

Contribution of Individual Background Factors towards Entrepreneurship intentions among Minority Youth who Attend an Urban Farming Youth Program

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Abstract

This study explored the contribution of individual background factors in promoting or impeding entrepreneurship intentions acquisition among minority youth attending the Felege Hiywot urban farming youth program. Six minority youth aged between 13 to 18 years and 2 adults were conveniently and purposely selected and interviewed about their entrepreneurship intentions as a result of attending or engaging with the FHC urban farming program. After one on one data collection, the recordings were transcribed and coded to identify topics and themes emerged. Results showed that background factors such personality traits and social factors highly affected the minority youth entrepreneurship's intentions regardless how FHC provides equal opportunities and exposure for entrepreneurship training to all minority youth. Findings reinforce the importance of background factors as a key determinant for entrepreneurship intentions among youth engaging in either formal or informal youth programs.

Keywords: Minority Youth, Urban Farming, Background Factors

1. Introduction

There is growing evidence that participation in an urban agriculture youth program has an impact in promoting positive youth development among participants (Durlak et al., 2007; Eccles & Gutman, 2002; Finlay, Flanagan, & Wray-Lake, 2011). However, there is limited information that pertains to the extent to which individual background factors such as personality traits, social-cultural backgrounds promote or impede the acquisition of *entrepreneurship intentions* among minority youth engaging in urban farming youth programs.

Personality traits are believed to be important components of human capital. For example, Almlund et al. (2011) showed that personality traits have positive or negative productivity effects in school, in the labor market, at the workplace, and in social relationships. Zhao & Seibert (2006) used the Five Factor Model of personality to categorize the diverse range of scales on personality and entrepreneurial status. Their study showed that entrepreneurs are higher on conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience, and lower on agreeableness than ordinary or non-entrepreneurial managers. The most important common experience found in the majority entrepreneurs that is linked to entrepreneurship intention is when a potential entrepreneur starts and manages his/her own business (Bird, 1988; Krueger et al., 2000).

It is believed that founding and managing a new business venture requires an entrepreneur to fulfill several unique tasks, demands or work roles. These include innovator, risk taker and bearer, executive manager, relationship builder, risk reducer and goal achiever (Chen et al., 1998). Markman & Baron (2003) show that perseverance is called for by entrepreneurial work, while other researchers have also emphasized the importance of motivation and hard work (Chen et al., 1998; Baum & Locke, 2004). Locke (2000) found that work goal orientation, hard work and perseverance to achieve one's goals in the face of daunting obstacles are closely associated with entrepreneurship in the popular imagination. Ciavarella et al., (2004) and Morrison (1997) also found that success in a critical early task of entrepreneurship opportunity recognition is likely to be related to imagination, creativity and openness to new ideas. Successful entrepreneurs are also likely to rely on their creativity to solve day-to-day problems and formulate strategies using the limited resources at their disposal (Baron, 2007; Schumpeter, 1942, Schumpeter, 1976; Zhao and Seibert, 2006). Baron (1999) & Locke (2000) found that entrepreneurs in both popular imagination and academic literature are described as hardy, optimistic and steady in the face of social pressure, stress and uncertainty. These individuals are capable of resisting both physical and emotional burdens. They are also capable of pressing on where others might be discouraged by obstacles, setbacks or self-doubt. In contrast, individuals with low emotional stability feel vulnerable to psychological stress and experience a range of negative emotions more frequently and intensely, which include anxiety and worry, depression and low self-esteem (Zhao et al., 2010). These individuals are sensitive to negative feedback and tend to become discouraged by small failures. In a difficult situation, they feel worried, hopeless or even panicked. Costa and McCrae (1992) showed that entrepreneurs with high emotional stability are more likely to cope with problems and high stress through positive thinking and direct action. These individuals behave in a calm and confident manner and focus on the tasks at hand, even under stress. This is likely to help them to perform better in the entrepreneurial role.

