

Entrepreneurship in Tunisia: Obstacles

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Abstract: *Entrepreneurship is considered as a source of wealth creation, economic growth, social progress, and technological development. The current paper seeks to shed light on obstacles that are impeding business creators to start their businesses. To identify the observed constraints, we developed a questionnaire that we addressed to 120 new entrepreneurs drawing on the theoretical and empirical literature.*

The application of factor analysis has revealed that business creators' decision to launch their ventures is hindered mainly by the following factors: lack of managerial and business skills, poor training programs, and risk aversion. The study also suggests some recommendations to alleviate obstacles facing new entrepreneurs when deciding to launch their projects.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial environment, business creators, obstacles*

I. Introduction

The field of entrepreneurship is considered as a dynamic process of creating wealth through innovation and a process of conceptualizing, organizing, launching and nurturing a business opportunity into a potentially high growth venture in a complex and unstable environment (Rwigema and Venter, 2004 and Sathiabama, 2010). In their attempt to define to define the field of entrepreneurship, Chen and He (2011) assumed that it is an engine of economic growth, social progress, and technological development.

In his turn, Henley (2007) points out that entrepreneurship is an intentional activity since business founders' intentions are commonly formed at least a year in advance of new venture creation. This suggests that there is a link between entrepreneurship and intention. As Lumpkin and Dess (1996) maintained, individuals' entrepreneurial intention is one of the most eminent constructs that has predominantly contributed to the flourishing of entrepreneurship. On this basis, entrepreneurial intention is accounted for as a primary step towards new venture creation in the entrepreneurial process. Evidently, some eminent determinants are expected to either enhance or impede business creation (Engle *et al.*, 2010). The current paper is limited to investigating factors impeding business creators from delving into the realm of entrepreneurship and hence concretizing the dream of becoming entrepreneurs.

In short, the issue of employability has received much attention from policy makers because the growing body of unemployed people in Tunisia places an additional burden on limited government budget. Thus, by enhancing entrepreneurship in Tunisia, policy makers anticipate that new venture founders will no longer rely on the welfare of the State since they will be able to achieve economic independence. Besides, when enterprising, business founders will focus more on achieving their self esteem as productive players in their societies and as "engines of economic growth" (Baron and Shane, 2008). According to Von Broembsen *et al.* (2005), though youth entrepreneurship is very low in developing countries, entrepreneurship is one of the solutions to the high rate of youth unemployment. Finally, entrepreneurship, as a career choice, has become a national strategy as it helps alleviate poverty, reduce the rate of unemployment, and avoid income inequality among individuals.

In the literature, there has been a focus on the determinants of entrepreneurial intentions among individuals as well as factors hindering new business creators' decisions to start their ventures. Accordingly, it seems appropriate to use the entrepreneurial environment as our theoretical lens so as to unveil the obstacles that new entrepreneurs may face and render them reluctant to create their own businesses.

Having this in mind, the research problem in our analysis is connected with questioning the environmental factors that impede the development of entrepreneurs' decision to launch their businesses in Tunisia.

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Considering that entrepreneurs are very significant for the growth and development of economies in countries in which they operate their businesses, investigating demotivating factors is expected to be of great help for policy makers to enhance the development of entrepreneurial activities and the birth rate and survival of SMEs. Thus, the main objective of this research is to determine factors standing as obstacles that young entrepreneurs face in Tunisia. These obstacles revolve around 1-lack of managerial and business skills, 2-the poor training programs, and 3- being averse to risk and to compare results obtained with other developing countries where similar research has already conducted.

This paper is structured as follows: first, we present the literature review on the topics of entrepreneurial obstacles. Then, we explain the survey and methodology used. Afterwards, we present the obtained results, discuss their implications and, finally, draw conclusions.

II. Literature Review

Theories of entrepreneurial intention include Ajzen and Fishbein's 1975 theory of reasoned behavior, Shapero and Sokol's entrepreneurial event theory of 1982, Bandura's process driven theory of 1991 and Ajzen's theory of planned behavior of 1991. Ajzen and Fishbein's (1975) theory of reasoned action declare that behavior is greatly influenced by one's intention to engage in that behavior and intentions are influenced by attitude towards the behavior. This implies that intention comes first before the actual behavior. Another theory of entrepreneurial intention is the process driven theory developed by Bandura in 1986. Bandura reasoned that, behavior is dependent upon an individual's perception that they can carry out the intended action. According to the process driven theory, external environment influences thoughts, which shape attitude and form intention. Shapero and Sokol's (1982) introduced the entrepreneurial event theory. The theory examines life path changes and their impact on individual desirability and perceptions of feasibility related to new venture formation.

