Fostering intrapreneurial competencies of employees in the education sector

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Jo Boon, Marcel Van der Klink and Jose Janssen[1]

Abstract

Intrapreneurship, a term coined to indicate that entrepreneurial competencies are valuable in any working context, is still a relatively new concept. So far, little attention has been devoted to the development of intrapreneurial competencies in the existing workforce. Starting from the integrated model of entrepreneurship of Bagheri and Pihie (2011) we address the question of the extent to which this model can be applied to intrapreneurial competencies. To this end in-depth interviews were conducted with employees and employers in the education sector. Results suggest that the model largely applies to intrapreneurship as well. An important nuance concerns the risk-taking competency. In addition, both employees and employers stress the role of the organisation with respect to displaying intrapreneurial qualities in the first place and in further developing them. The article concludes with recommendations for future research and practice.

Keywords

Intrapreneurship, intrapreneurial competencies, employability, risk taking

1. Background

Employability has become increasingly important in today's European labour markets where lifetime job contracts are no longer considered to be the norm. The concept of employability implies that

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individuals become more accountable for investments in their own human capital, and hence for their job and employment security, learning and future career development. Although defining employability appears to be a rather complicated endeavour because of the existence of different perceptions of what it means to be employable, many scholars emphasise that employability refers to the continuous acquisition or creation of work through the optimal use of one's competencies (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006, p. 453), within or outside the current organization, today and in the future (Van der Heijden, Boon, Van der Klink & Meijs, 2009).

Safeguarding employability requires the initiatives of many stakeholders, including employees, unions, professional associations, national governments and even international bodies, such as the European Community that has outlined the needs for the 21st European labour market (European Communities, 2007). Given the ambition to maintain a leading economy with sustainable growth rates, there is a necessity to speed up the pace of innovation in Europe and this will only succeed if particular competencies are better represented in the current workforce. The EU defines eight competencies as key interests for learning and hence economic development: communication in the mother tongue and foreign languages, mathematical competences and competences in science and technology, digital competence, competence to learn, social and civic competences, cultural awareness and expression and sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. Among these highly desired competencies listed by the European communities, entrepreneurship holds a prominent position when it comes to safeguarding one's own employability as well as contributing to innovation and economic growth (European Communities, 2007, p. 11; Cedefop, 2011).

The concept of *intrapreneurship* is strongly related to, and expands on, the notion of entrepreneurship. Whereas the latter traditionally focuses on improving one's ability to set up and maintain a (small) business, recent views elaborate on the concept of entrepreneurship by also including the development of certain personal qualities and mind-sets, irrespective of whether one owns a business or is self-employed:

"(...) an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. This

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supports individuals, not only in their everyday lives at home and in society, but also in the workplace in being aware of the context of their work and being able to seize opportunities, and is a foundation for more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity." (European Communities, 2007, p. 11)

This expanded definition of entrepreneurship applies to large segments of the contemporary labour market. To underscore this move to a new and broader meaning of entrepreneurship the term *intrapreneurship* has been proposed recently to better reflect the idea that even when not involved in a business start-up, people can nonetheless act in an entrepreneurial fashion in their own work setting (De Jong & Wennekers, 2008).

The relative newness of the concept intrapreneurship is echoed in the absence of a significant number of studies on how to increase employees' intrapreneurship, but some studies did reveal findings helpful for a better understanding of this concept, such as Antoncic's exploration of the literature on the risk-taking aspect of intrapreneurship (Antoncic, 2003). He assumes that risk-taking is not only a characteristic of individuals but is strongly encouraged by the organizational context in which the risk-taker performs. However, the focus on intrapreneurship does not by definition limit the value of existing studies concerning entrepreneurship: as De Jong and Wennekers (2008, p. 24) have stated 'we emphasize that intrapreneurship is a special case of entrepreneurship and thus shares many key behavioural characteristics with this overarching concept, such as taking initiative, opportunity pursuit without regard to presently available resources, and some element of 'newness'. At the same time, intrapreneurship distinctly belongs to the domain of 'employee behaviour' and thus faces specific limitations that a business hierarchy and an internal business environment may impose on individual initiative, as well as specific possibilities for support that an existing business may offer to a nascent intrapreneur'.

