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Imagining future success: Imaginative capacity on the perceived performance of potential agrisocio entrepreneurs



Chaoyun Liang^{a,*}, Chi-Cheng Chang^b, Chao-Tung Liang^c, Yu-Cheng Liu^d

^a Department of Bio-Industry Communication and Development, National Taiwan University, No. 1, Sec. 4, Roosevelt Road, Taipei, 10617 Taiwan

^b Department of Technology Application and Human Resource Development, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan

^c Department of Cultural Creativity and Digital Media Design, Lughwa University of Science and Technology, Taoyuan, Taiwan

^d Department of Bio-Industry Communication and Development, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Although social entrepreneurship has been the subject of considerable research and practitioner attention, detailed studies of the potential entrants, their perception of business performance, and the factors influencing this perception are rare. This study reviewed empirical data to determine how the imaginative capacities of potential entrepreneurs affect their perceived success in operating agrisocio enterprises. The reliability and validity, and the direct and interactive effects among different imaginative capacities were analysed. The study indicated that although conceiving and transforming imagination were positively related to all the dimensions of perceived performance, initiating imagination was negatively related to the dimensions of business operations and service programmes. Some interactions among the three types of imagination were also found. This study contributes to the social entrepreneurship literature by theorising and testing how imaginative capacities can be beneficial to potential entrants for perceiving business success.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, global warming has changed the physical and biological systems of human society. Numerous scholars have suggested that human society must consider the ecological, ethical, and social dimensions of future agricultural practices and uses of rural landscapes (Wilson & Morren, 1990). Agricultural social entrepreneurship is one of the most crucial topics being discussed (Ellis, Ratanawaraha, Diskul, & Chandrachai, 2012). However, few studies have focused on social entrepreneurship in agrirural and related sectors, which helps farmers adapt to climate change (Fuller-Love, Midmore, Thomas, & Henley, 2006), and numerous open questions on this topic require clarification, particularly regarding the contribution of agrisocio entrepreneurship to rural economic development.

Until recently, few agrisocio enterprises had been established in Taiwan, but numerous agrirural service organisations have demonstrated their intentions and potential for transforming to agrisocio enterprises. Although the related concepts of social entrepreneurship have been subject to considerable research and practitioner attention, detailed empirical studies of potential entrants, their perception of business performance and the factors influencing this perception are rare. Inquiring

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: iccylian@saturn.yzu.edu.tw, cliang@ntu.edu.tw (C. Liang), samchang@ntnu.edu.tw (C.-C. Chang), liangdondon@gmail.com (C.-T. Liang), brad.ycliu@gmail.com (Y.-C. Liu).

how these potential entrants perceive organisational transformation and possible success is essential. Studies have indicated that human imagination can influence perception (Berger & Ehrsson, 2013; Bergland, 2013), and human perception may result in corresponding behaviour (Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001; Chartrand, Maddux, & Lakin, 2005). Therefore, the present study explored how the imaginative capacities of potential agrisocio entrepreneurs influence their perceived success in managing agrisocio enterprises in Taiwan.

The research team of this study first confirmed the factor structures of both imaginative capacity and social enterprise performance scales. The team then examined the interactive effects of imaginative capacities on the perceived performance of potential agrisocio entrepreneurs. In this study, imaginative capacity refers to an entrepreneur's capacity of initiating, conceiving, and transforming the mental representations of things that are not present to the senses. Social enterprise performance refers to the performance of a social enterprise in terms of its personal characteristics, social impacts, business operations, and service programmes.

2. Research context

Taiwan has a firmly established infrastructure in agriculture, strong research and development capability, and agricultural extension services provided by the public sector (Huang & Lin, 2006). Because of rapid economic development in previous decades, the gross domestic product of Taiwan has increased substantially, whereas the agricultural contribution has declined. From 1992–2012, the agricultural population declined from one million to 540,000 (Agricultural Statistics Yearbook, 2012). In 2013, the average age of farmers was 63.5 years. The main sales channels for farmers are wholesalers, distributors, and end consumers. Many farmers are currently deprived of economic opportunities, fair employment, and access to essential services. Simultaneously, Taiwan is facing an imminent food crisis because the food self-sufficiency ratio is only 32% (Chen & Chang, 2013).

Recent development trends in rural villages, such as the establishment of farmers markets and the promotion of agricultural tourism and entrepreneurial ventures, have revitalised rural culture in small towns in Taiwan. Under Council of Agriculture (COA) programmes, younger generations are playing a larger role in the national agricultural sector, indicating the beginning of an era in which farming is a lifestyle (Council of Agriculture, 2015a). The agricultural environment and conditions in Taiwan are unlike those in countries with large agricultural sectors operating on a vast economic scale. The agricultural management system in Taiwan is primarily that of small-scale farms; thus, accumulating capital, increasing investment, and expanding the scale of operations is challenging. Moreover, introducing mechanised cultivation methods for increasing production is challenging, and consequently, farmers lack bargaining power for their product prices (Council of Agriculture, 2015b).

Taiwan has numerous flexible modes of operation for resolving this limitation. At a national level, the government is eager to facilitate farmer cooperation as an economic scale for competing with international agricultural products in the world market. At a local level, attention towards the development of agrisocio enterprises is increasing. Although social enterprises are common in Europe and the United States, they are new in Asia. Before 2007, most people in Taiwan perceived a social contribution as a traditional public service, such as fundraising for philanthropic organisations, assisting with natural disaster relief, or teaching children in remote areas (Lin, 2009). Building agrisocio enterprises is currently perceived as a beneficial approach for assisting rural communities in developing a sustainable region.

Lin (2009) showed that minimal support from academia has hampered the progress of social enterprise development. Without systematically analysing the functioning of social enterprises, potential supporters should not invest in social entrepreneurship because they would lack knowledge regarding the start-up and sustainable operation of social enterprises. Entrepreneurial success is intrinsically lopsided (Isenberg, 2014). The present study serves as a basis for understanding how the intrinsic power (i.e., imaginative capacity) of potential entrants (i.e., agrirural service organisations) would influence their perceived success in managing agrisocio enterprises.

3. Literature review

3.1. Social entrepreneurship

Social enterprises are hybrid organisational forms that combine the characteristics of for-profit businesses and community sector organisations (Eversole, Barraket, & Luke, 2013). Tracey and Phillips (2007) defined social enterprises as organisations meant to resolve social problems through entrepreneurial action. These organisations are innovative agents that engage the market and harness its wealth-generating power for serving disadvantaged social groups and achieving social transformation (Pelchat, 2005). In addition, such organisations use business methods for spreading their social, environmental, and human-justice agendas (Vitiello & Wolf-Powers, 2014). They create nonprofit sector jobs, foster workforce development, and assist people in generating supplementary income, often by strengthening ties between entrepreneurs and the formal economy and building social capital (Liang, Peng, Yao, & Liang, 2015).

Social enterprises have been modelled on the tenets of nonprofit charitable organisations that have community-oriented motives. Eversole et al. (2013) demonstrated that agrisocio enterprises, as deeply contextualised development actors, are firmly established in their local communities. Furthermore, agrisocio enterprises use community-spirited motives for attracting human and social capital and engendering survival strategies premised on grant dependency. For example, agrisocio

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