



The influence of personality traits and persuasive messages on entrepreneurial intention

A cross-cultural comparison

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine persuasion and personality variables as predictors of entrepreneurial intention in a cross-cultural sample.

Design/methodology/approach – Undergraduates in the USA and the Republic of Ireland completed measures of personal efficacy, achievement motivation, ambiguity tolerance, attitudes toward entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial intention.

Findings – The results suggest that the decision to become an entrepreneur comes about differently in different cultures. US participants appear to perceive entrepreneurship as a societally sanctioned and appropriate outlet for their achievement motivation. While achievement motivation correlated with entrepreneurial intention for the US participants, this result did not obtain for the Irish subjects. In both cultures, those who have come to believe that being an entrepreneur is consistent with their self-image showed strong entrepreneurial intention independent of their other beliefs about entrepreneurship. This study suggests that recollections of positive interpersonal and mass media messages about entrepreneurship encourage entrepreneurial intention – but only for US participants. Other factors discussed in this report appear to mitigate the effect of such recollections for the Irish.

Research limitations/implications – This study is part of a larger research program that includes following up on these participants at a later date. With longitudinal data, we will be able to track the relationship between stated entrepreneurial intention and later business startup.

Originality/value – This investigation compares factors influencing entrepreneurial intention in the USA and Ireland.

Keywords Entrepreneurialism, Careers, Decision making, Personality, United States of America, Ireland

Paper type Research paper



This research is part of a larger investigation on factors influencing entrepreneurial intention. Emmeline and Kathleen worked with Mike Driver – Emmeline as an advisee and Kathleen as a colleague. His imprint is on this investigation as it is on their work in general. Long before Kathleen became Mike's colleague and office neighbor, his work influenced her dissertation, despite having never met and 3,000 miles between them. The dissertation was awarded the National Communication Association Dissertation Award. He continued that influence informally in discussions over the years. His departure is a significant loss but he has left many lasting, positive and important impressions on so many. He certainly influenced Emmeline as well in her topic selection for her dissertation work and throughout to its completion.

This investigation compares factors influencing entrepreneurial intention in the US and Ireland. Most of our current understanding of the entrepreneur derives from research done in the US, and it is unclear how applicable these findings are to other cultures. Even though Ireland has become economically vital in the last decade, much of its financial upsurge has come from foreign (particularly US) businesses taking root there, not from indigenous entrepreneurial activity. Ireland's culture and history are intertwined with, yet distinct from, those of the US. Exploring how each culture defines and values entrepreneurship can illuminate our understanding of how and why individuals become entrepreneurs.

Background

Definition of entrepreneurship

Following Low and MacMillan's definition of entrepreneurship as "creation of new enterprise" (Low and MacMillan, 1988), we define entrepreneurial intention as the intention to start a new business.

Predictors of entrepreneurship: personality traits

Personality traits have proven to be intriguing but imperfect predictors of many aspects of entrepreneurship including intending to start a business, starting a business, succeeding in running a business, and corporate intrapreneurship (Shaver and Scott, 1991). In this study we test the predictive value of three characteristics frequently associated with entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship: achievement motivation, tolerance for ambiguity, and personal efficacy.

Achievement motivation. According to David McClelland's influential *The Achieving Society*, achievement motivation is critical to economic development and progress (McClelland, 1961). Achievement motivation has been singled out as the most prevalent predictor of entrepreneurship (Babb and Babb, 1992). Some studies have found a positive relationship between achievement motivation and entrepreneurial behavior (Shaver and Scott, 1991). Others have found no connection (Bonnett and Furnham, 1991).

Risk and ambiguity tolerance. In founding a new venture, the entrepreneur risks financial failure and possible embarrassment. If the venture succeeds, the entrepreneur stands to gain wealth, independence, and a sense of accomplishment. Given the extent of risk involved, it is reasonable to assume that tolerance for risk is more common among people choosing to become entrepreneurs. The literature, however, does not support risk taking as characteristic of entrepreneurs (Low and MacMillan, 1988). The lack of consistency in the research on risk taking among entrepreneurs may be explained by variation in the perception of risk (Corman *et al.*, 1988; Shaver and Scott, 1991).

