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Entrepreneurship traits and social learning process: an overview and research agenda

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Abstract

This paper aims to focus on three main strands of research relating to entrepreneurship in Malaysia: the personality traits of entrepreneur in automotive service industry (ASI); social learning process among ASI entrepreneur; and impact of the Big Five personality traits namely Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience upon entrepreneurship. It aims to suggest a tentative research agenda and offer directions for further research. Systematic and critical literature review approach are employed to research on entrepreneurship and ASI development in Malaysia. The paper proposes a conceptual framework that integrates the Big Five Personality model and the Entrepreneurial Learning Model.

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurial learning is unique since it involves a dynamic process of awareness, reflection, association and application. It also involves transforming experience and knowledge into functional learning outcomes (Harrison and Leitch, 2005). Despite entrepreneurial learning is credited for all its potential and values (Rae, 2004; Berglund, Hellström, and Sjölander, 2007), the mutual understanding on its construct and definition are missing. As a result entrepreneurial learning process remains ambiguous since it effect the context in which learning occurs and

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includes the content of what is learned as well as the processes through which learning takes place (Moustaghfir and Sirca, 2010; Hynes and Dodd, 2014). Furthermore, this field is said to be at its early life phase which debates are still continuing on conceptual and methodological issues. It is argued that, the entrepreneurship content and its learning process are ignored by practitioners and are not empirically studied by previous researchers.

It is realized that understanding human dynamics in order to understand entrepreneurship is becoming more relevant. Entrepreneur is no longer a fixed identity who playing a fixed role in the economic process. Their role is no longer limited as an agent for economic change or activity and makes buying and selling in the market for future profit realization. They are an alert entrepreneur who will react and take necessary actions to changing market condition and regularly changing their management style using innovative approach for their advantage. What are the necessary actions taken by the entrepreneur? They act accordingly based on their learning experienced from their environment. This is because entrepreneurship is a process of learning (Cope, 2005), but what and how they learn remain poorly understood. For instance the ways in which entrepreneurs manage and grow their businesses can be contributed towards significant understanding on their social learning process, however has not been empirically studied by many researchers. Wright and Stigliani (2013), support that entrepreneurs experience and decision making on their business/firms growth on what and how they grow firms, represent a rich arena for studying entrepreneurial learning but has been neglected by previous studies.

Since the field revolves around complexity and ambiguity, hence it can be postulated that this field requires more holistic investigation. Henry, Hill et al. (2005) said that previous research from various disciplines had been conducted without developing its theoretical framework had cause many different analyses and outcomes from the research conducted on the subject. The different views prolonged because each of researchers or experts involved do not use each other's work and the huge knowledge generated on entrepreneurship research had cause the discipline to be fragmented and never been cumulated (Henry, Hill et al., 2005). The integration concept of entrepreneurial learning and personality in this study attempt to investigate how personality traits of entrepreneur in ASI effect their social learning process.

1.1. Entrepreneurial Learning

Regardless of lack of solid theory in entrepreneurial learning, there is continuing interest in this field. Indeed, the entrepreneurship education has gaining popularity and interest in higher education institutions. The important of entrepreneurship education can be seen as it becomes the political agenda and the priority for both industrially developed and developing countries. It is agreed that the entrepreneurship education can increase the quality and quantity of graduate entrepreneurs which enter into the country economy. Education they received in the higher education institutions' had absolutely influence their attitude towards entrepreneurship and equips them with necessary knowledge and skills for entrepreneurial activities (Matlay, 2006).

In the United States (US), the remarkable increase in new business for the past 10 to 15 years is due to the advantages and attractiveness of entrepreneurship activities in the economy (Lambing and Kuehl, 2007). The practice of downsizing by big firms is believed to contribute into the increasing number of people considering entrepreneurship as a career not only because of unemployment but also decreasing interest of people pursuing career in a big corporation. For the past ten years, small, emerging and self-employed business had employs 77.4% of all Americans and has produced 71.4% of all new jobs (Volmer, 2014).

Many developed countries had recognized the crucial contribution of the entrepreneurial firms to the economy as an engine for economic growth and had emphasis the important of small firms as part of renewal process of declining economies with its innovation which lead to technological change and growth in productivity (Kuratko, 2005). Today, entrepreneurship had gained its importance in Malaysia both in concept and activity. It can be seen with the various supporting mechanism and policies that exist from funding, the physical infrastructures to the consultation services initiated by the government. The seriousness of this field perceived by the government can be seen with the setting up of Ministry of Entrepreneur and Co-operative Development (MeCD) in 1995 to deal with entrepreneurship issues and its development in Malaysia. One of the main focuses of the ministry is the acculturation of entrepreneurship culture. It is a continuous and long-term process that was designed to attract various levels of society to be involved in business including students at secondary schools and institution of higher

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