



## Unraveling the “passion orchestra” in academia



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### ABSTRACT

This paper disentangles how organization members' “passion orchestra” is related to their entrepreneurial intentions in the particularly relevant context of academia. Drawing on passion literature and identity theory, we propose and test a model linking two central parts of researchers' “passion orchestra”, namely entrepreneurial and obsessive scientific passion, directly and indirectly, to spin-off and start-up intentions. While spin-off intentions refer to intentions to found a firm based upon research results, start-up intentions denote intentions to start any type of company. Using a sample of 2308 researchers from 24 European universities, our findings reveal that higher levels of entrepreneurial passion are associated with both stronger spin-off and start-up intentions. Further, obsessive scientific passion is positively associated with researchers' intentions to create a spin-off, and negatively with their propensity to establish a start-up. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy and affective organizational commitment mediate these effects. Finally, the two types of passion show characteristic interactions. Obsessive scientific passion moderates the entrepreneurial passion–intentions relationship such that it strengthens spin-off intentions. Our results highlight that recasting the individual driven by a singular passion to one with a “passion orchestra” provides a more holistic understanding of the new venture creation process. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

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### 1. Executive summary

A growing volume of research indicates that entrepreneurial passion – which involves intense positive emotions and a meaningful identity connection – is central to the entrepreneurial experience and venture-related outcomes. Previous studies, however, have ignored that non-entrepreneurial passions may also shape the new venture creation process. Consequently, it is pertinent to uncover the consequences of multiple passions coming together in a person. Drawing on passion literature (Cardon et al., 2009; Vallerand et al., 2003) and identity theory (Stets and Burke, 2000; Stryker and Burke, 2000), we introduce the concept of a “passion orchestra”, i.e. the intraindividual coexistence and interplay of entrepreneurial passion and passions for non-entrepreneurial roles. In this paper, we specifically focus on the nascent stages of the entrepreneurial process and investigate the role of organization members' “passion orchestra” in the development of different types of entrepreneurial intentions in a particularly relevant context, namely academia.

We test our conceptual model using survey data from 2308 (post-)doctoral researchers across 24 universities in five European countries. Our empirical analyses reveal that entrepreneurial passion is positively related to spin-off and start-up intentions,

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both directly and indirectly through entrepreneurial self-efficacy. We further theorize and find that researchers with high levels of obsessive scientific passion develop greater intentions to engage in spin-off creation, and lower start-up intentions. This relationship is mediated by individuals' affective organizational commitment. Finally, central to our exploration of the “passion orchestra”, our results confirm the interplay between the two passion types. Specifically, we demonstrate that the link between entrepreneurial passion and spin-off intentions is stronger if researchers have an obsessive passion for their scientific role.

This article primarily contributes to the burgeoning literature on passion and entrepreneurship, which we advance in several ways. First, our work challenges extant research that largely assumes that entrepreneurs are motivated by a singular entrepreneurial passion. Instead, we argue that individuals are likely to hold multiple congruent or competing passions, connected to actual and/or possible role identities, which simultaneously affect the new venture creation process. Our conceptual development of the “passion orchestra” lays the ground for future research to unravel the notion in other (organizational) contexts characterized by a multiplicity of identities, and to scrutinize its impact on diverse aspects and throughout different stages of the entrepreneurial process. Moreover, we extend passion research by proposing and testing the mechanisms through which an organization member's “passion orchestra” operates. Finally, by studying the “passion orchestra” underlying the formation of entrepreneurial intentions, we offer better insights into the microfoundations of entrepreneurial transitions (i.e. leaving one organization to found another). Implications for practitioners consist of being aware that individuals' obsessive passions for non-entrepreneurial roles can positively affect the new venture creation process.