Furthermore, individuals with high level of extraversion are gregarious, outgoing, warm and friendly. These individuals are likely to be more energetic, active, assertive and dominant in social situations. They experience more positive emotions, are optimistic and always seek excitement and stimulation. Studies by Baron (1999) & Locke (2000) show that assertiveness, energy, a high activity level and optimism are traits associated with people who have potential in becoming entrepreneurs. Markman & Baron (2003) showed that many of the tasks engaged in by entrepreneurs are likely to involve social interaction, which include communication of vision and enthusiasm, building networks with outside backers and other constituents, establishing relationships among employees and partners and negotiating deals with suppliers and customers. Individuals with a high level of agreeableness are often believed to be trusting, altruistic, cooperative and modest. A person with a low-level agreeableness can be described as manipulative, self-centered, suspicious and ruthless. Entrepreneurs involved in establishing a for-profit enterprise have more success when it is built around the entrepreneur's own needs and interests (Singh & DeNoble, 2003). These individuals must work hard for the survival of the new business, sometimes to the detriment of previous employers, partners, suppliers and even one's own employees (Zhao et al., 2010). Highly agreeable people are unlikely to find the entrepreneurial role attractive because of limited leeway for altruistic behavior and the high likelihood of guarded and conflicting interpersonal relationships associated with entrepreneurship (Zhao et al., 2010).

Besides the personality traits explained above, several studies also show that entrepreneurship intentions are linked to social-cultural factors. Aldrich & Zimmer (1986) showed that entrepreneurship is embedded in a social context. Studies show that entrepreneurs have to have a wide range of casual contacts (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Birley, 1985), suggesting that a variety of trusted social linkages is an important prerequisite to developing an entrepreneurial idea (Shane, 2000) and for garnering the resources to start a new business (Shane & Cable, 2002). Portes & Landolt (2000) showed that exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restriction on individual freedoms and downward leveling of norms are the negative consequences of social capital. The same authors found that the same strong ties that enable group members to obtain privileged access to resources bar others from securing the same assets (Thornton et al., 2011). The particular preferences granted to members of a clan or circle of friends are commonly at the expense of the universalistic rights of others. This phenomenon of unequal rights to entrepreneurial resources often frames the differences among ethnic entrepreneurial groups or among entrepreneurs in different regions or countries (Thornton et al., 2011). Studies show that although entrepreneurs might hold some of the resources necessary to create a business, generally they need complementary resources which they obtain through their contacts to produce and deliver their goods or services (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Cooper et al., 1995; Greve & Salaff, 2003; Hansen, 1995; Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2009; Teece, 1987).

Culture as distinct from political, social, technological or economic contexts, has relevance for economic behavior and entrepreneurship (Shane, 1993; Shapiro & Sokol, 1982). Cultural values are defined as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from another and their respective response to their environments (Hofstede, 1980). Cultural differences across societies can be reduced to four quantifiable dimensions: uncertainty avoidance, individualism, power distance, and masculinity (Hofstede, 1980; 2001). Uncertainty avoidance represents preference for certainty and discomfort with unstructured or ambiguous situations (Thornton et al., 2011). Individualism stands for a preference for acting in the interest of one's self and immediate family, as distinct from the dimension of collectivism, which stands for acting in the interest of a larger group in exchange for their loyalty and support (Thornton et al., 2011). Power distance represents the acceptance of inequality in position and authority between people (Thornton et al., 2011). Masculinity stands for a belief in materialism and decisiveness rather than service and intuition (Thornton et al., 2011). A study by Hayton et al. (2002) shows that entrepreneurship is facilitated by cultures high in individualism and low in uncertainty avoidance, and low in power-distance and high in masculinity. Major domains of life and how they affect entrepreneurial behavior are conceptualized and measured in the context of distinct institutional orders such as family, religions, market, professions, state and corporation (Thornton, 2004; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). These institutional orders embody competing and conflicting sources of norms, values, legitimacy and justifications of worth that have consequences for supporting or discouraging entrepreneurial behavior (Thornton et al., 2011). The family and the market, as institutional orders embody values that organize behavior and knowledge in quite different ways. A typical example for this argument is provided by Friedland & Alford (1991). Acting as if to sell a used car at the family dinner table would draw scorn, while treating a used car salesman like a family member would lead to exploitation. This simile illustrates that individuals and organizations have the capacity to loosely couple and manipulate elements of culture using them strategically as if they were a tool kit (Boltanski & Thevenot, 1991; DiMaggio, 1997; Swidler, 1986; Thornton, 2004).

