991) undoubtedly contributes to this development.

The evolution of the literature on entrepreneurial intention is a prime example of the successful integration of theories from a neighboring field into the study of entrepreneurship. In this particular case, the theories shifting to the entrepreneurship field belong to the area of social psychology, namely cognitive psychology. The speed of this integration process is remarkable, as publication of the first contributions from the field of psychology almost coincides with the early developments of the concept of entrepreneurial intention in the field of entrepreneurship. This phenomenon is true of, for instance, the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982, 1997), and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and its antecedents (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

Since the early nineties, an increasing number of contributions employ entrepreneurial intention models (Kolvereid, 1996a, 1996b; Krueger, 1993), confirming the applicability of the concept in different

settings (Autio, Keeley, Klofsten, Parker, & Hay, 2001; Liñán & Chen, 2009; Tkachev & Kolvereid, 1999). Although no specific work reconciles alternative models into a single one, authors show the compatibility of intention-based models (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994; Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000). This approach therefore consolidates the subject within the general category of entrepreneurial intention models, Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior providing the predominant specification.

With the publication of more and more studies using entrepreneurial intention as a framework, however, new applications, mismatches and specifications emerge (Carsrud & Brännback, 2009; Carsrud & Brännback, 2011; Krueger, 2007, 2009; Krueger & Day, 2010). Krueger (2009) considers entrepreneurial intentions to be dead and claims long live entrepreneurial intentions, calling for a deep rethinking of research on the matter. Liñán and Fayolle (in press) underline a lack of systemization and categorization within this stream of research, offering a systematic review of the literature. Taking Krueger's call as a starting point, and on the basis of Liñán and Fayolle's extensive review of the literature, this paper's purpose is to develop ideas and thoughts to suggest new directions for future research.

## 2. New directions for entrepreneurial intention research

The proposal of new ideas and research perspectives on entrepreneurial intentions draws on the research categories, or conceptual approaches, set out in Liñán and Fayolle's (in press) review of the literature.

- The first category covers papers studying the core entrepreneurial intention model, either deepening knowledge of some theoretical nuances, or analyzing methodological issues.
- The second category analyzes the role of personal-level variables in the configuration of entrepreneurial intentions.

<sup>☆</sup> The 2nd GIKA Conference (2013) hosted a previous version of this paper, and we thank participants for their comments. We are most grateful to the guest editors for their guidance and support, and also to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful recommendations, which have contributed to enhancing the quality of the paper.

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- c) A third group of papers addresses the interrelationship between entrepreneurship education and the entrepreneurial intention of its participants.
- d) The role context and institutions play in the configuration of entrepreneurial intentions constitutes the fourth category.
- e) Finally, a fifth research approach considers the entrepreneurial process and the intention–behavior link.

The authors link their proposals to the gaps that each of these categories highlights.

### 2.1. Core model, methodological, and theoretical issues

Three models primarily serve as a guide to an understanding of the development of entrepreneurial intentions: 1) Bird's (1988) model for implementing entrepreneurial ideas; 2) Shapero and Sokol's (1982) model of the entrepreneurial event; and 3) Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (Carsrud & Brännback, 2009; Shook, Priem, & Mcgee, 2003). Empirical evidence supports the applicability of Shapero and Sokol's model, and the theory of planned behavior to the field of entrepreneurship (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994; Krueger et al., 2000); however, strangely enough, the literature has yet to validate Bird's model empirically (Shook et al., 2003). The authors suggest areas of further research to validate this model and thus offer a new theoretical avenue for expanding research on entrepreneurial intention.

As prior works (Krueger, 2009; Liñán & Fayolle, *in press*; Shook et al., 2003) point out, key definitional challenges remain. To address this issue, researchers should define and explain precisely what they mean by entrepreneurial intention. Future research also ought to investigate intention in a wide range of entrepreneurial scenarios, by trying to capture and document, for example, corporate entrepreneurship intention (Fini, Grimaldi, Marzocchi, & Sobrero, 2012), social entrepreneurship intention (Nga & Shamuganathan, 2010), academic entrepreneurship intention (Goethner, Obschonka, Silbereisen, & Cantner, 2012), and family entrepreneurship intention (Zellweger, Sieger, & Halter, 2011).

