



Developing a competency-based framework for teachers' entrepreneurial behaviour

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate which competencies underlie teachers' entrepreneurial behaviour. Based on the literature and discussions in the field, six competencies (entrepreneurial knowledge, career adaptability, occupational self-efficacy, creative thinking, networking skill, teamwork skill) and entrepreneurial climate were included in the research model. A questionnaire was developed and tested in a pilot study ($n = 178$). A sample of 255 teachers from five different vocational schools in the Netherlands participated in the main study. The findings supported most expectations; only occupational self-efficacy was not significantly related to entrepreneurial behaviour. This study has theoretical and practical implications.

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1. Introduction

In the past decade, entrepreneurship and enterprising behaviour have become important objectives for organisations and societies in general. Entrepreneurship relates to the capability for exploiting successfully innovative ideas in a commercially competitive market. Entrepreneurship is generally considered a source of flexibility and innovation, a creator of jobs for the economy, and an interesting opportunity for individual career development (Onstenk, 2003). Both within and outside the European community, policies on education and life-long learning emphasize the importance of stimulating entrepreneurial behaviour (European Community, 1999).

Integrating entrepreneurship development in vocational education is viewed as an effective way to enhance enterprising behaviour at the economic market and the labour market (Biessen, Ebbens, Van Esch, Kleuskens, & Thielen, 2005). Vocational education prepares learners for jobs that are based in manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic, and totally related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation. It is sometimes referred to as technical education, as the learner directly develops expertise in a particular group of techniques or technology.

The need for entrepreneurship in vocational education implies changes for the educational system of a school (Biessen et al., 2005). Instead of sitting and listening to their teachers' lectures on trade and management, students are now actively involved in the entrepreneurial and managerial aspects of enterprising. For example, students participate in simulations, collaborate with real entrepreneurs, or engage in mini-enterprises or student competitions. Also, students are stimulated to think creatively, and develop innovative procedures, technologies, services, products, and come up with ways to energise these businesses.

As these examples illustrate, the emergence of entrepreneurship also affects teachers' roles and conduct. Nowadays, teachers are more than producers of knowledge; instead, they are expected to act as entrepreneurs themselves (Johnson, 2004). Scanning the environment for new developments, designing and facilitating compelling technology-based classroom projects, and locating the means and funds to acquire the tools their students need, are some of examples of teachers' entrepreneurial behaviour.

Despite the importance of teachers' entrepreneurial behaviour, little is known about the factors underlying teachers' entrepreneurship. Accordingly, the objective of the present study was to identify which competencies are related to teachers' entrepreneurship, and find empirical evidence for the unique contribution of these competencies to the display of teachers' entrepreneurial behaviour. Insight in these competencies will add to theories and models of entrepreneurship, and will help schools with their efforts

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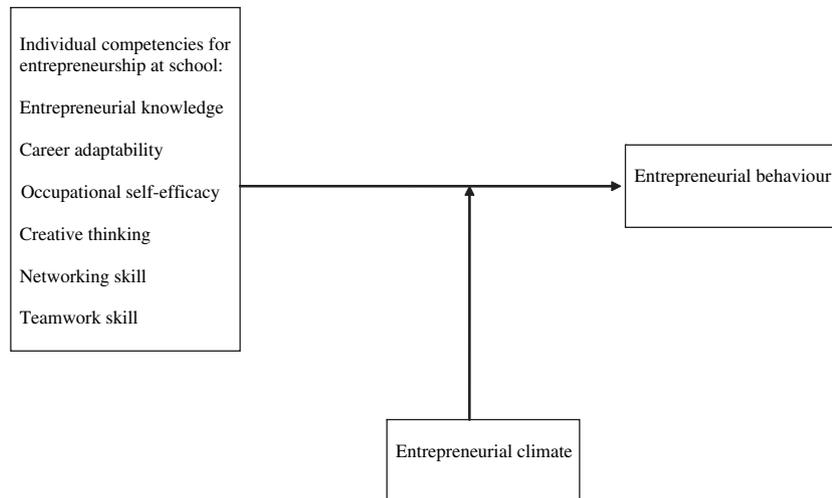


Fig. 1. Theoretical model.

to enhance teachers' entrepreneurship. The theoretical model is presented in Fig. 1.