Scott (2008) suggested that institutions consist of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning in social behavior. Institutions are the game in a society that function as constraints and opportunities shaping human interaction (North, 1990). These institutions represent the set of rules that articulate and organize the economic, social, and political interactions between individuals and social groups with consequences for business activity and economic development (Díaz et al., 2005; Veciana & Urbano, 2008). Informal institutions are likely to resist change and can take longer to evolve toward new social norms. Both formal and informal institutions can legitimize and delegitimize business activity as a socially valued or attractive activity and promote and constrain the entrepreneurial spirit (Aidis et al., 2008; Veciana & Urbano, 2008; Welter, 2005). Combining entrepreneurship, ethnic and transnational entrepreneurship with institutional economics, Urbano et al. (2011) showed that while role models and immigrants' entrepreneurial attitudes and values play an important role in the emergence of transnational entrepreneurial activity, the immigrants' social works and perceptions of the host society's culture as providing entrepreneurial opportunities most facilitate the development of transnational entrepreneurial activities. Korsgaard & Anderson (2011) show that, far beyond simple economic decision making, it was social conditions of entrepreneurs combined with the social nature of entrepreneurial opportunities that affected the entrepreneurial process. Audretsch et al. (2011) showed that social events facilitate entrepreneurship activities and innovation by those who participated. Zhang et al. (2011) concluded strong ties are more salient than weak ties in entrepreneurs' resource acquisition, and this importance grows when resource owners have less prior knowledge to offset problems of information asymmetry. Their study found that while social networks are useful information channels, entrepreneurs are more likely to turn to interpersonal ties for seeking contacts or acquiring resources.

Numerous studies have shown the impact of individual background factors on entrepreneurship skills, however, research related to these individual factors and their impact on minority youth engaging in urban farming youth programs is under explored. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the relationship between individual factors and the entrepreneurship intentions among minority youth attending Felege Hiywot Center (FHC, the Center) urban farming youth-led program in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Materials and Methods

1.1. Participant selection

This qualitative study was conducted as part of a larger project at the FHC youth-led urban agriculture program, based in the Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood, which is a low-income neighborhood food desert, which focuses on underserved youth.

Three alumni (N=3) who graduated from the FHC program and three (N=3) current youth who attend the program, two parents (N=2) and two board members from FHC (N=2) were purposely and conveniently selected by the Center Director based on how often they come to the Center and how much they engage with other youth at the Center. The main goal was to explore the extent to which the individual background factors impacted their entrepreneurship intentions.

1.2. Data collection

Interviews were used to provide insights using youth perspectives to illustrate their experiences. Interviews started out with baseline open-ended questions about the program and then transitioned into open-ended questions about the youth experiences. An audio recorder was used to capture responses and ensure accuracy of responses for all interviews and field notes captured additional interesting information and behavior regarding youth experiences. Questions asked focus on youth's intentions towards entrepreneurship before joining the Center, entrepreneurship intentions because of attending the FHC, and the support and motivation they receive(d) from their colleagues, friends and parents and how they contribute towards the starting of their own business. These questions were generated from surveys and other preliminary data done at the FHC (Nzaranyimana, 2020).

1.3. Data analysis

Analysis of the interview findings consisted of an eight-step process: The audio recordings were transcribed by Rev.com Company (www.rev.com) and each interview was listened to repeatedly and edited where the website skipped or could not be well heard. Reading transcriptions and listening repeatedly to recordings helped organize and better understand participants' responses. These steps were followed by identifying and coding key words and phrases from participant interviews for the purpose of developing categories and generating themes that emerged from the interviews. Generated themes provided the framework of the substance and analysis of data (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; & Saldana, 2013). Data analysis and interpretation for the field notes were also done. The process of reading helped build meaning that was chronicled and summarized (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Data collected from the field notes was coded to identify topics as well as themes that emerged which included **personality traits** and **social cultural factors** (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Saldana, 2013). Coding process was done based on the research question that was addressed regarding the impact of the individual background factors in promoting or impeding entrepreneurship intentions among minority youth attending FHC.