Against the background of the parallels and dissimilarities drawn between entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship this paper builds on the model of entrepreneurial leadership and learning recently proposed by Bagheri and Pihie (2011), investigating to what extent the model can be adopted for the development of intrapeneurial competencies as well. Whereas contemporary studies mainly examine

advancing students' intrapreneurial competency levels in vocational and higher education, far less attention has been devoted to the issue of supporting the existing workforce in increasing their intrapreneurial qualities. The work presented in this paper is a first step towards filling this gap.

In order to shed some light on this issue and gain a more profound insight into the model we conducted in-depth interviews with both employees and employers. Core questions guiding the study were:

1. When asked to reflect on their own experience and learning, do intrapreneurial employees implicitly and/or explicitly confirm the model proposed by Bagheri & Pihie?

2. Does the model reflect the views and experiences of employers with respect to fostering development of entrepreneurial competencies among staff?

The paper first outlines the model proposed by Bagheri and Pihie (2011). Following that, the empirical research, findings and conclusions are reported.

2. Towards an integrated model for intrapreneurship

Empirical research about intrapreneurship is scarce and has mainly focussed on the effects of (self declared) intrapreneurial behaviour on a firm's position in the market (Fitsimmons et al, 2004). Mostly this research focuses on industrial firms. Research among public organisations such as universities and polytechnics is almost non-existent. With the prospect of the growing importance of intrapreneurship on employability these organisations cannot be excluded from empirical research. In order to design support for the existing workforce to increase their intrapreneurial qualities, a comprehensive model has to be developed describing the competencies related to this concept.

The integrated model of entrepreneurial leadership and entrepreneurial learning as proposed by Bagheri and Pihie (2011) is summarised in Figure 1. The model distinguishes five entrepreneurial competences, which are connected with two basic challenges that entrepreneurs face. Firstly, entrepreneurs face the challenge of envisioning the future and the question how to realise this vision (scenario enactment); and secondly they have to influence and inspire people to accomplish their

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vision of the future (cast enactment). For scenario enactment entrepreneurs need to be proactive, innovative and willing to take risks, whereas cast enactment requires competencies of commitment building and specifying limitations.
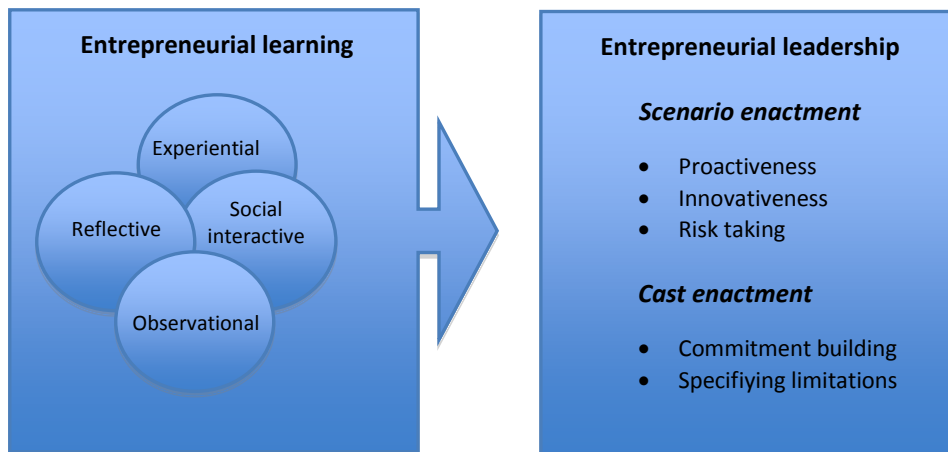
Figure 1. Integrated model of entrepeneurial leadership (adapted from Bagheri & Pihie, 2011).

