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Personality and entrepreneurial, professional and leadership motivations [☆]



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ABSTRACT

Using a new framework that includes entrepreneurship, professionalism and professionalism as different dimensions of subjective career space, we investigated whether different kinds of people are motivated towards entrepreneurial as compared to organizational leadership or specialized professional work-roles. Correlations from two samples of 396 and 272 undergraduates indicate personality traits have more similar relationships with both entrepreneurial and leadership than with professional work-role motivations. Specifically, while the Big Five personality traits, low risk aversion and proactive personality correlate with entrepreneurial and leadership motivations, high risk aversion correlate with the motivation for more vocationally-based, professional work. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses indicate that whether proactive personality and risk aversion add to the prediction of entrepreneurial, professional and leadership motivations beyond the Big Five depends on the Big Five measure used and sampling differences. Overall, this study fills a gap in the comparative appreciation of the role of traits in leadership and entrepreneurial emergence, which has resulted from the historic separation of both research fields, and has implications for the entrepreneurial and/or leadership development of professionals in organizations.

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Research on the trait-motivational basis for various work-roles (e.g., McClelland, 1961; Miner, 1976) has advanced with new constructs and measures like Chan and Drasgow's (2001) "motivation to lead" and more recently, Chan et al.'s (2012) Entrepreneurial, Professional and Leadership (EPL) career framework. Using these new operationalizations, we examine whether different kinds of people have a higher proclivity towards entrepreneurial as compared to organizational leadership or specialized professional work-roles. Although meta-analytic studies have shown correlations between the Big Five and leadership (e.g., Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002) and between the Big Five and entrepreneurship (e.g., Brandstätter, 2011; Zhao & Seibert, 2006), the historic separation of entrepreneurship and leadership research fields (cf. Coglisier & Brigham, 2004; Vecchio, 2003) in terms of samples, measures, and methods of data collection has made the integration of research findings difficult if not impossible. The study of professionals and professionalism has remained as a topic of sociological

study (e.g., Hall, 1968) with some organizational extensions (e.g., Kerr, Von Glinow, & Schriesheim, 1977), so hardly any studies have attempted to establish any trait or personality linkages as a possible basis for understanding the motivational antecedents for highly-specialized, professional work. Although Brandstätter claimed that the "influence of personality traits may be stronger with entrepreneurs than with most other professions" (p. 229; Brandstätter, 2011; italics added), no actual data had been presented to support this proposition.

It therefore remains unclear whether entrepreneurially and leadership-motivated individuals are more similar in their personality than they are different, and, what crucial personality difference lies between them and those motivated to pursue more vocationally-specialized, professional work. So long as trait research is conducted separately within respective fields, we will lack an appreciation of the relative extent and nature of trait influence on each of them. Within-field research also prevents us from considering how individuals may have motivations across multiple work-role or career domains (e.g., to be a professional-leader or entrepreneurial-leader). Some traits such as risk aversion seem exclusively studied in relation to one of the fields (entrepreneurship), but one could also make a case to link it to leadership and even professional work-roles.

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2. EPL framework of careers

To reconcile the abovementioned limitations, we use the person-centered career framework by Chan et al. (2012) which sees entrepreneurship, professionalism and leadership not as distinct domains, but as key dimensions of subjective “career space” representing how people think about their careers in an increasingly “boundaryless” career context (Arthur, 1994). This framework sees individuals as having motivations and capacities across multiple career/work-role domains (e.g., I want to be a professional-leader or entrepreneurial professional or entrepreneurial leader) rather than limiting them to one particular career track. As such, the framework more closely reflects the realities of today’s work environments where specialists (e.g., doctors, engineers, accountants) are increasingly asked to handle managerial and commercial challenges that often lie outside of their functional training.

Theoretically, the EPL framework has its roots in an earlier macro-level career models proposed by Kanter (1989) and Schein (1978). Chan et al. (2012) operationalized motivations for entrepreneurial, professional and leadership by incorporating Chan and Drasgow’s (2001) measure of motivation to lead (MTL) which has been shown to have antecedents in the Big Five personality factors and which predict leadership emergence over time (see Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Luria & Berson, 2013), and adapting the MTL scale to measure entrepreneurial and professional motivations. In a large empirical study, they provided evidence empirical evidence to validate their new career motivation framework and measures.