The underlying assumption of the entrepreneurial event theory is that, critical life changes (displacement) precipitate a change in entrepreneurial intention and subsequent behavior. Displacement can occur in a negative form such as job loss or a positive form such as financial support. The intention to become an entrepreneur therefore depends on the individual perceptions of desirability and feasibility in relation to that activity.

This study will focus on Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. This theory focuses on intentions by an individual which will determine the actual behavior towards something. According to Ajzen's theory of planned behavior, there is a relationship between the intention to be an entrepreneur and the act of becoming one. Thus, one's intention greatly explains the behavior. Entrepreneurial intentions are the first step in the evolving process of venture creation.

Even though studies have concentrated much on motivational factors in starting up and sustaining a business, substantial research has been attempted to identify and explain obstacles encountered by entrepreneurs while starting up their new ventures. Growing evidence suggests that it is a normal process for any novel entrepreneurs to face the challenges or obstacles during the early stage of establishing new ventures. The dark side of operating and maintaining a novel business is also critical to ensure its survival. Young and Welsch (1993) identified that entrepreneurs face several obstacles, such as lack of financial assistance, lack of information on various aspects of business, excessive taxation, high rate of inflation, etc.

A study by Moy et. al. (2001) advocated that exogenous and endogenous factors are the main obstacles faced when starting and sustaining new ventures among students. Among them are: high labour cost, high interest rate, strict government regulation (exogenous factors) and lack of managerial experience, lack of technical knowledge, excessive risk (endogenous factors).

The current article is concerned with investigating the effect of endogenous factors on potential entrepreneurs' decision to start a business. Thus, our paper is centered on investigating the link between lack of individual entrepreneurial characteristics in the Tunisian context and the decision to found a business. The individual entrepreneurial characteristics include: 1-lack of managerial and business skills, 2-the poor training programs, and 3- being averse to risk.

2.1 Effects of Managerial Skills on the Decision to Launch a Business

Most business founders find themselves incapable of launching a business because they do not have the required managerial skills and, hence, anticipate the failure of their businesses. As Peterman and Kennedy (2003) advocated, managerial competency and skills are important for new firm formation. So, lack of business skills stands as an obstacle hindering young entrepreneurs to found their own ventures.

When it comes to individuals' anticipation of business development, prospect business creators admit that they need the required skills in the field of management (Papulova and Makros, 2007). Bosma, Van Praag, Thurnik and De Wit (2004) find that the endowed level of talent of a small business founder is the investment in industry-specific and entrepreneurship-specific human capital which contributes significantly to the

performance of new small firm. So, lack of basic business skills is regarded as a major challenge impeding the fact of launching businesses and is accounted for as a constraint to entrepreneurial success. Therefore, individuals' previous working experience positively or negatively influences entrepreneurial performance (Lena and Wong, 2003).

So, the link between individuals' managerial and business skills and their likelihood to launch a business is translated as follows:

Hypothesis (H1): lack of managerial and business skills influence individuals' decision to launch their business.

2.2 Effect of Poor Training Programs on the Decision to Launch a Business

Poor training programs are linked to the educational system adopted in a given country. Poor business and managerial skills among graduates as new entrepreneurs in the marketplace are due to the fact that the quality of entrepreneurship training is poor in South Africa (Herrington *et al.*, 2009). In the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report, Herrington and Wood (2003) point out that lack of education and training programs have reduced management capacity and entrepreneurship in South Africa. These authors maintained that the development of managerial competencies rests upon lack of training, the quality and context of the educational system.

In the same sphere, Papulova and Makros (2007) maintained that there is an evident mismatch between what skills graduate entrepreneurs developed in higher education and what they need in order to survive in the business world. For this, they argued that educational institutions ought to introduce and strengthen entrepreneurial education for all tertiary learners so as to be equipped with business practices.

On this basis, the relationship between poor training programs and young entrepreneurs' decision to enterprise is displayed as follows:

Hypothesis (H2) poor training programs influence individuals' decision to launch their business.

2.3 Effects of Tolerance of Risk on The Decision to Launch a Business.

Individuals' unwillingness to take risks is another attitudinal drive hindering entrepreneurs to found their businesses. In fact, one of the obstacles to the concretization and success of a business is lack of willingness to take risk. In this sense, fear of failure does not stimulate people to explore ideas, nor does it enhance them to make venture and infringe the competitive stage. However, in order to be successful, new entrepreneurs must gain knowledge on their tolerance of risk (Robinson, 2008). Therefore, their fear of failure and loss stands as a barrier against their longing for occupying a competitive position in the marketplace (Robinson, 2008).