Based on their review of literature on entrepreneurial learning the authors conclude that the development of entrepreneurial competences is basically an experiential process: learning that occurs through facing the challenge of new venture creation (experience), negotiating these challenges (social interaction), and trying to overcome them by following role models and good practice (observation) and by reflecting on their own experiences to draw lessons from them (reflection). Through negotiation with the environment the ideas and rationale of the entrepreneur are challenged, indicating opportunities for improvement.

The above model is based on an extensive body of literature and is fairly straightforward and easy to understand. This makes the model suitable to be directly used in a dialogue with those engaged in the processes it describes, which is at the heart of our empirical study to investigate the models applicability to the context of intrapreneurship, as is explained in the next section. On our way to

developing such a model specifically for intrapreneurial competencies, the model of Bagheri and Pihie was taken as starting point. This model was considered useful for the research on intrapreneurship because it can be applied to learning both in formal and informal settings. It describes how entrepreneurial learning for students in formal settings can be developed by experience, social interaction, observation and reflexion. These learning conditions however, are not only relevant for formal learning but also for informal learning in the workplace.

Following Marsick and Volpe (1999), earlier empirical research on the topic of informal learning (Van der Klink, Boon and Schlusmans, 2012), defined informal learning as learning that is integrated in work and daily routine, triggered by an internal or external jolt, not highly conscious, often haphazard and influenced by change; an inductive process of reflection and action, linked to learning with others. Reflection, pro-activity, goal setting and monitoring of learning activities are seen as learning conditions reinforcing the quality of informal learning. These conditions show a similarity to the learning conditions described in the model of Bagheri and Pihie.

One of the conclusions of the study was that informal learning can be optimised by offering a clearer view on possible roads and outcomes. The trigger to learn is strongly related to jobs tasks and changes in these tasks, but the domain of what is learnt is not restricted just to the current job but is also applicable to other jobs. Learning is strongly determined by the here and now; the picture of the self - directed learner proved to be barely noticeable. Employees in the study proved to be competent in reflection and pro-activity but far less so in setting goals and monitoring the course of their learning activities. Consequently, offering a structure of relevant competencies might enhance the quality of informal learning. A model such as the one described by Bagheri and Pihie offers a structure for advising employees in setting goals for their informal learning trajectories.

3. Method

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In order to investigate the applicability of Bagheri and Pihie's model, in-depth interviews were conducted with the main stakeholders concerning the development of intrapreneurial competencies: employees and managers with responsibility for employee/staff development. As mentioned previously, empirical data are scarce when it comes to non-commercial organisations. At the start of the research project the team considered both the nursing and the educational sector as potentially interesting occupational groups. Acquaintance with the educational sector and its organisations was eventually the deciding factor for the choice made for this first explorative study. It was decided to draw the sample of employees (n=9) from members of staff working in different large educational organisations, and to select them based on their reputation for being intrapreneurial in the daily work setting. It was not intended to sample a representative group of employees; selection was based on reputation and was decided upon by agreement among the researchers. The selection aimed at a distribution of respondents working in organisations at different educational levels. This resulted in a sample of respondents were working in secondary professional education (2 respondents), higher professional education (4 respondents) and universities (3 respondents). A brainstorm investigation provided a list of frequently mentioned names of people working in innovation projects. Of this list a selection was made taking care of a good distribution over the organisations and the availability of the respondents.

Employee participants received a copy of the interview questions in advance in order to allow some preparation. The main approach used in the employee interview was a critical incident method for the analysis of personal career development experiences to discover situations and settings that were, self-reportedly, most conducive for the development of intrapreneurial competence. In addition, employee participants were asked to reflect and comment on the competencies described in the model of Bagheri and Pihie in terms of their relevance for their personal development and functioning as intrapreneurs. Finally, they were asked whether there were any other competencies which they believed the current model overlooked.