It has been argued that "adventurousness," as captured by measuring tolerance for ambiguity, provides a better predictor. Compared to managers, entrepreneurs have been shown to possess a significantly higher level of tolerance for ambiguity (Low and MacMillan, 1988).

Locus of control and personal efficacy. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that their life outcomes are the result of their own actions, such as hard work. Someone with an external locus of control believes that events are controlled by luck or other external phenomena (Rotter, 1966). An internal locus of control has been associated with entrepreneurial venturing and success (Gatewood *et al.*, 1995).

Unfortunately, Rotter's locus of control scale is one-dimensional, and does not allow for an individual to express varying perceptions of control in different aspects of life (Low and MacMillan, 1988). Paulhus's spheres of control personal control subscale, like Rotter's scale, also measures perceptions of control, but distinguishes among various aspects of life, and is preferable to standard Locus of Control measures for entrepreneurship research (Shaver and Scott, 1991). This scale has been revised several times and is considered to be reliable (Paulhus and Van Selst, 1990).

Predictors of entrepreneurship: cultural factors

Persuasion: the appropriateness-consistency-effectiveness model. The appropriateness-consistency-effectiveness (ACE) model of persuasion (Reardon, 1991) was derived from an extensive body of communication research. It proposes that the most effective reasoned persuasion is tailored to at least one of three considerations people bring to bear on decisions: appropriateness (what others do, or approve of), consistency (what fits with the receiver's self-schema), and effectiveness (what is likely to bring desired outcomes) (Reardon *et al.*, 1989).

Furthermore, the relative effectiveness of one type of appeal versus another varies by individual. If an individual is predisposed to care about what others think, appropriateness appeals (what others would do) are more likely to influence his or her behavior than appeals to consistency (what a person like the receiver would do) or effectiveness (what would be more likely to bring desired outcomes). For example, a potential entrepreneur sees himself as a nonconformist may be undeterred by the disapproval of others, and will focus instead on whether entrepreneurship is consistent with his or her self-concept. Effective persuasion relies on the persuader selecting the type or types of appeals most likely to have an impact on the receiver.

For the purposes of this study, two types of persuasion were considered: face-to-face interaction and that via mass media. Messages about the appropriateness, consistency and effectiveness of entrepreneurship to which individuals in the US and Ireland recall being exposed were expected to influence entrepreneurial intention.

Valence of entrepreneurial perceptions. Aside from appropriateness, consistency and effectiveness appeals, it was anticipated that the extent to which subjects recalled entrepreneurs portrayed positively in the mass media and spoken of favorably by significant individuals, would play an important part in influencing attitudes toward entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship in the US and Ireland

Much of the research on entrepreneurship has been conducted in the US, and the findings are likely not generalizable to other cultural contexts (Cox, 1997). Rates of entrepreneurship vary widely from country to country, and broad cultural characteristics appear to explain little of the variance (Hunt and Levie, 2003). Although Ireland and the US have much in common, including a shared language, Ireland does not have the same history or experience with entrepreneurship and economic development as the US. In this respect and others described below, the cultures are quite different.

US attitudes toward entrepreneurship. US culture encouraging of individualism has predisposed Americans positively toward competitive enterprise. America has a long tradition of business enterprise permeating daily life (Briedlid *et al.*, 1996; Grund, 1837).

US culture is distinguished by extremely high individualism and low uncertainty avoidance, two characteristics often associated in the literature with entrepreneurs (Hofstede, 1980). In the US, success in individual pursuits is admired, as are choice, pursuit of seemingly impossible dreams, impatience with time, acceptance of mistakes, urge to improvise, and intrigue with what's new (Hammond and Morrison, 1996). Americans admire the maverick entrepreneur (Jackson and Brophy, 1986).

Irish attitudes toward entrepreneurship. While Americans are relatively indulgent toward entrepreneurial failure, the Irish view failure as a sign of incompetence (Cuddy and Evertsen, 2004). Prior to Ireland's current celebrated economic recovery, scholars of Irish culture observed a general conservatism in Irish society that included an aversion to entrepreneurial risk-taking (O'Farrell, 1986) and a lack of respect for entrepreneurs (Hisrich and O'Connide, 1986). Even entrepreneurial success can be a negative, as a thriving venture invites "begrudgery" – one's peers resenting one's success (Ardagh, 1997). In addition to this begrudgery and perhaps due in some part to it, the bureaucratic steps to becoming an entrepreneur in Ireland are enormously challenging (O'Kane, 1995).