3. Present study: aim & hypotheses

This study examines the relationships between various kinds of personality traits with entrepreneurial, professional and leadership motivations of university students who are likely to exhibit the most variation in their career aspirations as they actively explore their career options across a broad number of industries and work forms. Specifically, we report on the relationships between measures of “Big Five” personality factors, proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 1995, 1996), and risk aversion (Cable & Judge, 1994), with measures of entrepreneurial, professional and leadership motivation developed by Chan et al. (2012). In doing so, we attempt to fill the research gap in understanding the role of similar or different traits in leadership and entrepreneurial emergence. As we will discuss later, this research also has implications for entrepreneurial and leadership development of professionals. While we hardly have any past research to propose specific relationships between traits and professional motivations, we make some hypotheses regarding the relationships between traits and motivations for professionalism, leadership and entrepreneurship as follows.

3.1. Big Five personality factors

The Big Five (Goldberg, 1990) are seen as the most comprehensive framework for personality and has, therefore, been a typical starting point for personality research on leadership and entrepreneurship. In separate meta-analyses, Judge et al. (2002) reported a multiple correlation of .53 between the Big Five and leadership emergence, while Zhao, Seibert, and Lumpkin (2010) reported a multiple correlation of .36 between the Big Five and entrepreneurial intentions. While the corresponding estimates were consistently smaller for entrepreneurship than for leadership across extraversion, openness, emotional stability and conscientiousness, the differences in criterion measures (emergence vs. intentions) preclude making definitive statements about the relative strengths of these dispositional influences. We know of no research that

examined traits in relation to professional motivations, although we anticipate that one’s desire to specialize in a particular subject area is more likely driven by vocational interests (Holland, 1997) than personality. On these bases, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1: Big Five personality factors will account for more variance in entrepreneurial and leadership motivations than with professional motivations.

3.2. Proactive personality

Bateman and Crant (1993) introduced the proactive personality construct to describe relatively stable individual differences in the tendency to identify opportunities, to take initiative, and to persevere in efforts to change one’s environment in a manner that is “unconstrained by situational forces”. Empirically, the construct was linked to entrepreneurial intentions (Crant, 1996) and to transformational and charismatic leadership ratings (Crant & Bateman, 2000). However, while proactive personality is clearly featured in reviews of entrepreneurial traits, it hardly appears in leadership-trait reviews. It is not clear if proactive personality is more uniquely a feature of entrepreneurial than leadership motivation, or, if it is related to having stronger career motivations – irrespective of whether it is for leadership, professional or entrepreneurial work. As part of our aim to study the comparative extent of trait influence across entrepreneurial, professional and leadership work-role motivations, we hypothesize these alternatives:

Hypothesis 2a: Proactive personality is positively correlated with entrepreneurial and leadership motivations but not with professional motivations.

Hypothesis 2b: Proactive personality is positively correlated with entrepreneurial, professional and leadership motivations.

3.3. Risk aversion

Beyond the Big Five factors, risk-related traits are probably most studied in relation to entrepreneurship (e.g., Stewart & Roth, 2001); Zhao et al.’s (2010) recent meta-analysis featured relationships between risk propensity with entrepreneurial intentions “as a separate dimension of personality” beyond the Big Five factors. In contrast, risk-related traits are much less the focus in the trait approach to leadership today despite claims about risk-taking or propensity as a leadership-related trait. Judge et al.’s (2002) meta-analysis of the Big Five to leadership links did not mention risk-related traits, while a recent meta-analytic study and integration of trait and behavioral theories of leadership by DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, and Humphrey’s (2011) discussed risk-taking as part of the task and change-related behaviors of leaders. This lack of specific focus on risk and leadership may be due to the dominance of the Big Five model in explaining the interpersonal as opposed to task and change aspects of leadership. Are risk-related traits incrementally and thus more uniquely related to entrepreneurship and leadership beyond the broad Big Five of personality? It is possible that individual differences in risk-related tendencies may be subsumed within all of the Big Five personality factors (e.g., Chauvin, Hermand, & Mullet, 2007), so such traits do not add to the prediction of leadership or entrepreneurial motivations beyond the Big Five factors. Without any prior research on risk and professional motivation, we considered Chan et al.’s (2012) finding of a negative correlation between professional and entrepreneurial motivations and our observation that professionally-motivated participants in our early pilot-study interviews expressed much aversion towards the perceived risks in entrepreneurial work, and hypothesized:

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