Opmerking [a3]: It would be helpful to the reader provide a little more detail on the nature of these organisations are they universities and polytechniques?

Opmerking [a4]: While representativeness is not an issue. Some greater clarity on the process of identifying intrapreneurs would be helpful

Though the reflections of employees on the model are valuable, they represent only one angle of the research which inspired the original model. Following a research strategy of triangulation an additional perspective was included in our study, i.e. the perspective of managers in educational institutions with a responsibility for motivating and enhancing staff development. To this end additional interviews (n =3) were carried out with managers who were selected because of their involvement in innovations in their institution. Though the selected managers were working in the same large educational organisations, there was no direct working relation between managers and employees involved in our study. The managers were first provided with a short summary of the research and of the results from the interviews with employees. Next they were asked whether they recognised the results for their own department or organisation; whether they believed that intrapreneurship can be stimulated and trained; and if so, how?

Interviews lasted on average for 30 minutes in the case of managers and 70 minutes for employees and were conducted between March 2012 and September 2012. The difference in the duration of interviews between employees and managers was due to the fact that the employees were asked to reconstruct their career and reflect on intrapreneurship issues while the interviews with managers required them mainly to reflect on the summary of the research results.

The summarized interview transcripts were returned to interviewees for review, which occasionally resulted in minor adjustments or additions. The analysis was performed by all three researchers, using the methodology of Glaser and Strauss (1967). First transcripts were studied carefully, followed by division into fragments and coding of the fragments, with the use of the coding categories stemming from the theoretical model underlying this study. Fragments that could not be allocated to these pre-defined categories were inspected again, sometimes resulting in additional codes being generated. Each fragment was coded by one researcher and checked by a fellow researcher. Afterwards a summary of the findings was composed per code. All three researchers wrote summaries and checked each others' summaries to assure sufficient fit between the coded data and the summaries.

4. Results

This section presents the main findings of the interviews. First, the findings of the employee interviews are reported, followed by the results from the interviews with employers.

4.1 Employee perspective

The main problem addressed in the research is how to develop intrapreneurial competence of employees. To answer this question a 'useful' definition of intrapreneurship is needed. Therefore, interviewees were asked to give their own definition of intrapreneurship from their respective working context. Related to the question of definition is that of whether - and if so, how - intrapreneurship differs from the better known and longer used concept of entrepreneurship.

Asked for a definition of intrapreneurship, one participant said: "*Yesterday I came to the school, and by coincidence I saw an announcement about a presentation on learning analytics with mobile devices. My curiosity was immediately aroused and I asked the boy who was giving the presentation whether I could attend. During the presentation I saw many opportunities for this technology - including opportunities for improvement - and I made all kinds of combinations*". Another defined intrapreneurship as "*Bringing into the organisation new developments from outside; having the guts to take initiative to change matters in a totally new way. The change must be radical, otherwise it has nothing to do with intrapreneurship and will be embedded in the organisation*" or as: *"At the same time accepting the organisation as it is, yet not feeling too much stuck in it to realise your ambitions".*

The respondents in our sample were asked to reflect for their specific context on the relevance of the entrepreneurial competences described by Bagheri and Pihie, under the headings of scenario enactment (competencies needed to realise the vision of the future of one's enterprise) and cast enactment (competencies needed to influence cooperation).

4.1.1 Scenario enactment

Looking at the scenario enactment competencies, to be influential and to manipulate future possibilities entrepreneurs need to be *proactive, innovative* and *willing to take risks*.

Although some of the participants saw risk taking as inseparable from the concept of intrapreneurship, they were not unanimous on this issue. The kinds of risks that were put forward during the interviews were mainly financial or income risks, including the risks associated with starting an enterprise. Other risks mentioned were reputational risks such as daring to ask provocative or 'stupid' questions. Risk taking can be seen almost as a negative, but is defined more positively as 'I am not afraid to take responsibility, but I do not take real risks'. Risk taking is more linked to personal decisions taken in one's career than to the job accomplishment in an organisation; some people had taken risks at the beginning of their career that could have had financial consequences, such as a change of job or resigning to take up studying.