The Irish have been aware of these social obstacles to entrepreneurship for some time, and policymakers have advocated removing these obstacles. In 1958, the Secretary of the Department of Finance argued that further economic development in Ireland required not only ideas but also conditions and policies favorable to individual profit-making. In the mid-1980s a report of the National Planning Board argued that Ireland needed economic policies that would "encourage and sustain growth of output and employment . . . by inducing private persons and agencies and public enterprises to use their time, talents and other resources more productively in Ireland." The report called for increasing incentives to "take commercial risks and innovate" (Guiomard, 1995). The 1992 Culliton report stated:

Enterprise means accepting risk and that many risky ventures fail. Until a sufficiently large cadre of people in Ireland are prepared to undertake the risks associated with business and are adequately rewarded for success we will continue to experience only modest progress (Guiomard, 1995).

In 1993, the General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions argued that much needed was "an entrepreneurial revolution" in Ireland. In his review of these calls for entrepreneurship, Guiomard proposed that in Ireland, "the rewards for entrepreneurship need to be greatly increased" (p. 162).

In 1992, Forbairt, a state-funded and state-owned body, was established to help Irish people start new businesses. The Irish Development Authority, which attracts business to Ireland, and Forfas, the policy-making body, have worked toward improving the business climate in Ireland. The infusion of money from the European Community has also helped, but Ireland's economic renaissance is very recent and is based mostly on foreign investment, not indigenous entrepreneurship.

Ireland's economic recovery. Ireland is currently enjoying a high standard of living and although the rate of business startups lags behind that of the US, in 2004 it was the highest in Europe (Cuddy and Evertsen, 2004). Ireland's recent economic success appears in contradiction to commonly held perceptions that Ireland is relatively inhospitable to entrepreneurship (Ardagh, 1997; O'Farrell, 1986; O'Kane, 1995).

Ireland's current economic resurgence, however, is not based on Irish entrepreneurship. Rather, the centerpiece of Ireland's economic renaissance is foreign investment (Breen *et al.*, 1990; Cuddy and Evertsen, 2004), lured by an educated

workforce and low taxes. A recent drop-off in multinational investment, however, is exposing the great extent to which Ireland's economic success has depended on foreign multinationals. Irish policymakers are now hoping to encourage more homegrown entrepreneurship (Capell, 2003). In order to sustain Ireland's current economic strength, entrepreneurship must take root in Irish culture, and Irish companies must constitute a significant portion of the economic landscape. Identifying any impediments to Irish entrepreneurship is a necessary first step toward cultivating indigenous entrepreneurship. We believe that examining entrepreneurial intention in the US and Ireland will shed some light on how entrepreneurship is perceived and valued in these two cultures, and can lead to more effective methods for cultivating entrepreneurship.

Research hypotheses

The rate of business startup is higher in the US than in Ireland (Capell, 2003), and Irish scholars and policy makers report that the Irish are not sufficiently entrepreneurial (Ardagh, 1997; Breen *et al.*, 1990; Capell, 2003; O'Halloran, 2005; O'Kane, 1995). In addition, there are logistical obstacles to starting a business in Ireland (Guiomard, 1995; O'Kane, 1995). For these reasons we believe it is likely that the Irish subjects in this study will demonstrate a lower level of intention to start a business than will the American subjects:

H1. (Entrepreneurial intention) compared to the Irish, Americans will display a higher level of intention to start a business.

Differences in personality and cultural variables. We hypothesize that American subjects will differ from Irish subjects in the following ways:

H2a. Compared to the Irish, Americans will score higher on achievement motivation.

H2b. Compared to the Irish, Americans will score higher on tolerance for ambiguity.

H2c. Compared to the Irish, Americans will score higher on personal efficacy.

H3a. Compared to the Irish, Americans will score higher on appropriateness perceptions.

H3b. Compared to the Irish, Americans will score higher on consistency perceptions.

