




SOCIAL REPRESENTATION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG PORTUGUESE HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS


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ABSTRACT

This study aims to know the Social Representation of Entrepreneurship among Portuguese higher education students. 966 students answered through a free word evocation technique based on the term entrepreneurship. 4,726 terms were identified in a total of 339 different words. The results show a central core organized around the core concepts of Creativity, Company, Initiative, Innovation, Business, and Work. A first periphery was identified with terms such as Support, Autonomy, Development, Money, and Commitment. A second periphery contains aspects such as Determination, Leadership, and Realization. A contrasting core, referred to by a minority group, is composed of elements such as Power, Boldness, and Aspiration. The results suggest that the core definition of entrepreneurship has attained the status of social representation among Portuguese higher education students.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurship; Higher Education Students; Social Representations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship can be seen as the trend of the century, being a subject of incessant study during the last decades in many social-scientific disciplines. It is related to many representative aspects of human behavior and personality (Alferaih, 2017; Brandstätter, 2010). This concept is known as an accelerator in society's economic development, being a core value for economic prosperity in the modern society (Brandstätter, 2010). The entrepreneur innovates, creates new ideas, and transforms them into profit and success (Turker & Selcuk, 2009). This concept is dynamic (Blackburn, 2011) and it is increasingly associated with organizational success, representing new strategies, innovation and good capital investment which positively impacts in organizational performance (Bierwerth et al., 2015).

Humanity is what gives society shape and progress, and people spend their days working, facing a high number of social and affective experiences which influence their behavior (Fodor & Pintea, 2017). Entrepreneurship promotion results from the constant demands of modern society, being through entrepreneurship education that students integrate themselves into the market and can be effective in interacting with the surrounding context.

Evidence suggests that Cantillon and Say may have been the first authors to see entrepreneurship in a more structured theoretical conceptualization (Vale, 2014). Indeed, any individual can be an entrepreneur, through a favorable context for creating and stimulating a functional entrepreneurial attitude (Mónico et al., 2021). Human skills can be expanded through entrepreneurship, both as a resource and a process, and matters in human development (Gries & Naudé, 2010). Economists tend to ignore the entrepreneur's role in this phenomenon and



focus more on their impact in economy, disregarding human development (Naudé, 2010, 2011), seeing the entrepreneurs as innovative individuals, who take risks to contribute to economic growth by introducing new technologies, competition and markets. But the entrepreneur is much more than that. Many studies identify traits such as high objective or self-realization motivation, boldness, high self-awareness, market awareness, employment awareness, creativity, innovation, openness to new experiences and transformational leadership as core aspects of a successful entrepreneur. Statistically, these tend to be individuals with high education and financial resources (Borcos & Bara, 2013; Rocha & Freitas, 2014; Timmermans, Heiden, & Born, 2014).

This study analyzes the social representation of entrepreneurship formed by Portuguese higher education students. Knowing their social representations may allow us to understand higher education students' mindsets regarding entrepreneurship, giving us clues to structure entrepreneurship training in higher education institutions.

2. EDUCATION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The first entrepreneurial course was implemented at Harvard Business School, in 1947, boosting this concept's rapid propagation in higher education at a global level. This course was created with the intention of teaching students the art of entrepreneurship, what is needed, and what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur (Kuratko, 2005). Entrepreneurship is a discipline, which can be learned as any other. This is the core idea behind this concept. Kuratko (2005) understands that entrepreneurship education should include subjects such as distinguishing what is managing and what is entrepreneurship, financial techniques, risks and disadvantages of an entrepreneurial career, and many other subjects that further conceptualize entrepreneurship and can educate the potential entrepreneur.

Today, entrepreneurship education is globally known and applied, whose objective is to differentiate itself from the typical business and management courses, since creating a business is different than managing it, and takes different factors into account, including entrepreneurship in different contexts in cultural and creative industries (Porfírio et al., 2016). It must include courses and workshops which can further develop negotiation skills, leadership, new product development, creative thought and exposition to innovative technologies (Parreira, Alves, et al., 2018). This pedagogy changes depending on the market's interest in entrepreneurship education, having adapted itself to the students who are not associated with business, including artists, engineers and science students, now being part of the common higher education (Solomon et al., 2002).

Effects caused in students through entrepreneurship education are diverse. In their meta-analysis, Martin et al. (2013) identified a few studies pointing to this evidence. Many of them showed that pre-graduated students in entrepreneurship courses have higher intentions of creating a business, and students with proper entrepreneurial education and training are more likely to found a business (Galloway & Brown, 2002). Several authors defend entrepreneurship education as an important factor to make entrepreneurship intentions emerge (Mónico et al., 2018, 2021; Parreira, et al., 2015; Parreira, Alves, et al., 2018; Parreira, Mónico, et al., 2018). Students' entrepreneurial characteristics were analyzed before and after attending an entrepreneurial course, being more defined after graduation (Parreira et al., 2015, 2018; Rocha & Freitas, 2014). Individuals with an entrepreneurship course are also better at identifying opportunities than others without any kind of entrepreneurship education (DeTienne & Chandler, 2004; Mónico et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, there are studies that have found different results. For instance, Oosterbeek et al. (2009) reported lower intentions in creating a business in graduated students from entrepreneurship courses, with less motivation to do so. Similarly, Mentoor and Friedrich (2007) identified a negative correlation between the practices in a typical entrepreneurial course and a high number of human and personality characteristics related to entrepreneurship in students frequenting entrepreneurship courses. Also, there is a negative effect on entrepreneurial performance caused by entrepreneurship workshops on people who are still planning their businesses (Honig & Samulsson, 2012). These results are difficult to incorporate in a narrative review, and future research may help to clarify this controversy.