Participants were found to be explicitly risk averse regarding financial uncertainties. This could be the risk to lose one's job, or the risk of being financially responsible for others. During the interviews the question of whether they had considered starting a business of their own was regularly raised; most of the interviewees had considered doing so but no one actually had, out of risk aversion. The stress of being responsible for the income of other people (hired employees) was mentioned several times in this respect.

Reputational risks though, are more likely to be taken by intrapreneurs: they have no fear of voicing their opinions and ambitions. They dare to ask unconventional questions, and to discuss an assignment given by management, for example when they disagree about the goal of the assignment or the establishment of priorities. They are not afraid of the risks one has to take when starting a large project.

Being innovative and creative in the development of new ideas is seen by most of the interviewees as an important competence. It was described as "*Daring to break with traditions, doing things differently. Overcoming organisational inertia in order to enable new initiatives*". Or: "*Keeping the good things and looking for opportunities to make them better*". Sometimes innovation meant looking for new directions for the organisation, which in almost all the cases meant building (commercial) bridges between the organisation and the external environment, but also looking for change in the (limited) domain one is working in. Searching for ways to do things differently and looking for solutions, sometimes from an out-of-the-box perspective, were seen as innovative. One

Opmerking [I5]: Perhaps indicate the circumstances that prompts this response?

participant warned against too much innovation "*You don't always have to be innovative, not in every phase. Too much innovation can be counterproductive. Consolidation is also important.*"

The most unanimously recognised competence of the three scenario enactment competencies is proactiveness. It is clearly seen as an obvious competence, often related to learning and training decisions. *"I have learned new things during my whole career; I was always prepared for change"*. The proactive competence motivates employees to reflect on their learning needs and to engage in new learning. A parallel can be seen here with research results about entrepreneurs indicating that they engage in learning activities and training programs to cope with the crisis and challenges of their business management (Cope and Watts, 2000, Major et al., 2006, Young and Sexton, 2003)

In some cases reference was made to the context, meaning that one needs leeway to be proactive: "B*eing proactive sometimes requires the freedom to operate in a space of your own, like an enterprise within the organisation. It requires the freedom to function as a committed outsider"*.

4.1.2 Cast enactment

In describing their model, Bagheri and Pihie paid relatively little attention to the elaboration of cast enactment competences – *commitment building* and *specifying limitations* - presumably because they seem self-evident. Taking them on face value they almost appear to state the obvious: it goes without saying that in any change process building commitment and being aware of constraints are paramount. However, the results from our interviews with employees suggest that there is more to say, as well as to question, regarding these two competences.

Firstly, commitment building and specifying limitations are, at least to some extent, two sides of the same coin. This is perhaps best illustrated by the metaphor of a flock of sheep: in order to keep them going in the same direction the shepherd needs assistance of a dog which points out to them where they can and cannot go. Of course the metaphor is flawed as we can hardly speak of commitment in sheep (an issue we'll return to shortly), but the idea is that in order to build

commitment, i.e. win people over to work in a particular direction, it is necessary that people know which direction, but also to maintain an awareness of the limitations involved. One of the interviewees summarized this in a few sentences: *"You need to win people over. This is something you are constantly aware of. At times I want to stretch things further, but then I realize, it is not the right time yet."* This is confirmed by another interviewee saying that being able to correctly estimate limitations is very important and also the biggest problem: *"I often want more and at a faster pace. It is hard to adapt to the organization."*

This quote suggests that commitment building can be seen as a process that requires a careful balancing, of personal ambitions and the ambition levels of those whose cooperation and commitment is needed. Or, to use the terminology of optimal distinctiveness theory: between differentiation and assimilation (Brewer, 1991; Shelton & Peters, 2008). According to optimal distinctiveness theory individuals are in a constant process of negotiating the need to individuate the self from others and the need to integrate the self within relational and collective social groups.