Many young entrepreneurs become risk averse because of their social environment (Kazela, 2009). In fact, some venture creators are averse to risk because they did not know how to tolerate unexpected matters related to business processes (Kazela, 2009). However, starting a business needs drive and perseverance (Botha, 2006). According to Robertson *et al.* (2003), these elements have negatively impacted the advance of entrepreneurship. This is one of the reasons for the low level of entrepreneurial creation and the high failure rate of new ventures. Thus, entrepreneurs' psychological drives and perseverance are amongst the basic requirements for business creation.

Thus, the effect of individual unwillingness to take risks on potential entrepreneurs' decision to delve into the realm of business creation is translated as follows:

Hypothesis (H3) individuals' unwillingness to take risks has an effect on individuals' decision to found a business.

Figure 1 below illustrates a conceptual framework relating to the relationship between the entrepreneurial environment and entrepreneurs' decision to start a business:

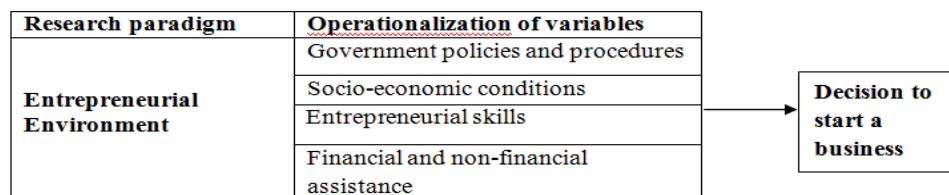


Figure 1: effects of individual entrepreneurial characteristics on individuals' decision to start a business

III. Methodology

3.1 Sample and Data

The current study is conducted with the aim to identify factors standing as obstacles facing potential entrepreneurs' decision to start their businesses. Three criteria have determined the choice of our sample. First, our sample is limited to young entrepreneurs who have already established their projects. Second, the age of these companies is less than two years from the date of creation. Third, the respondents are specifically Tunisian business creators who have already launched their own businesses.

In order to respond to our research problem and to check the validity of our hypotheses, we conducted a quantitative study. Data were collected from the entrepreneurs who were selected on a convenience basis. As a data collection technique, the questionnaire presents a series of formal questions to collect data from respondents. The chosen method of administering the questionnaire is face to face. 175 structured questionnaires were displayed to respondents. Only 120 questionnaires were found flawless thus used for data collection. The questionnaire, which consists of two main sections, was constructed on the basis of previous research on obstacles impeding youth entrepreneurs to launch their projects. The first section was designed to collect general information about the entrepreneurs. The second section, which tackles the issue of demotivators related to individual entrepreneurial characteristics, is divided into three subsections that deal with lack of managerial and business skills, poor training programs, and risk aversion, respectively.

The questionnaire predominantly made use of Five-point Likert scale with 1 meaning strongly disagree to 5 meaning strongly agree to determine the obstacles to youth latent entrepreneurship. Close-ended questions were used for demographic variables. The research instrument was developed taken into consideration other similar studies such as Wong and Choo (2009), Benzing *et al.* (2009) and Pihie (2009). The questionnaire was pre-tested on a sample of 16 young entrepreneurs having started their business in Sfax-Tunisia.

To identify significant associations between lack of individual entrepreneurial characteristics and the decision to create a business, we relied on multiple regression analysis. Indeed, this technique is suitable if the variable to be explained and the explanatory variables are quantitative. The Statistical package SPSS 19 was used for data analysis. The Cronbach's alpha was used as the measure of reliability. The normality of the data was determined by using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

The data analysis was done using descriptive statistics, T-test and the principal component analysis. Cooper and Schindler (2003) describe principal component analysis as a multivariate statistical method used to describe variability among observed variables in terms of fewer unobserved variables called factors. Principal component analysis, which is used to verify a construct of interest, has two main purposes. Firstly, it is used for data reduction and secondly for detection of structure (underlying dimensions) in a set of variables. Leech, Barrett and Morgan (2005) point out that the decision about which factor to retain depends on the percentage of the variance accounted for the variable, the absolute variance accounted for by each factor, and whether the factor can be meaningfully interpreted. Factors with Eigenvalues greater than one are usually retained.

Factor analysis was applied to determine the effect of these impeding factors on potential entrepreneurs' decision to create business. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (Kaiser, 1970; Kaiser, 1974) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) were used for the justification factor analysis.

IV. Results and discussions

4.1 Response Rate and Demographics

The total number of questionnaires distributed to young entrepreneurs was 175 and 120 were returned which represents a response rate of 68.57%. The majority of the respondents were 32 years old and below, followed by the 31-27 age range and the 26-24 had the least representation in that range. Female respondents constituted of twenty-six (26) and ninety-four (94) were male. Most respondents (68.76%) were graduates while 12.54% were undergraduates and 8.7% were post-graduates.