H3c. Compared to the Irish, Americans will score higher on effectiveness perceptions.

H4a. Compared to the Irish, Americans will score higher on possess more positive overall perceptions of entrepreneurship.

Personality and cultural variables as predictors of entrepreneurial intention.

H5a. (Achievement motivation) Achievement motivation will be significantly and positively related to entrepreneurial intention.

H5b. (Ambiguity tolerance) Ambiguity tolerance will be significantly and positively related to entrepreneurial intention.

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- H5c.* (Personal efficacy) Personal efficacy will be significantly and positively related to entrepreneurial intention.
- H6a.* (Appropriateness) Perceived appropriateness of entrepreneurship will be significantly and positively related to entrepreneurial intention.
- H6b.* (Consistency) Perceived consistency of entrepreneurship will be significantly and positively related to entrepreneurial intention.
- H6a.* (Effectiveness) Perceived effectiveness of entrepreneurship will be significantly and positively related to entrepreneurial intention.
- H7a.* (Positive messages) Recall of positive messages about entrepreneurship will be significantly and positively related to perceptions of appropriateness, consistency, and effectiveness of entrepreneurship.
- H7b.* (Positive messages) Recall of positive messages about entrepreneurship will be significantly and positively related to intention to start a business.

Methods

Participants

Our sample consisted of 208 participants, drawn from undergraduate and MBA programs in Ireland and the US. The undergraduates were 24 US male technical undergraduates, 35 US female technical undergraduates, 36 Irish male technical undergraduates, and 24 Irish female technical undergraduates. The MBA students were 45 male US MBA students, 28 female US MBA students, 11 Irish male MBA students, and five Irish female MBA students.

The US sample was recruited primarily through university courses in two universities on the West Coast, and was limited to subjects who grew up in the continental US and still considered it home. The Irish participants were drawn from courses at two leading Irish universities. The Irish sample included only subjects who grew up in the Republic of Ireland, and still considered it home.

Instrument

We administered a single survey that combined the following measures.

Entrepreneurial intention. Previous studies on entrepreneurial intention have used either a one-year (Autio *et al.*, 1997) or a five-year measure (Krueger *et al.*, 2000). For this investigation, we used both measures: the stated likelihood, on a scale of 1 through 5, of starting a business within one year, and the stated likelihood, on a scale of 1 through 5, of starting a business within five years.

Achievement motivation, tolerance for ambiguity, and personal efficacy. For these well researched traits, we selected Driver's ten-item achievement motivation subscale, adapted from Murray (Driver, 1991); the 16-item short version of the general incongruity adaptation level instrument (Driver, 1984); and the personal control subscale from Paulhus' spheres of control scale (Paulhus and Van Selst, 1990).

Valence of entrepreneurial perceptions. These items measured the extent to which subjects recalled entrepreneurs being portrayed and spoken of positively in the respondent's social environment, through both mass media and interpersonal channels. To ascertain the types of mass media and interpersonal messages that the Irish and American subjects received about entrepreneurship, we asked the subjects to

recall portrayals of entrepreneurship in books, newspapers and magazines, and to rate how positive these portrayals were on a scale of 1 to 5. In addition, we asked them to rate the degree to which recalled messages about entrepreneurship received from community, family and peers were positive on a scale of 1 to 5.

Appropriateness, consistency, and effectiveness. For this study we designed the entrepreneurship ACE audit, which measures the perceived appropriateness, consistency, and effectiveness of starting a business. It was derived from Reardon's ACE model (Reardon (1991)). It contains four subscales: appropriateness, self-consistency, national consistency, and effectiveness (see also Reardon *et al.*, 1989).

The appropriateness questions assess the respondent's perception of the social acceptability of an entrepreneurial career. A sample appropriateness item is, "People are impressed by entrepreneurs."

Consistency is measured with two separate subscales. Self-consistency is the extent to which the respondent believes that being an entrepreneur is consistent with his or her self-image. A sample self-consistency item is, "When I think of the word 'entrepreneur,' I imagine somebody like myself." Consistency appeals have been shown to be effective in changing behavior (Reardon *et al.*, 1989). National-identity consistency was utilized in this study to assess the extent to which being American and being Irish is perceived to be consistent with becoming an entrepreneur. A sample national-identity consistency item is, "compared with other nationalities, people from my country of origin are relatively entrepreneurial."

