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Boosting and sustaining passion: A long-term perspective on the effects of entrepreneurship training

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ABSTRACT

We know that entrepreneurship training is effective but we lack a theoretical understanding of the dynamic processes after training leading to business creation. In this study, we develop a theoretical model to explain short- and long-term effects of entrepreneurship training on entrepreneurial self-efficacy, passion, and business creation. We hypothesize that entrepreneurship training boosts entrepreneurial self-efficacy and passion, and that entrepreneurial self-efficacy sustains the positive effect of entrepreneurship training on passion over time. Furthermore, we hypothesize that entrepreneurship training impacts business creation through passion. We conducted a field experiment with four measurement waves over 32 months resulting in 784 observations from 227 participants. Discontinuous growth curve modeling and joint lagged analyses supported our hypotheses. Our findings indicate that post-training processes are dynamic and that entrepreneurial self-efficacy is important to maintain high passion after training. Maintaining high passion after training eventually leads to business creation.

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1. Executive summary

Meta-analytic research has provided evidence that entrepreneurship training is effective in promoting cognitive and motivational outcomes resulting in more start-ups and higher performance (Martin et al., 2013). However, we lack a profound theoretical understanding of the mechanisms and boundary conditions explaining why and under which conditions entrepreneurship training exerts a positive effect. This is because previous research on entrepreneurship training mainly focused either on short- or long-term outcomes without linking the two. Moreover, previous research assessing the impact of entrepreneurship training took mainly a static perspective and neglected to take into account the dynamic nature of short-term training outcomes in terms of people's motivation.

In this study, we seek to address some limitations of previous research by linking short- and long-term training outcomes and by taking a dynamic perspective on training participants' motivation. We develop a theoretical model to explain short- and long-term effects of entrepreneurship training on entrepreneurial self-efficacy, passion, and business creation. Our theoretical model makes three predictions. First, our model predicts that entrepreneurial self-efficacy mediates the effect of entrepreneurship training on passion. Second, entrepreneurial self-efficacy sustains the positive long-term effect of entrepreneurship training on passion

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over time. Third, passion mediates the effect of entrepreneurship training on business creation. We thus explain how training participants gain and maintain high passion after the training and how this translates into business creation in the long-run.

The study design was a randomized controlled field experiment with a training and control group. The training was a 12-week action-oriented entrepreneurship training with didactical elements derived from action regulation theory (Frese and Zapf, 1994). The participants were students enrolled at a university in Nairobi, Kenya. We assessed the participants four times. We conducted a measurement wave before the training (baseline, T1) and three measurement waves after the training (T2–T4) over a total period of 32 months. Most of the students graduated from university in the course of the study. In the final sample, we had 784 observations from 227 participants. We measured entrepreneurial self-efficacy, passion, and business creation at all four measurement waves using established scales and items. To account for the dependency in the data and to model short- and long-term effects of the training, we applied discontinuous growth curve modeling and joint lagged analyses.

The statistical analyses supported our hypotheses. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy mediated the effect of entrepreneurship training on passion. Furthermore, entrepreneurial self-efficacy moderated the long-term effect of entrepreneurship training on passion. The analyses and maintenance curves showed that entrepreneurial self-efficacy was a factor that explained under which condition the participants maintained high passion after the training over time. We also found support for our hypothesis that passion predicts business creation, but this effect was contingent on time. We found a significant effect of passion on business creation later in time but not earlier in time.

Our study contributes to answering the theoretical question of how entrepreneurship training boosts and sustains passion over time and how this increases the likelihood of business creation. Our findings indicate that post-training processes are dynamic and that entrepreneurial self-efficacy is important to maintain high passion after training. Specifically, our findings suggest that besides engaging in an activity, it is important to develop a feeling of mastery and control over the activity. Participants who have not mastered entrepreneurial skills are less likely to maintain high passion for entrepreneurship in the long-run. This also means that any boost in passion, for example through inspiration, should eventually wear off if it is not substantiated by a belief of “I can do it”. Furthermore, our results suggest that maintaining high passion after training eventually leads to business creation.

2. Introduction

Entrepreneurship training programs focus on equipping individuals with knowledge and skills for launching and operating business ventures (Katz, 2007). Entrepreneurship training is regarded as a practical means to increase new business creation and entrepreneurial activity (Martinez et al., 2010). Indeed, meta-analytic research has provided evidence that entrepreneurship training is effective in promoting cognitive and motivational outcomes resulting in more start-ups and higher performance (Martin et al., 2013). However, what is lacking is a profound theoretical understanding of the mechanisms and boundary conditions explaining why and under which conditions entrepreneurship training exerts a positive effect (Martin et al., 2013). Accordingly, researchers have noted that our knowledge about how to design and improve training to effectively promote entrepreneurship is still limited (Edelman et al., 2008; Gielnik et al., 2015a; Pittaway and Cope, 2007).

There are at least two reasons for the lack of a theoretical understanding of the effects of entrepreneurship training. First, previous research on entrepreneurship training mainly focused either on short- or long-term outcomes without linking the two. In fact, Martin et al.'s (2013) meta-analytic overview reports that only four out of 42 evaluation studies included both short-term outcomes in terms of knowledge, motivation, or intention and long-term outcomes in terms of nascent behavior, start-up, or performance. Linking short- and long-term outcomes, however, is important to identify the mechanisms through which entrepreneurship training exerts an influence on entrepreneurial behavior. Thus, previous research oftentimes failed to offer an integrated perspective on the processes leading to start-up and higher performance after the training.

Second, previous research assessing the impact of entrepreneurship training took mainly a static perspective and neglected to take into account the dynamic nature of short-term training outcomes in terms of people's motivation (Martin et al., 2013). A static perspective assumes that entrepreneurship training enhances participants' motivation and that participants maintain high levels even over extended periods of time, which eventually translates into business creation and higher performance (e.g., Gielnik et al., 2015a; Souitaris et al., 2007). However, the literature on motivation and training transfer suggests that a static perspective is overly simplistic. Specifically, the motivation literature suggests that motivational constructs are not stable trait-like constructs but rather dynamic state-like constructs that change substantially over time (Lord et al., 2010). In fact, evidence indicates that about half of the variance in motivational constructs is within-person variance (Bledow et al., 2011; Gielnik, Spitzmuller, Schmitt, Klemann, & Frese, 2015b; Lord et al., 2010). Furthermore, the literature on training transfer suggests that the positive effects of training on motivational outcomes usually wear off over time (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010). So, we cannot simply assume that participants of entrepreneurship training keep up high levels of motivation after the training. Rather, we need to examine the process after the training to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence the extent to which people's motivation increases, decreases, or remains stable over time.

In this study, we seek to address the key limitations of previous research by linking short- and long-term training outcomes and by taking a dynamic perspective on training participants' motivation. Specifically, we use the setting of an action-oriented entrepreneurship training to examine the flow of effects from entrepreneurship training to business creation through entrepreneurial self-efficacy and passion (see Fig. 1). In our theoretical model, we put passion center stage and use it as an indicator reflecting people's motivation for entrepreneurship. In the entrepreneurship literature, scholars have regarded passion as a central motivational force fueling entrepreneurship (Baum et al., 2001; Cardon et al., 2009; Shane et al., 2003). The underlying argument is that passion is a strong energizing driver that enables entrepreneurs to work hard, persistently, and with dedication toward the

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