3. KNOWING SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Social representations correspond to a modality of knowledge that is developed through social interaction, being composed of beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and information regarding one certain social object (Camargo, Justo, & Jodelet, 2010). They are sustained both by culture and society, guiding behavior and intervening in the individual and social identity. Social representations are considered multifaceted, diffuse and constantly changing, manifesting in social practices and individual thoughts. We could then define them as “constructions made by people to improve their understanding of the world, which allows them to better communicate and act upon it” (Francis et al., 2018, p. 89).

Social representations constitute forms of practical knowledge related to communication and understanding of conceptions, while emerging as constructions of social subjects derived from socially valued objects (Mónico et al., 2018; Parreira et al., 2015, 2018).

Representations are social because they emerge from social context, which is composed of ideologies, values and shared systems of social categorization, while simultaneously producing and translating social relations. In 1981, Moscovici proposes that they are equivalent to myths and systems of beliefs of traditional societies, which can be seen as what we today call common sense (Vala & Monteiro, 2013).

Our study follows Abric’s Central Nucleus Theory (1994, 2001), regarding the articulation between structuring and dynamism in social representations: “social representations are at the same time stable and mobile, rigid and flexible. (...) they are consensual but also marked by strong inter-individual differences” (Abric, 1994, pp. 77–78). Abric supports the hypothesis that all social representations are organized around a central core and a peripheral system. The Central Core represents the social representation’s global meaning, based on the major issues of society. While the Central Core components are stable, consensual and mostly rigid, the peripheral ones (1st and 2nd Peripheries) are flexible, individualized and more prone to change. These components provide for the maintenance of the interface with the situations and practices of a specific group regarding a given object of social representation, regulating and adapting the central system to the concrete situation the group is facing and protecting the central system. At last, the contrasting core is composed of terms with low frequency and low evocation order. According to the Central Nucleus Theory, it is possible to highlight and compare representations’ transformation, which is very important considering entrepreneurship, since these different changes in the central core and peripheral system are the results of different interventions undergone by specific groups (Parreira et al., 2015, 2018), namely higher education students. Knowing the social representations of entrepreneurship among Portuguese higher-education students will allow to identify clues to improve entrepreneurship education in the higher education system.

4. METHOD

Sample: The sample is composed by 966 higher education students (72.6% female), aged between 18 and 63, who are currently undergoing a higher education course in Portugal (see table 1).

TABLE 1: Sample Characterization.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Age	23.82	6.73		
<i>Gender</i>				
Male			265	27.4
Female			701	72.6
<i>Civil State</i>				
Single/Divorced			877	90.8
Married/Cohabiting			85	8.8



<i>Nationality:</i>		
European	888	91.9
African	17	1.8
South American	59	6.1
Asian	2	.2
<i>Institution</i>		
University	918	95
Polytechnic	45	4.7
Others	3	.3
<i>Course</i>		
Degree	294	30.4
Int. Master	515	53.3
Master's degree	95	9.8
Doctorate	57	5.9
Post-Graduation	5	.5
<i>Year of study</i>		
1 st	112	11.6
2 nd	210	21.7
3 rd	309	32
4 th	149	15.4
5 th	186	19.3
<i>Professional Condition</i>		
Student	746	77.2
Working student	220	22.8

SOURCE: Developed by the authors.

Free Word Evocation: The free evocation technique was applied to the term “entrepreneurship”, through the following instruction: “Write down the first 5 words or brief expressions that come to your mind when you read the term Entrepreneurship.”

Procedures and data analysis: All legal and ethical issues in research involving human subjects were followed. The words obtained with the free evocations based on the term “Entrepreneurship” were analyzed with the software EVOC (Ensemble de Programmes Permettant L'Analyse des Evocations; Vèrges, 2002), after carrying out a lexicographical standardization. The order of evocation and word frequency were crossed, generating a four-quadrant matrix discriminated by the mean order of evocation and evocation frequency. This procedure allows to obtain the central and peripheral elements of the social representation (Abric, 1994, 2001).