The effectiveness dimension assesses the extent to which respondents perceive that an entrepreneurial career can effectively fulfill their goals. A sample effectiveness item is, "starting and running one's own business is an effective way to succeed." The entrepreneurship ACE audit was originally designed with 28 items, seven items per subscale. Correlation analysis and principal components analysis were used to eliminate inconsistent items. The final audit contains 17 items: four appropriateness items, six self-consistency items, five national-consistency items, and two effectiveness items (Figure 1).

Additional items. To explore further the participants' preconceptions of the entrepreneur, we asked an open-ended question: "when you hear the word 'entrepreneur,' what kind of person comes to mind?" We also collected demographic data including age, sex, religion, and birth order.

Results

Bivariate correlations

All variables are standardized to a five-point scale, with five as the strongest agreement or highest value. Because we are studying the relationships among variables in two different populations, we show correlations in the Irish and US samples separately (Table I).

Means and scale reliabilities

Scales showed moderate to good reliability, with all values over 0.6 (Table II).

Variables predicting entrepreneurial intention

Stepwise regression results for Irish participants (Table III) indicate that ambiguity tolerance alone has a direct effect on short-term (one year) entrepreneurial intention

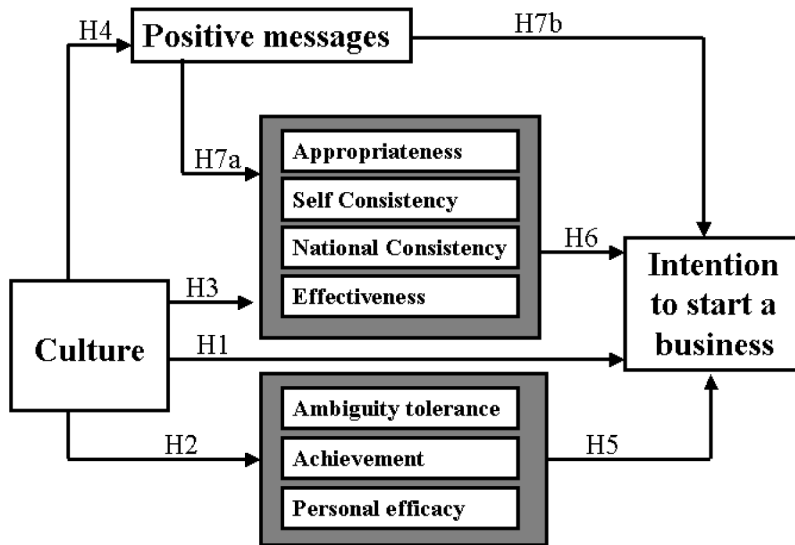


Figure 1.
Proposed model:
predicting entrepreneurial
intention

while self-consistency alone predicts five-year entrepreneurial intention. Table III shows that self-consistency predicts one-year and five-year entrepreneurial intention among US participants, and positive messages constitute a significant direct predictor of five-year entrepreneurial intention among US participants.

Valence of entrepreneurial perceptions as a predictor of perceived appropriateness, consistency and effectiveness of entrepreneurship

After testing the extent to which appropriateness, consistency and effectiveness predicted entrepreneurial intention, we then tested the extent to which recall of positive entrepreneurial role models predicted appropriateness, consistency and effectiveness (Table IV).

Recall of positive role models of entrepreneurship, which we call positive social modeling, was found to be a significant predictor of appropriateness, self-consistency, and effectiveness of entrepreneurship among Irish participants, but not a significant predictor of national consistency. Among US participants, positive message recall was found to be a significant predictor of appropriateness, effectiveness, self-consistency and national consistency perceptions regarding entrepreneurship. The single significant difference we found with this test is that positive modeling of entrepreneurship predicted the Americans in our study believing that Americans are entrepreneurial, but this positive modeling did not predict the Irish in our study believing that the Irish are entrepreneurial.