4.2 Verifying the Conditions of Application of the Regression and Quality of the Model

The verification of conditions for the application of multiple linear regressions is performed by the SPSS Windows software (version 19.0). These conditions relate to the linearity of the model, the normality of residuals, and the homoscedasticity of residues. Then, lack of bivariate and multivariate multicollinearity is verified.

The empirical results show that 50.6% of the propensity of Tunisian students to create their own projects is explained by lack of managerial and business skills, poor training programs and risk taking. The statistics of Fisher (F) confirms the good quality of the model ($F= 39.574$ and $\text{sig.} = 0,000$). We can conclude that the model is statistically significant and is illustrative of the studied phenomenon.

Table 2 below shows the explanatory power of the model, the beta coefficients, the t-Student, the F-statistic, its significance, and a summary of the regression results on the set of explanatory variables of this model.

Table 1: Results of the multiple linear regression model

Explanatory variables	Coef.	T- Student	Sig
Constant		4.138	0.000**
lack of managerial and business skills	,320	3.835	0.000***
poor training programs	,358	4.320	0.000***
risk taking	,277	4.182	0.000***
$R^2 = 0.506$ $R^2_{\text{adjusted}} = 0.493$ $F = 39.574$ Sig 0.000			

4.2.1 Analysis of the Effect of Lack of Managerial and Business Skills on the Decision to Start a Business.

The first hypothesis (H1) is used to check whether lack of managerial and business skills positively influence the decision to create a business.

Examination of statistical tests shows that this variable has a negative effect on individuals’ decision to start a business. Indeed, the examination of causal relations shows that the coefficient associated with the link between lack of managerial and business skills and the decision to start a business is positive (0.320) and statistically significant (the associated t value is 3.835 with $p = 0.000$).

This corroborates the predictions of hypothesis (H1). These results show that lack of managerial and business skills have a positive and significant impact on the decision to create a business.

This can be explained by the fact that Tunisian young entrepreneurs, when attempting to launch their own projects, feel that they do not have the appropriate managerial skills to run a business. Thus, our findings corroborate literature on lack of managerial and business skills as an obstacle impeding young entrepreneurs’ likelihood to found their business (Gnyawali and Fogel, 1994; Klapper, 2004; Simola, 2011). Similarly, Papulova and Makros (2007) found out that failure of potential entrepreneurs’ decision to concretize their entrepreneurial endeavor is attributed to lack of business skills. In the same vein, Herrington *et al.* (2009) signaled the low level of business start-ups among graduates and also the high rate of business failure in developing countries are due to mainly lack of previous working experience and poor entrepreneurial skills. Finally, Thandi and Sharma (2004), Ooi (2008), and Sandhu *et al.* (2011) concluded that young entrepreneurs capitalize a lot on their previous working experiences when deciding to delve into the realm of business creation.

4.2.2 Analysis of the effect of poor training programs on the decision to create a business

The second hypothesis (H2) states that poor training programs positively influence the decision to start a business. Examination of statistical tests shows that this variable positively and statistically influenced business creators’ decision to launch their own projects.

The examination of the causal effect shows that the statistical coefficient associated to this variable has a positive value (0.358) and is statistically significant (the associated t value is 4.320 with $p = 0.000$). This means that poor training programs have a significant and positive effect on young entrepreneurs’ decision to start a business. This corroborates the predictions of hypothesis (H2).

Therefore, our results are fine-tuned with previous research on the link between poor training programs and potential entrepreneurs’ decision to start a business. For instance, Herrington *et al.* (2009) found out that the quality of entrepreneurship training is poor in South Africa, which has yielded poor business and managerial skills among graduates as new entrepreneurs in the marketplace. Similarly, the quality and context of the educational system and lack of training do not promote the development of managerial competencies. Similarly, Herrington and Wood (2003) in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report point out that lack of education and poor training programs have reduced management capacity and entrepreneurship in South Africa.

4.2.3 Analysis of the impact of risk taking on the decision to create a business

The aim of the third hypothesis (H3) is to check whether risk taking positively influences business creators’ decision to launch their projects. The examination of the statistical tests shows that this variable has a positive and significant effect on individuals’ decision to found their businesses.

Thus, the examination of causal relations shows that the coefficient associated with the link between risk taking and the decision of starting a business is positive (0.277) and is statistically significant (the associated t value is 4.182 with $p = 0.000$). This corroborates the predictions of hypothesis (H3).