## 2. Introduction

An emergent body of entrepreneurship literature indicates that passion plays a critical role in new venture creation processes and outcomes (Cardon et al., 2005; Smilor, 1997). It is the “fire of desire” that fuels entrepreneurs' daily efforts and creativity (Baum et al., 2001; Cardon et al., 2009), and urges them to persist even in the face of challenge and adversity (Cardon et al., 2005; Cardon and Kirk, 2015; Chandler and Jansen, 1992). Further, entrepreneurial passion is instrumental in the entrepreneurial process as it exerts a positive influence on important resource providers, such as investors and employees (Breugst et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2009; Mitteness et al., 2012; Sudek, 2006). Prior research emphasizes that role identity is a vital component of and the central force behind entrepreneurs' passion, driving entrepreneurial actions (Chen et al., 2015). In particular, Cardon et al. (2009, 2013) explicitly incorporate identities in their proposed definition of entrepreneurial passion, thereby distinguishing between the roles of inventor, founder and developer, along with the passion associated with each of these role identities. Murnieks et al. (2014) subsequently demonstrate a strong positive link between the centrality of an entrepreneurial identity and entrepreneurial passion.

Despite significant progress made toward understanding the nature and impact of entrepreneurial passion, current theoretical and empirical work assumes that individuals experience a singular entrepreneurial passion that motivates them to think and act like an entrepreneur. Yet, a parallel emerging research stream on identity in entrepreneurship indicates that, alongside the entrepreneurial identity, meaningful non-entrepreneurial identities are likely to affect individuals' entrepreneurial endeavors and venture decisions (e.g., Jain et al., 2009; Powell and Baker, 2014; Shepherd and Haynie, 2009b; Wry and York, 2015). The ferment generated by such work suggests that (potential) entrepreneurs often simultaneously experience a passion for non-entrepreneurial roles. However, to date, the growing literature on passion in entrepreneurship has ignored that non-entrepreneurial passions may also affect the entrepreneurial process. Consequently, one of the critical questions left unanswered is how entrepreneurial passion shapes new venture creation processes when no longer studied in isolation but in chorus with other relevant types of passion (Cardon et al., 2013).

Our study seeks to fill this gap in the literature and suggests that the impact of entrepreneurial passion may be more complex than previously conceived. Specifically, building upon the tenets of identity theory (Stets and Burke, 2000; Stryker and Burke, 2000), we introduce the concept of a “passion orchestra”, i.e. the intraindividual coexistence and interplay of entrepreneurial passion and passions for other non-entrepreneurial roles. In scrutinizing the influence of the “passion orchestra”, we focus on the nascent stages of the entrepreneurial process. In particular, we study organization members' entrepreneurial intentions, as they form the first in a series of actions to organizational founding (Bird, 1988). Given the strong connection between entrepreneurial intentions and behavior (e.g., Lee et al., 2011; Obschonka et al., 2010), intentions have become a vibrant field in entrepreneurship research (Fayolle and Liñán, 2014). To date, however, no scholarly attention has been given to the role of passion(s) in shaping individuals' intentions to engage in entrepreneurial activities whilst being part of an established organization. This is surprising since, in the vast majority of cases, the intent to found a new venture originates while a person is employed by an existing organization (Sørensen and Fassiotto, 2011). Moreover, the multiplicity of role identities is undeniably applicable in work organizations (Ashforth, 2000; Dobrev and Barnett, 2005), and the transition to entrepreneurship requires individuals to shift to a new role and to ultimately abandon their current work role (Carroll and Mosakowski, 1987; Hoang and Gimeno, 2010). Hence, it is likely for passion related to one's (possible) entrepreneurial role identity and passion related to one's (actual) work role identity to come together and interact. Accordingly, our paper disentangles how organization members' “passion orchestra” is related to the formation of entrepreneurial intentions. Furthermore, since little is known about the mechanisms through which passion operates (Cardon et al., 2013; Murnieks et al., 2014), we identify and investigate the impact of two mediating mechanisms, namely a person's entrepreneurial self-efficacy beliefs and affective commitment toward his or her current work organization.

In this paper we embed our theorizing in the context of academia, as entrepreneurship out of universities is increasingly important (Ambos et al., 2008; Etzkowitz, 2003; Jain et al., 2009). Specifically, we unravel how researchers' passion related to

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