Apparently, the balance can also tip in the other direction as was pointed out by one of the interviewees, whereby she initially felt she a lot of space to maneuver, constrictions increased as the sense of ownership / commitment of those involved increased. Several interviewees explicitly mention that the competence to build commitment requires empathy; the ability to see things from another persons perspective – what does this mean for him or her?

Secondly, in a number of the interviews the need for and/or source of commitment building were the subject of debate. One participant explained how she feels ambiguous about the need to build commitment, which she rephrases into what seems a principle of democratic decision making: *"Commitment is something I have mixed feelings towards. Here they believe everyone should have a say in everything. Personally I feel that educational organizations are better off with clear leadership and a clear structure."* Another interviewee, who addresses the source of commitment, distinguishes between power and authority to explain that there is a personal dimension to commitment. Trying to

Opmerking [a6]: Didn't find this point clear!

Not sure whether I have correctly interpretd this?

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make people do things by exerting power (cf. controlling a flock of sheep) will only result in a breakdown of competence, culture and ambition. She describes her own approach as one of shared leadership and horizontal control.

Thirdly, though all interviewees confirmed that specification of limitations is an important competence in relation to intrapreneurship, it should not be left unmentioned that a majority stressed the fact that they had been in a position to use and develop their intrapreneurial qualities because they were given the space to do so by their organization. It is worth noting that most of these intrapreneurs described this as 'being given' the space, with only one describing it as 'having created' the space, which would seem more in line with the idea of the proactive intrapreneur.

A fourth elaboration regarding *specification of limitations* involves the fact that various types of limitations may be implied. During the interviews a variety of limitations were mentioned which can be summarized as:

a. organizational (e.g. goals & mission, strategy, hierarchy, bureaucracy, procedures, financial, personnel)

b. social / interpersonal (e.g. lack of commitment)

c. personal (inability to convince, being too ambitious, lacking realism, lacking self-esteem)

In addition to the ability to estimate and specify limitations, one competence which is not explicitly mentioned in the model is perseverance: being able to cope with drawbacks and criticism. However, it was also interesting to note how at least two of the interviewees described awareness of limitations as beneficial rather than demanding perseverance. In relation to personal limitations, one interviewee said: "*As intrapreneurial professional you need to be well aware of your own shortcomings. Often people say what they can do, rather than what they cannot do; that is a difficult step and one that is often skipped. It is almost as if there is a taboo resting on this. A consequence of acknowledging your own shortcomings is that you can go and find ways to compensate for it.*" The other interviewee described how she sees building commitment as dealing with / taking away the

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worries of stakeholders in the process: people see all kinds of limitations and problems down the road.

Once again this underlines the link between commitment-building and specifying limitations.

However, she does not see this as problematic or negative, rather, she sees this as the way to make an

inventory of the constraints and constrictions an individual is working under. The trick is not to

become discouraged by it, but instead to start working realizing you cannot know everything

beforehand and harboring sufficient confidence that you will manage to solve things as you go along.

She stresses the importance of doing this in an open atmosphere, as commitment-building requires

trust. If people ask her things she does not have an answer to as yet, she openly says so: "*I don't know

yet, but I trust we will work something out once we have...*". Interestingly, this interviewee points out

how specifying and accepting limitations is also linked with daring to take risks: embarking on a

change process without being sure (having all the answers) beforehand. A similar link was also made

by another interviewee in relation to personal limitations, rather than social/interpersonal: when asked

to reflect on his risk-taking competence he said "*I ask myself: can I do this?*"

4.1.3 Other factors influencing intrapreneurship

The interviews also addressed the factors that are linked to intrapreneurship. The possibilities for

developing one's intrapreneurial competence depend to some extent on the opportunities embedded in

the work environment. Participants mentioned the importance of being aware of the possibilities for

becoming engaged in new endeavours, of receiving career and training opportunities, and working in

settings with colleagues who can serve as role models. It is not, however, sufficient just to be exposed

to opportunities as such, intelligent behaviour may be needed to ensure that the organizational support

and facilities are received to enable an individual to take up and work on that new opportunity.