2. Results and Discussion

Minority youths' responses demonstrated how individual background factors have a part to play in acquisition of entrepreneurship skills. Among these individual background factors are **personality traits**, and other **social cultural factors**. For instance, during the interview, one youth acknowledged that she had interest in becoming an entrepreneur. This participant stated that: *"I feel like personally I've had an interest in entrepreneurship, but the facility also offered different programs or lessons towards management of or financial management or how to sit down and learning well, in my position when I was the assistant farm manager, learning how to plan out for the year some supplies that you might need and whatnot. That all those activities help tie into building the skills that would be needed for having to be an entrepreneur"*.

3.1. Personality traits. The tone and confidence this participant used to express her ability to start her own business reflected how her individual **personality** played a big role in her entrepreneurship intentions. A participant's prior intention toward entrepreneurship was acknowledged as the major contributor toward her entrepreneurial endeavor. She also acknowledged that the Center strengthened entrepreneurship intentions she already had. This is an indication of how individual personality can positively contribute to entrepreneurship intention. She also mentioned how the Center helped her gain more knowledge on how to start and run a business as an additional opportunity for her entrepreneurship intention.

On the other hand, another youth mentioned that regardless of the training and knowledge about entrepreneurship, she is not interested in becoming an entrepreneur. She is interested instead in getting her college degree and working for other people. This is a clear indication that regardless of the programs and professionals the Center invites to come and assist youth, based on her individual personality she is not inclined to become an entrepreneur.

Another participant acknowledged how the Center encourages minority youth to become entrepreneurs through its entrepreneurship programs and activities. However, because of her individual personality, she is not interested in becoming an entrepreneur. This participant stated that: "*Me personally, I'm not interested in entrepreneurship, but I know if that's something you're interested in or you express it, we have those opportunities.*" Her facial expression and gestures when she was discussing this topic showed how much she would not like to be self-employed. Regardless of the entrepreneurship exposure provided by the Center, she is not interested in becoming an entrepreneur based on her individual personality. Besides being her personality trait, there is also an issue related to limited resources in Martindale-Brightwood where FHC is located. The limited businesses within this community make it hard for minority youth to see opportunities of starting and running their own businesses. This forces some to just focus on how to get diploma/degrees and make ends-meet because of lack of income that can be used to start their own business.

This participant stated that "*Again, I'm not very good at communicating with the group of people sometimes, so I think one challenge is telling people what to do. I'm getting there, but it's tough.*" The tone and facial expression used by this participant clearly indicated that her individual personality is a barrier regardless of the opportunities to exercise her leadership and communication skills provided by the Center. Assigning people what to do is one of several leadership qualities. If the Center provides that skill, and this participant feels she is not confident enough to do it, it is an indication that her individual personality is an obstacle in her communication and leadership skills, yet these are the major factors which contribute to the entrepreneurship success. Regardless of how the Center exposes youth to different opportunities that foster leadership and communication, this youth shows she is still not comfortable speaking in front of other youth who come and make quick progress and she is still not comfortable talking in front of people or telling them what to do.

One of the participants acknowledged that even before she came to the Center, she dreamed of being self-employed. However, when she joined the program, she gained more skills and knowledge on how to create and run a successful business. In contrast, another participant mentioned that regardless of the activities and training FHC offers about entrepreneurship, she does not feel interested in becoming an entrepreneur. This is an indication that individual personality had a big influence on these two participants in choosing to, or not to become an entrepreneur. The fear and lack of intentions towards entrepreneurship from one participant and the confidence from another clearly indicates that regardless of the entrepreneurship training offered by the Center at the similar level, individual personality has a role to play towards the acquisition of the behavior. One can argue that one participant acknowledged that she had an intention to become an entrepreneur before joining the Center can be attributed to the way the African Americans have higher unemployment rates mainly as a result of some discriminations during the hiring process. Self-employment can be the only way of avoiding the rejections during the hiring process.