Our findings, therefore, confirm other researchers’ findings. According to Robinson (2008), one of the main obstacles to new entrepreneurs’ decision to start a business is lack of willingness to take risk. So, young entrepreneurs’ fear of failure stands as a barrier against their longing for occupying a competitive position in the marketplace. Then, for Botha (2006) and Kazela (2009), starting a business needs drive and perseverance.

Conversely, for Robertson *et al.* (2003), entrepreneurs' willingness to take risk is among the basic elements that have negatively impacted the advance of entrepreneurship.

V. Conclusion And Perspectives

In the current study has put a great effort to delve into obstacles hindering potential entrepreneurs to start their businesses. Throughout the study, we have grouped demotivating factors with reliance on the theoretical and empirical studies. Thus, we have set forth three hypotheses to assess the extent to which they corroborate with the respondents' perceptions and, subsequently, with our findings. This study was conducted based on the opinions of entrepreneurs operating business in Sfax, an industrial town in Tunisia. The results may not be generalized as a reflection of all entrepreneurs of the country. This cannot infer that factors associated with obstacles will appear similar everywhere (Zimmerman and Chu, 2010).

Therefore, the results indicate that the first hypothesis is supported in that our findings indicated that lack of managerial skills has a negative effect on fostering business creators' tendencies to launch their projects. The second hypothesis is also validated in this study since the results indicated that the element of poor training programs is an eminent reason for business creators to express their reluctance to found their ventures. This shows the extent to which there is a mismatch between the acquired theoretical concepts about business creation and the required practical knowledge related to managerial and business practices. Thus, poor training programs have contributed in yielding graduates not generally thinking about becoming entrepreneurs because they do not have the prerequisite profile of projects founders. Similarly, the third hypothesis is confirmed in this study since our findings indicate that potential entrepreneurs' unwillingness to tolerate risk and their fear of failure are accounted for as factors impeding individuals to decide to start their own businesses. This factor, as being related to individual traits, is assumed to be an eminent obstacle impeding individuals to move to the stage of enterprising and hence rendering them reluctant to become business creators.

In short, the results of this study provide new insights into the factors impeding potential entrepreneurs to launch entrepreneurial activities and reducing their likelihood to indulge into the realm of entrepreneurship in Tunisia. In this sense, this paper empirically contributes to the existing research in the field of entrepreneurship and serves to bridge the gap existing between entrepreneurial theoretical frameworks and the poor institutional and individual investment in this field.

Therefore, illuminating business creators with motivational factors as well as alleviating obstacles hindering their inclinations to concretize their own start-ups may raise the rate of potential entrepreneurs embracing the field of business. It also serves to ascertain the rate of success and sustainability of new ventures.

VI. Managerial Implications And Recommendations

The results of this study indicate business founders are encountering a number of obstacles when launching their own ventures, which will negatively impact on youth actual entrepreneurship. One of the reasons why Tunisian youths are unwilling to get into entrepreneurship is lack of managerial and business skills, lack of business skills, poor training programs, and their being averse to risk.

Entrepreneurship education, which provides basics of such practical business practices, is one of the initiatives that can be designed to enhance skills and knowledge in entrepreneurship. Therefore, the required entrepreneurial skills include creativity, innovation, risk-taking and ability to interpret successful entrepreneurial role models and identification of opportunities. So, to improve their tendencies to subscribe in the realm of entrepreneurship as a career choice, policy makers should reduce the obstacles including lack of competence, weak governmental support, and unwillingness to take risk as well as the administrative constraints. Besides, excessive and over complex regulations should be loosened to enhance potential entrepreneurs to register in business creation.

As for entrepreneurial education, which contributes in enhancing skills and knowledge, universities and high schools can also be used as sources of information about entrepreneurial opportunities devoted to students. For this, we suggest that entrepreneurship should be encouraged and embedded in education from early formative years through secondary education and be part of the curriculum in all stages of education. Similarly, it is recommended that university students should go for industrial and technical trainings during their study to gain valuable managerial and practical experience.

VII. Limitations Of The Study And Areas For Further Research

The present paper was mainly based on the perceptions of the youth entrepreneurs with regard to the encountered obstacles related to their entrepreneurial characteristics. However, it remains is subject to some limitations. For instance, possible differences may exist between potential entrepreneurs' "perception" and "reality". Another limitation of this study may arise in that we investigated the barriers faced by actual entrepreneurs (i.e. youths that have actually started their business). However, there are some youths who are jobless and could be qualified for this study but were not included. So, a limitation might be signaled since

divergent opinions can be highlighted between our respondents and others coming from other Tunisian towns. Therefore, broadening our sample to other towns in Tunisia may yield more generalized findings to this study.

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