As Krueger (2009, p. 53) states, "The construct of intentions appears to be deeply fundamental to human decision making and, as such, it should afford us multiple fruitful opportunities to explore the connection between intent and a vast array of other theories and models that relate to decision making under risk and uncertainty." This view opens the door for the development of integrative and more sophisticated theoretical models of the entrepreneurial process, linking intention-based models with prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) or effectuation theory (Sarasvathy, 2001). New research may also consider interaction (Fitzsimmons & Douglas, 2011), mediation (BarNir, Watson, & Hutchins, 2011) and moderation (Pollack, Vanepps, & Hayes, 2012) effects.

Finally, at the methodological level, a need exists to encourage research using samples of would-be entrepreneurs or nascent entrepreneurs, and longitudinal data to identify causal order in the entrepreneurial process (Kessler & Frank, 2009). Following a suggestion by Shook et al. (2003), researchers should also attempt to triangulate their findings using multi-method studies.

### 2.2. Influence of personal-level variables on entrepreneurial intention

Drawing on suggestions by Krueger (2007, 2009), research on entrepreneurial intention could make significant progress by trying to improve the understanding of the deep assumptions underpinning intentions (Hayton & Cholakova, 2012). Assessing the role and the importance of mental prototypes, cognitive scripts, mental schemas, and maps may shed light on the formation of entrepreneurial intentions and the process leading from intention to behavior (Prabhu, McGuire, Drost, & Kwong, 2012; Shinnar, Giacomini, & Janssen, 2012). These concepts will help to gain a better understanding of how human decision making occurs via automatic processing (Krueger & Day, 2010).

### 2.3. Entrepreneurship education and intention

Empirical research results reveal significant differences in terms of attitudes and intention levels of students who take part in entrepreneurship education programs and those who do not. Nonetheless, whether and how a generalization of those results to a range of settings may occur remains a pending question (Zhao, Siebert, & Hills, 2005). Furthermore, according to Fayolle and Gailly (*in press*), little knowledge exists regarding the potential causal link between some educational variables (participant selection and past entrepreneurial exposure, course contents, pedagogical methods, teachers' professional profiles, available resources, etc.) and the impact of entrepreneurship education programs on the antecedents of intention and/or behavior (attitudes, values, skills, etc.). For example, rigorous empirical studies to answer Krueger and Carsrud's (1993) question regarding how the process of drawing up a business plan affects intentions are non-existent. How does the type of pedagogy (active versus passive, face-to-face versus distance learning, using ICT or not, etc.) affect intention levels? How do the profile and background of educators influence students' intentions? How does the entrepreneurial intention of educators impact on their students' entrepreneurial intentions? How do the contents of entrepreneurship education programs (theoretical versus practice-based knowledge) bear upon students' intentions? Research could also probe into issues relating to the reciprocal relationships between students' entrepreneurial intentions, the quality of their entrepreneurial learning and the development of their entrepreneurial competences in educational settings (Martin, McNally, & Kay, 2013).

Concerning future research on entrepreneurship education using intention as an impact factor, scholars should seek to conduct studies with a high standard of methodological rigor. Of particular importance to such studies is the inclusion of a treatment group (students who receive entrepreneurship education) and a control group (students outside the entrepreneurship education sphere). Considering randomization in assignment to treatment and control groups is also possible to avoid sampling biases. Finally, studies on this kind of research issue (i.e., the assessment of entrepreneurship education), should include measures of variables at both pre- and post-intervention (Fayolle & Gailly, *in press*; Martin et al., 2013).

### 2.4. The role of context and institutions

As Welter (2011, p. 165) recently claims, "There is growing recognition in entrepreneurship research that economic behavior can be better understood within its historical, temporal, institutional, spatial and social context." Thus, a strong need exists to examine the heterogeneous aspect of context (Zahra & Wright, 2011). Some research sets out to understand entrepreneurial intention in different countries (Engle, Schlaegel, & Dimitriadi, 2011; Liñán, Fernández, & Romero, 2013; Moriano, Gorgievski, Laguna, Stephan, & Zarafshani, 2012). Nevertheless, although countries are one sub-dimension of the spatial context, the design of research could also assess the influence of communities, industrial districts and clusters (other sub-dimensions of the spatial context) on entrepreneurial intention formation (Liñán, Urbano, & Guerrero, 2011).

More importantly, further research could investigate the role of institutions and the way public policies may influence entrepreneurial intentions by changing institutions. Regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive institutions (Shane, 2008) influence, both directly and indirectly, the perceptions that individuals may have about the desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship. Institutions can both constrain and enable self-employment and entrepreneurship (Welter & Smallbone, 2012).

In this context, researchers could study the impact of national, regional, professional and corporate culture on changes in individual attitudes toward entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intention. Research could also assess the effects of regulative systems and legal policies on

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