3.2. Social cultural factors. Another theme that emerged was the *social cultural factor* which include *gender and race, social support/institutions and income*. For example, after in depth conversation with different participants, the results from the interview analysis showed that **gender and race** contribute to entrepreneurship especially in the African American communities; for example, a common stereotype is that African American males pursue careers in music or sports. This is demonstrated by one of the youths who is currently attending the Center, who stated: "*I'm very good into music. So, I do rap. I have phones and things like that. So, one thing that I would like to do is start my own record label and get my own artists and producers.*" The gestures and enthusiasm this participant used to express his passion about music and how he wants a career as an artist reflected how social factors such as gender and race have a role to play in the career choice of some minority youth. This is an indication that his gender and ethnicity as an African American male helped him feel comfortable starting his own studio to produce rap music. Besides this youth being interested in music, there is also support from his mother. The support he gets from his mother, ie. buying necessary equipment to use in his music and being taken to different concerts to meet with his role models, has increased his passion to become an artist as a career. This youth stated: "*Because my mother, she paid for my studio time, and she always tells me to take opportunities, like if I see any artist out, because I'm already visiting cities and things like that. So, my mom takes me to concerts so I can meet artists and rap to them and things. Yes, my mother, she really does believe in my dream.*"

The youth's emotions and gestures when he was mentioning how his mom is very supportive in his music career path reflected how social factors affect the way we choose careers. Besides his individual personality traits of wanting to become an artist, this statement shows how support from the mother complements the desire that is already there.

3.3 Institutions and income. There is also the role **institutions and income** play in promoting the entrepreneurship intentions among minority youth. Institutions such as the FHC intends to change the lives of these minority youth by collaborating with other leading institutions in the community and youth development including Purdue Extension, Purdue and Indiana Universities, Eli Lilly, Inc., and EDNA Martin school. For instance, during the one-on-one interview discussions, participants shared how the Center has helped them to learn how to become entrepreneurs. One participant shared that the Center offered her entrepreneurship skill sets as a result of programs and activities with these other institutions that engage with them at FHC. She feels that it is easy for her to start and run a sustainable business. During the interviews she mentioned that "*If you ever got the chance to meet him and talk to him, he always pushes and states that his goal isn't to work for anybody for the rest of his life. His goal is to be able to form some type of business for himself or some type of web-based something, or something where he wants to generate his own growth. Versus working for anyone.*"

The enthusiasm and facial expressions used by this participant clearly indicates how he is grateful that the Center has created an entrepreneurial mindset in her son. All activities, programs and people who are brought at the Center create an environment which favors all youth to find their own identity. This is another indication that the Center, as an institution helps its minority youth with skill sets which encourage them to become entrepreneurs. This is quite different from the ordinary school systems which often assume that all kids have same level of interest and understanding, whereas FHC considers its participants' needs and interests. Though the Center provides these opportunities to minority youth with the reality of that there is still limited resources that can enable them to start up their own businesses. The finding also clearly indicates, that because of the limited resources within the Martindale-Brightwood which again is caused by the discriminations and other bad policies which were put into place against the African Americans since they started moving from the south to the north. The lack of entrepreneurship in role models in this neighborhood also limits the minority youth in becoming an entrepreneur regardless training and other supports that are given to them.

These results are parallel with Stewart and Roth (2001, 2004) who found that entrepreneurs are higher in risk taking propensity than ordinary managers from different institutions and entities. In other words, being an entrepreneur requires intrinsic motivation that allows individuals to choose whether to become self-employed or not. The entrepreneurs also are more likely to pursue decisions or courses of action involving uncertainty regarding success or failure of outcomes (Jackson, 1994). Studies also show that conscientiousness as one of the individual personalities that can potentially describe an individual's level of achievement, work motivation, organization and planning, self-control and acceptance of traditional, norms, and virtue and responsibility toward others (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Roberts et al., 2005). These all play big roles in promoting or impeding a given behavior. All these background factors are essential in determining whether a person is likely to or likely not to become an entrepreneur.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

One of the missions for the Felege Hiywot Center is to train minority youth who attend its programs to become self-employed through entrepreneurship training as a way of creating jobs and develop the Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood. This study's intention was to explore the contribution of individual background factors on entrepreneurial intentions for these minority youth who attend Felege Hiywot urban farming youth led programs. While participants' stories and experiences were shared individually, collectively their stories and experiences spoke to the influence of the individual background factors on their entrepreneurship intentions.