As hypothesized (H1), the American participants displayed a significantly higher level of entrepreneurial intention than the Irish. This did not appear, however, to be due either to lower achievement motivation or lower ambiguity tolerance on the part of the Irish. There was no significant difference in these variables. H2a (significant difference in achievement motivation) and H2b (significant difference in ambiguity tolerance)

Table I.
Bivariate correlations

	US									
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
Irish	Personal control	Ambiguity tolerance	Positive messages	Achievement motivation	Appropriate	Consistency self	Consistency national	Effectiveness	Intention to start a business 1 yr	Intention to start a business 5 yr
1. Personal control	1	0.341**	0.420**	0.254*	0.277**	0.353**	0.376**	0.183	0.226*	0.281**
2. Ambiguity tolerance	0.363**	1	0.362**	-0.009	0.238*	0.121	0.217	0.038	0.184	0.150
3. Positive messages	0.476**	0.141	1	0.126	0.509**	0.416**	0.363**	0.302**	0.341**	0.452**
4. Achievement motivation	0.479**	-0.022	0.424**	1	0.188	0.311**	0.125	0.307**	0.196	0.254*
5. Appropriateness	0.495**	0.107	0.620**	0.556**	1	0.178	0.366**	0.125	0.065	0.104
6. Consistency-self	0.349	0.289*	0.469**	0.294**	0.416**	1	0.117	0.339**	0.549**	0.752**
7. Consistency national	-0.106	0.204	0.052	-0.214	-0.059	-0.079	1	0.316**	0.118	0.143
8. Effectiveness	0.346**	-0.025	0.552**	0.605**	0.616**	0.501**	-0.151	1	0.254*	0.286**
9. Intention to start a business 1 yr	-0.222	-0.256*	-0.016	-0.123	-0.218	0.132	-0.186	0.034	1	0.807**
10. Intention to start a business 5 yr	0.245*	0.026	0.380**	0.165	0.159	0.503**	-0.173	0.353**	0.403**	1

Notes: Upper right is US, lower left is Irish; *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Variable	Means by nationality		Scale reliability
	USA	Irish	
Achievement motivation	3.28	3.22	0.7658
Ambiguity tolerance	3.48	3.45	0.6301
Personal efficacy	3.82*	3.27	0.6968
Social modeling	3.80*	3.60	0.8008
Appropriateness	3.83	3.88	0.8370
Self consistency	3.53*	3.27	0.8396
National consistency	4.11*	3.30	0.6848
Effectiveness	3.49	3.55	0.6263
Intention to start business: one year	2.19*	1.40	Single item
Intention to start business: five years	3.17*	2.5	Single item

Note: *Difference is statistically significant

Table II.
Means and scale reliabilities

		Beta	Sig.
Irish	Intention to start business within one year	- 2.194	0.032
	Intention to start business within five years		
USA	Intention to start business within one year	6.234	0.000
	Intention to start business within five years	8.710	0.000
		Positive social modeling (recall of positive messages about entrepreneurs)	2.036

Table III.
Significant predictors of intention to start a business, Irish and US participants: stepwise regression

		Beta	Sig.
Irish	Positive social modeling as a predictor of appropriateness (do others approve of entrepreneurship?)	0.620	0.000
	Positive social modeling as a predictor of self-consistency (am I entrepreneurial?)	0.469	0.000
	Positive social modeling as a predictor of national consistency (are people from my country entrepreneurial?)	0.052	0.656
	Positive social modeling as a predictor of effectiveness (will being an entrepreneur help me reach my goals?)	0.430	0.000
USA	Positive social modeling as a predictor of appropriateness (do others approve of entrepreneurship?)	0.498	0.000
	Positive social modeling as a predictor of self-consistency (am I entrepreneurial?)	0.457	0.000
	Positive social modeling as a predictor of national consistency (are people from my country entrepreneurial?)	0.276	0.000
	Positive social modeling as a predictor of effectiveness (will being an entrepreneur help me reach my goals?)	0.226	0.001

Table IV.
Positive social modeling as a predictor of perceived appropriateness, consistency and effectiveness among Irish and US participants: linear regression

were not supported. Americans scored significantly higher on personal efficacy, supporting *H2c*.