Participants emphasised that their intrapreneurship is strongly linked to personal traits such as
curiosity, mental versatility, the inner need to continuously learn and develop oneself, and the need to
be in control of one's own activities rather than being strictly supervised. However, characteristics that
are more influenced - to some extent - by the social context were also reported, such as self-efficacy
and self-esteem. In addition, participants mentioned experience in general and in particular the
experiences gained during one's youth as important drivers for becoming intrapreneurial. One of the
participants mentioned that as a girl from a working class background, school and career had been
considered important for boys only, placing her in the role of outsider. However, as a consequence she

had learned to work very hard at school and in further education and not to give up easily. During her career this attitude worked as an advantage when facing new and complex problems.

4.2 Employer perspective

The two main topics of the interviews with managers concerned the competencies conducive for intrapreneurship and the role of organizations in encouraging intrapreneurial behaviour. The three participating managers emphasized the importance of the competencies that are included in Bagheri and Pihie's model and which were also subjects during the interviews with employees. One of the managers mentioned that perseverance was not really included in the set of competencies, and yet this in her view was of the utmost importance: *"All competencies you mentioned are important. What is lacking is the importance of being persistent. Going further on the road you have chosen. In education we do not do that so often."* Another manager reported the need for being tactful, since in education employees do not always understand or appreciate the intrapreneurial behaviour of their colleagues: "*They* (intrapreneurs) *need to develop some kind of monitor that allows them to be aware of the fact that they can easily be considered as annoying".*

All three managers recognized that intrapreneurial behaviour is to some extent dependent of the existence of encouraging organizational conditions. In their views the numbers of employees with potential intrapreneurial qualities in their own organizations is considerably higher than the numbers that actually demonstrate intrapreneurial behaviour: *"It is not merely related to the person. I've seen plenty of examples of people who became intrapreneurs in the later stages of their careers. But this will only happen when you offer them the opportunities to become intrapreneurial".*

With regard to the conditions that need to be fulfilled for encouraging intrapreneurial behaviour the managers pointed at several aspects of human resource policies. They suggested that recruitment policies should adopt intrapreneurial behaviour as a screening criterion; providing training to employees to help them set up and supervise projects is helpful, as is offering them jobs that consist

of a variety of tasks instead of teaching tasks only. They believed that the opportunity to become

engaged in research or innovative projects helps foster intrapreneurial behaviour.

However, the likelihood of that employees actually demonstrating intrapreneurial behaviour is very much determined by management: *"Developing intrapreneurial behaviour is closely linked to the way they are supervised. (..) Give them space; be clear in your feedback as a manager".* The three managers differed in their views regarding the opportunities their own organizations offered in this respect. Two of them sensed their organizations did offer opportunities and even actively encouraged employees in this respect. The third pointed at some obstacles for intrapreneurial behaviour, as education tends to rely strongly on routines which conflict strongly with intrapreneurial behaviour. Employees with intrapreneurial aspirations often do not receive much appreciation from their colleagues: : *"They are the heroes of your organization but in reality they are the ones that suffer most".* This manager continued by mentioning the level of intrapreneurship that education tolerates: *"You'd better not have too many extreme intrapreneurs in your department. And then I refer to people like Steve Jobs. You need them, but not as your own employees!"*

Opmerking [I8]: I am not really sure this comment illustrates the prior claim.

5. Conclusions and discussion

This study is a modest attempt to explore the applicability of the model proposed by Bagheri and Pihie

(2011), which distinguishes two key sets of competencies conducive for intrapreneurship. The first set

concerns scenario enactment competencies, i.e. the need to be proactive, innovative and willing to take

risks. Employees especially emphasized proactiveness as an essential characteristic of their attitude

and recognize it as a part of their behavior. Proactiveness is often related to learning and training

decisions but is also linked to innovation. Being innovative and creative is the second competence

which employees virtually unanimously identify as an important aspect of intrapreneurship. Their

responses reveal a range of scope for exhibiting these traits, from overcoming organizational inertia to

looking for change in the specific domain one is working in.