1.1. Entrepreneurial behaviour

Entrepreneurial behaviour generally refers to behaviour that involves recognizing opportunities and marshalling the resources to take advantage of, and acting upon these opportunities (e.g., Chung & Gibbons, 1997; Huefner & Hunt, 1994). In line with the literature, we conceptualized entrepreneurial behaviour as including opportunity recognition, taking initiative, and risk management (Rauch & Frese, 2000). (i) *Opportunity recognition* refers to behaviour a person displays when actively seeking and identifying an opportunity (Hills, 1995; Tolentino, 1998), where an opportunity can be defined as a 'fit' between market needs and possible resources (Gibb, 1998). Identifying and selecting the right opportunities are among the most important behaviours of successful entrepreneurs (Stevenson, Roberts, & Grousbeck, 1985). Onstenk's (2003) study in the educational field similarly suggests that recognizing chances is an important part of teachers' entrepreneurship. (ii) *Initiative* is needed to act on the identified opportunities. Research has shown the importance of personal initiative and proactive behaviour for the success of entrepreneurs (e.g., Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001; Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, & Tag, 1997). In education, initiative is similarly perceived valuable for successful entrepreneurship at school (Onstenk, 2003). (iii) *Risk management* refers to behaviour that is tolerant of some risk, but in a calculated way, not recklessly. There is extant evidence that calculated risk-taking is related to successful entrepreneurship (e.g., Gibb, 1998; Rauch & Frese, 2000). In conclusion, the literature indicates that opportunity recognition, initiative, and risk management are important aspects of entrepreneurial behaviour, and predictive of successful entrepreneurship.

1.2. Entrepreneurial competencies

Individuals' entrepreneurial competencies are generally considered fundamental to organisations' ability to nurture and sustain innovation and new venture creation (Hayton & Kelley, 2006). Spencer and Spencer (1993, p. 9) describe competency as "an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to ... superior performance in a job or situation". Three categories of individual characteristics are considered to underlie specific

competencies and contribute to effective performance: knowledge, aptitudes, and skills (e.g., Schmitt & Chan, 1998). Specific sets of aptitudes, knowledge and skills are needed for superior performance in a specific domain such as entrepreneurship. Although research has identified a number of different characteristics of entrepreneurs (e.g., Baum & Locke, 2004), the specific individual-level characteristics of corporate entrepreneurs, and especially those in education, have not been addressed clearly yet.

Based on a review of the literatures of psychological entrepreneurship (e.g., Baum & Locke, 2004; Rauch & Frese, 2000), human resource management (e.g., Hayton & Kelley, 2006), and education (e.g., Biessen et al., 2005; Onstenk, 2003), and observations of practices in the field (e.g., schools' mission statements), the present study distinguished six individual characteristics that were expected to underlie teachers' entrepreneurial behaviour: entrepreneurial knowledge, three aptitudes (career adaptability, occupational self-efficacy, creative thinking), and two skills (networking skill, teamwork skill).

1.2.1. Entrepreneurial knowledge

Knowledge about a topic is seen as one of the competencies someone needs to be able to successfully exert specific task-related behaviour (e.g., Hayton & Kelley, 2006; Nordhaug & Gronhaug, 1994). Rottinghaus, Day, and Borgen (2005) found that perceived knowledge of the job market, or how well one understands job market and employment trends, was related to various behaviours at work. Perceived knowledge, for example, was moderately but positively related to risk-taking behaviour, which is part of our entrepreneurial behaviour construct. It was also found that perceived knowledge of the job market was positively related to Holland's (1985) enterprising personality. Therefore, we expected entrepreneurial knowledge to be positively related to entrepreneurial behaviour.

1.2.2. Career adaptability

Career adaptability relates to the ability to plan and adapt career plans and work responsibilities to fit new or changed circumstances (Savickas, 1997). It is likely that career adaptability is necessary to display entrepreneurial behaviour at school, because teachers' work demands and required behaviours are changing. It can be expected that teachers who are high on career adaptability are well able to conduct the adjustments and environmental explorations that are required for entrepreneurship. Rottinghaus

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