There was no significant difference in Irish and American evaluations of the appropriateness (*H3a*) or effectiveness (*H3c*) of entrepreneurship. The American participants rated entrepreneurship significantly higher in both self-consistency and national consistency (*H3b*). US participants had more positive recollections of messages about entrepreneurship (*H4*).

There were differences between Irish and American participants as to the correlations among variables. Achievement motivation was significantly and positively correlated to entrepreneurial intention only among the US participants, but not among the Irish (*H5a*). Ambiguity tolerance (*H5b*) was negatively correlated with one-year entrepreneurial intention among the Irish. Personal efficacy (*H5c*) was significantly correlated with five-year entrepreneurial intention among the Irish, and with both measures of entrepreneurial intention in the US participants. The Irish and American participants differed in level of personal efficacy, so this could have an effect on entrepreneurial intention.

The perceived appropriateness of entrepreneurship was not significantly related to entrepreneurial intention (*H6a*). Self-consistency was the most significant predictor for both Irish and US participants. It was positively and significantly correlated with five-year entrepreneurial intention among the Irish, and for both measures of entrepreneurial intention among the US participants. Self-consistency sole significant predictor of five-year EI among the Irish and one-year EI in the US, and as one of two predictors of five-year EI in the US. National consistency was not significantly correlated to EI for either group (*H6b*). The perceived effectiveness of entrepreneurship (*H6c*) was significantly and positively correlated to five-year EI for the Irish, and to both measures of EI for the US participants.

As expected, recall of positive messages about entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship was positively associated with perceived appropriateness, consistency and effectiveness of entrepreneurship among the Irish, indicating that these messages were not only remembered, but also internalized. For US participants, recall of positive messages was associated with perceptions of effectiveness and national consistency, but not self-consistency or appropriateness (*H7*). Among the Americans, positive message recall was a significant predictor of five-year EI as indicated by our regression results, but did not appear to have an effect on Americans' self-consistency. The correlation between positive messages and EI was significant and positive for one-year and five-year EI in the US, and for five-year EI among the Irish.

Discussion

The results point not to personal entrepreneurial deficit among the Irish, but to cultural factors that make entrepreneurship seem natural in a US context and less so in the Irish context. Compared to the American participants, the Irish scored significantly lower on perception of self-consistency (sample item: "when I think of the word 'entrepreneur,' I imagine somebody like myself"). Self-consistency was a strong and consistent predictor of entrepreneurial intention. The Irish participants also scored lower in national-identity consistency, indicating that the Irish do not think of Ireland as a particularly entrepreneurial nation. One striking finding is that positive messages about entrepreneurship were associated with entrepreneurial intention (Figures 2 and 3).