Where the results diverge most significantly from the model is where it comes to the issue of risk

taking. Although reputational risks are likely to be taken by intrapreneurs – they are not afraid to voice

their opinions - they often associate risk taking with financial risk taking. Regarding financial risks

several respondents especially underlined their reluctance and sometimes fear of feeling responsible

for the income of other people.

The second set of competences concerns cast enactment, i.e. commitment building and specification of limitations, which the interview findings show to be interwoven. Commitment building is seen as a competence that requires empathy and the ability to convince others to go along with a plan. It is crucial but it requires a careful balancing of the ambitions of all stakeholders. Stakeholders are the intrapreneur, the employees whose cooperation is needed and last but not least the management of the organization. Limitations mentioned by respondents relate to organizational, social or interpersonal, and personal constraints.

Several respondents mention commitment of their management as indispensable for their functioning. This commitment is a *conditio sine qua non* and was almost always seen as more important than the commitment of other employees – sometimes resulting in frictions with other employees due to this prioritisation. Interviewees regularly stressed the fact that they 'were given' the space to develop their intrapreneurial qualities. Here, the interviews with employees concur with the interviews with employers, as creating room for intrapreneurship was the most important issue mentioned by the managers taking part in this study. They defined their role in their organisations as creating space and inciting employees to be proactive.

Altogether the interviews with employees and managers confirm to a large extent the relevance of the model proposed by Bagheri and Pihie (2011) used as the basis for specifying intrapreneurial competencies. It is, however, noteworthy to mention that our study is only a first attempt to explore the accuracy of the model by conducting a limited number of interviews within one sector, namely vocational and professional education. A useful next step could be to shift the focus from education to another area in which work is strongly subjected to a hierarchy and rules of protocol: nursing, for example. Another track for further analysis could be the further investigation within one sector, for example the comparison of different divisions and their different management approaches to further explore the impact of organisational factors on the presence and further development of intrapreneurs. This recommendation for future research stems from our findings regarding the different factors reported by employees and employers respectively.

Next to recommendations for future research focusing on the organisational factors we would like to stress the need to further examine individual factors. The employees interviewed in our study experience intrapreneurship as a personal quality or competence while employers stress the importance of the organisation and the fact that the space for developing and demonstrating intrapreneurship may be defined by managerial attitude. So far, the limited empirical research on intrapreneurship has mainly focused on the organisational level (Antoncic, 2003); our study underscores the need to further examine the individual factors that contribute to intrapreneurship and to examine the interrelatedness of both organisational and individual factors.

The importance of organisational factors is not reflected in the definition of entrepreneurship applied by the European Communities (2007) in which the focus lies fairly exclusively on the attitudes of individuals, ignoring the organisational context and its impact on the opportunity to demonstrate and further develop one's intrapreneurship. Such a restricted definition holds the danger that the responsibility for developing intrapreneurship is predominantly taken to be an individual responsibility, ignoring the role that other parties need to fulfil in this respect.

What can organisations do to foster their employees' intrapreneurship? Our recommendation is best reflected in an African phrase saying: grass does not grow faster by pulling its stalks! Our findings indicate that intrapreneurship cannot be directly influenced, but it is worthwhile to create an environment that enables employees to demonstrate and further develop their intrapreneurial potentials. Fostering intrapreneurship requires organisational measures and managerial behaviour, or, as Eesley and Longenecker (2006, p. 23) advocated: The gateway to intrapreneurship is the creation of an organizational culture that encourages and supports it. An organizational culture of intrapreneurship creates a stable context in which employees can develop reliable expectations that innovative and risk-taking initiatives are appreciated and contribute to one's job security and employability in the long run.

Opmerking [a9]: Is this a direct quote?, If yes, quotation marks required

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