5. RESULTS

Starting with the inductive word Entrepreneurship, 4,726 terms were identified in the totality of our sample, for a total of 339 different words, respecting the order in which they were evoked by the students. The most evoked term was Innovation (f = 633), representing 13.39% of the total corpus, followed by “Creativity” (f = 259, 5.48%), “Business” (f = 180, 3.81%), “Work” (f = 170, 3.6%), “Company” (f = 162, 3.43%), “Money” (f = 133, 2.81%), Risk (f = 130, 2.75%), “Commitment” (f = 124, 2.62%), “Motivation” (f = 122, 2.58%), and “Initiative” (f = 120, 2.54%).

Table 2 shows the Four Quadrant matrix of evoked terms, according to the Mean Evocation Order (M.E.O.) and Frequency (f). The Central Core contains six terms, whose frequencies range between 120 and 633: “Creativity, Company, Innovation, Business, and Work”. The Contrasting Core is composed of words that present lower mean



evocation order and lower frequency, such as “Power, Dynamism, and Boldness”. In the First Periphery, evoked terms have higher mean order evocation and higher frequency (evoked in third place or beyond, M.E.O > 2.7); the most evoked terms in this periphery were “Money, Commitment, Risk and Motivation”. The Second Periphery features words with higher mean order evocation and lower frequency and is the least representative of the term “entrepreneurship”. The most evoked terms were “Leadership, Willpower, Determination, and Realization”.

TABLE 2: Social representation of Entrepreneurship: Evoked terms in the Four Quadrant Table according to Mean evocation order (M.E.O) and intermediate frequency [N = 966 subjects; 339 different words evoked].

M.E.O.	<2.70		>2.70			
INTER. FREQ.	EVOKED TERMS	F	M.E.O.	EVOKED TERMS	F	M.E.O.
	CENTRAL CORE			1ST PERIPHERY		
	Initiative	120	2.12	Job	70	2.71
	Innovation	633	2.45	Investment	93	2.89
	Work	170	2.46	Motivation	122	2.92
	Business	180	2.53	Autonomy	79	3.15
	Company	162	2.54	Risk	130	3.15
≥ 55	Creativity	259	2.68	Commitment	124	3.19
				Development	62	3.24
				Change	56	3.25
				Money	133	3.31
				Support	93	3.38
				Opportunity	73	3.58
	CONTRASTING CORE			2ND PERIPHERY		
	Aspiration	16	2.16	Willpower	46	2.89
	Confidence	16	2.31	Ambition	37	2.95
	Dynamism	54	2.32	Courage	39	2.97
	Activity	17	2.35	Success	43	3.16
	Capacity	25	2.4	Leadership	54	3.17
< 55	Boldness	22	2.5	Vision	41	3.2
	Objective	17	2.64	Future	34	3.21
	Originality	25	2.68	Realization	54	3.22
	Power	50	2.7	Profit	35	3.4
	Marketing	10	2.7	Resources	44	3.43
				Determination	52	3.46
				Difference	36	3.5
				Knowledge	40	3.73

SOURCE: Developed by the authors.

6. DISCUSSION

Entrepreneurship is increasingly associated with organizational success, representing new strategies, innovation and good capital investment, which positively impacts in organizational performance (Bierwerth et al., 2015). Attending to our results, the central core obtained (Creativity, Company, Innovation, Business, and Work) matches the one obtained in the study conducted in Portugal with higher education students (Parreira et al., 2015), especially considering the words Innovation, Creativity, and Business. While there are some differences, noted by the fact not all people think the same way nor live the same experiences, the central core has shown itself as stable, since Innovation is considered the main definition of entrepreneurship (Bierwerth et al., 2015; Ramalho et al., 2022; Vale,



2014). This suggests that the core definition of entrepreneurship has attained the status of social representation of entrepreneurship among Portuguese higher education students.

Humanity is what gives society shape and progress, and people spend their days working, facing a high number of social and affective experiences which influence their behavior (Fodor & Pinteá, 2017). Before entrepreneurs begin their businesses, they are young students, yet to initiate their professional lives, and they go through a lot of pressure in order to become successful innovators. Entrepreneurship education majorly targets these young students, who are the future of society. However, there is no evidence that these practices actually create new and better entrepreneurs by themselves, and sometimes even show controversial effects (Martin, McNally, & Kay, 2013; Oosterbeek, Praag, & Ijsselstein, 2009). This suggests the existence of other predominant factors in students' entrepreneurial skills, such as how they perceive themselves and how they perceive entrepreneurship as a social concept (Oosterbeek et al., 2009). In the case of our students, their social representation involves the terms indicated in the literature as identifying entrepreneurship but also highlights the importance they attribute to support, autonomy, motivation and commitment, elements of the first periphery in our study.

Entrepreneurship can be seen as the trend of the century, being related to many representative aspects of human behaviour and personality (Alferaih, 2017; Parreira et al., 2018). This concept is known as a core value for economic prosperity in modern society, and relates positively with organizations' success (Bierwerth, Schwens, Isidor, & Kabst, 2015). Our results provide useful information about the social representations of entrepreneurship in Portuguese higher education students and, according to their representation, entrepreneurship education can be adjusted for a more successful intervention.

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