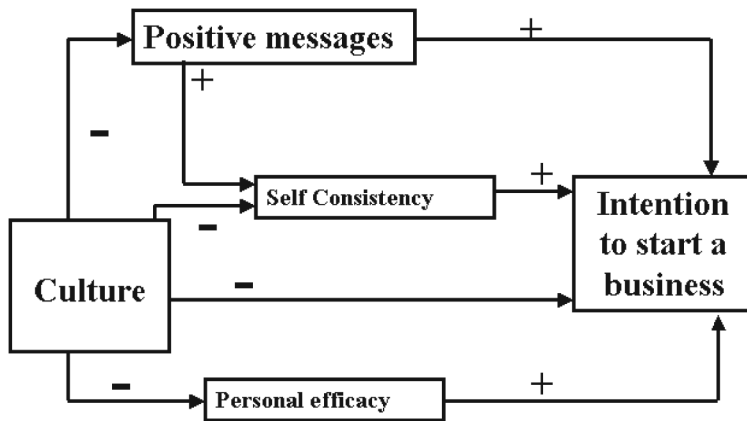


Figure 2.
Predictors of entrepreneurial intention among Irish participants

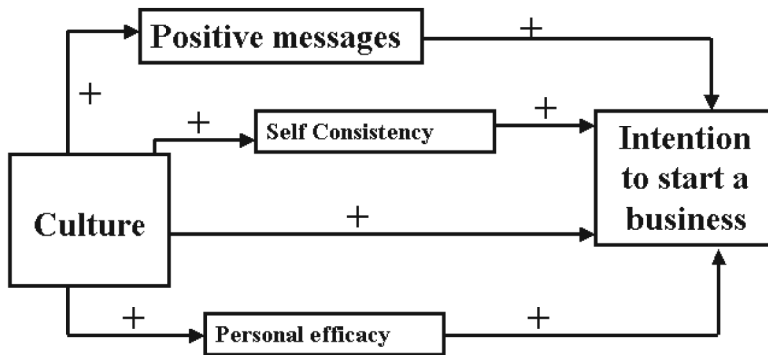


Figure 3.
Predictors of entrepreneurial intention among American participants

This study takes a first step in addressing how persuasive messages about careers can influence decisions regarding entrepreneurial careers. It broadens current conceptualizations of entrepreneurial intention by questioning whether personality factors are the best predictors. This research also indicates that there are indeed cultural differences in the persuasive messages about entrepreneurship recalled by people, how these messages influence perceptions of the appropriateness, self-consistency, national consistency and effectiveness of this career, and how such perceptions influence the intention to become an entrepreneur. It opens up an avenue for research not previously explored, not only in terms of entrepreneurship but also in terms of careers in general.

The entrepreneurship appropriateness-consistency-effectiveness (ACE) audit developed and tested in this research extends previous work pertaining to the influence of persuasive messages on life choices. More work remains to be done in refining this audit but this study demonstrated that it is useful for examining the reasons underlying particular career preferences. In this study, perceptions of entrepreneurship as a self-consistent career was the most significant predictor of intention to become an entrepreneur.

Cultural context

Our results confirmed the drawbacks of projecting US assumptions onto other cultures. The relationships among personality traits, perceptions about entrepreneurship, and perceptions about self were more consistent with previous entrepreneurship research in the mainland US sample than in the Irish sample. Achievement motivation, cited frequently in practitioner writings as a given for entrepreneurs, was correlated with entrepreneurial intention in the US sample, but not in the Irish sample.

Irish people anticipating an entrepreneurial career must be able to withstand social pressure that discourages this choice. Selecting entrepreneurship as a career in Ireland may require rebelliousness not needed in the US where entrepreneurship is a more conventional career choice.

This research has brought to light some limitations of pure trait orientations to the study of entrepreneurial intention. Achievement motivation levels were not significantly different for the Irish and US subjects but the relationship between achievement motivation and entrepreneurial intention was completely different: significantly and positively correlated with entrepreneurial intention in the US, and not significantly correlated at all in the Irish. The Irish, while similarly achievement motivated, do not appear to translate that orientation into encouragement to become entrepreneurs in the near or short-term future. The Irish and US subjects were also similar in tolerance for ambiguity, but ambiguity tolerance in the Irish was actually negatively correlated to short-term entrepreneurial intention.

The Irish were lower in personal efficacy than Americans, and this trait was correlated with entrepreneurial intention, but was eliminated in the stepwise regression as it was overshadowed by self-consistency. It is difficult, however, to envision potential entrepreneurs who do not believe they possess the ability to reach their goals . . .

Compared to persuasive messages, personality trait variables were weaker predictors of career intentions. The perception of entrepreneurship as consistent with one's self-image emerged as an important component of entrepreneurial intention. Consistency between self-image and the concept of "entrepreneur" was the best overall predictor of entrepreneurial intention both at one year and five years.

Future directions

Results of this study constitute only an early step in understanding how persuasive messages influence career decisions, but it is an important step. From a policy perspective, this research suggests that policy makers wishing to increase entrepreneurship in their country or region would do well to explore the types of messages their young people are receiving about that career. Future research might examine how such messages influence careers choices in general. If these messages and images change, careers once considered unavailable to people may become available and appreciated. Research such as this can at the very least heighten awareness of the powerful role played by cultural messages in career selection.

Policymakers can take some encouragement in our finding that positive messages about entrepreneurship do appear to influence entrepreneurial intention. Public campaigns to encourage entrepreneurship are not a waste of resources, although it may take years to see the results. Both in the US, where reverence of entrepreneurship is built into the culture, and in Ireland, where it is not, this research suggests that

policymakers would be wise to consider consistency appeals when developing persuasive campaigns to increase the likelihood of their young people choosing entrepreneurial careers.

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