Unlike other organizations, FHC strives to incorporate the backgrounds of the students in its operational model and this can only be done in an environment where leadership has freedom to decide how external funds/donations should be utilized. These youth come from low-income families where there are limited resources that can positively impact them in their development. One of the aims of the Center is to teach minority youth how to become self-employed through the programs and engagement with professionals and volunteers. These youth join the Center with diverse backgrounds such as low income, personality traits, and other social factors that create opportunities to learn and grow.

The Center's success lies to the fact that it does not push these minority youth to take what the Center offers, instead it creates an environment that encourages them to explore and find their passions, ambitions, and skills. The FHC leadership evaluates the background of the youth and learn what they like and do not like. Once they learn about the youth's background, the leadership starts to serve these youth based on their needs and they start where they are, which is different from the public schools or other youth programs.

Based on the findings from this study, there are recommendations that can be shared with researchers, policy makers and practitioners who are involved in urban agriculture youth-based programs. One of the aims of the FHC is to train minority youth to become entrepreneurs so that they can be self-employed and generate some jobs within the community. Because of the limited resources found in the Martindale-Brightwood community, training will not lead directly to self-employment and have an impact on the community. Therefore, youth without some financial support would benefit by the opportunity to apply for some form of micro-loans directed to the minority youth so that they can reasonably engage in some entrepreneurial related activities and projects. Therefore, first recommendation is that practitioners and other people engaging in urban farming programs consider creating a micro loan program which can be used to fund entrepreneurial related projects developed by the minority youth who show potential in starting and running their own businesses.

The FHC is among the leading organizations that support minority youth's development. Based on much responsibility and services it provides in the Martindale-Brightwood community, it cannot fully provide all skills seats needed by the youth who attend its programs. Therefore, second recommendation is that the urban youth program leaders and practitioners with similar programs to assist minority youth who show a passion in entrepreneurship to connect with the business incubators in their local communities so that they can expand their knowledge, skills, and network in entrepreneurship.

Based on the interview discussions from the participants, some youth also showed interest in urban farming as their entrepreneurial activities. However, the common issue raised was the lack of the plots or land where these youth can put into action what they learned. Third recommendation will be that communities where youth programs are present would benefit from these minority youth interested in urban farming by providing plots/land, possibly vacant City properties where they can easily start their entrepreneurial activities.

Minority youth come in the program with diverse background factors which make each and every individual youth unique, therefore, fourth recommendation is that during the selection process, these urban youth programs must consider assessing each minority youth to be recruited and also reaching out to their parents or guardians as a way of discovering their backgrounds. This would allow involvement of the whole family and the likelihood of the youth's experiences being able to directly impact the community. This can also help them to know the type of activities, amount of resources, professionals and volunteers to be used to meet the needs for each participant.

The Center is heavily relying on professionals, volunteers, and Board members who are predominantly Whites. While this seems to be a good thing for the Center to bring people who are skilled and willing to serve minority youth to promote entrepreneurship skills, it can also be a drawback for youth who work with people who don't look like them with no similar backgrounds such as poverty and racial discriminations. One of the challenges which could happen will be the disconnection between minority youth and the successful White professionals and volunteers who provide knowledge and skills to them. Therefore, fifth recommendation is to engage and invite successful minority experts who look like them to the Center. It is very important considering that the majority of these youth grew up in a community where there are few successful businesspeople. Bringing successful people, and ideally entrepreneurs who look like them or share same history and struggle can significantly increase their self-efficacy in acquiring certain skills as they can easily connect with them by taking them as their role models. The urban farming youth programs can improve on this by diversifying volunteers and professionals who often come to engage with youth.

4. References

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