

STRUCTURED QUALITATIVE METHODS

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STIMULATING YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN KENYA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
ABSTRACT	
INTRODUCTION	4
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	5
BACKGROUND	5
THE SCOPE OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT	6
THE KENYAN EDUCATION SYSTEM	7
YOUTH ENTREPRENEURIAL INITIATIVES IN KENYA	9
IMPORTANCE OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND THE INFORMAL SECTOR AMONG GRADUATES	11
THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	14
SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND THE CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY	13
CONCEPT OF INTENTIONS	16
SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY AND THE CONCEPT OF SELF EFFICACY	18
THE MODEL	21
THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE	22
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	
ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS	24
AUTONOMY SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS	28
THE IMPORTANCE OF PEER GROUP CLIMATE	29
FIELDWORK	33
THE RESEARCH QUESTION	33
RESEARCH DESIGN	34
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	37
REFERENCES	38

I: ABSTRACT

A preliminary survey among the Kenyan youth shows that a small but growing number of college graduates are choosing to venture into small-scale businesses on graduation. The researchers interviewed some youth entrepreneurs and found that their experiences in college may have positively influenced their attitudes towards entrepreneurship. This research aims at exploring the link between the experience in colleges and the intentions towards entrepreneurship among college graduates.

Institutions that operate in competitive environments are more likely to be innovative and to be more risk-oriented than institutions that do not face competition. In Kenya, privately owned institutions of higher learning do not get any funding from the government, unlike public institutions, and must therefore continuously come up with innovative ways of keeping afloat and ahead of the competition. Students in such institutions may therefore unconsciously experience an entrepreneurial environment. If in addition such institutions encourage students to freely express themselves, regularly consult with students and keep them informed of any plans and projects, invite students suggestions for improvement etc, autonomy supportive environments are created. Consequently, students who study in such environments are more likely to be self-assured and this, coupled with the exposure to entrepreneurship is likely to result in an inclination to go into self-employment as opposed to choosing corporate employment.

This study investigates graduates running their own businesses with a view to gaining an insight on how the environments and experiences in universities and colleges may have influenced their career choice of self-employment.

II: INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, university graduates and graduates of other tertiary educational institutions in Kenya have in the past had a guarantee of employment either in the public sector or in multinational firms. Today Kenyan university graduates are finding it difficult to secure employment in these sectors. Unfortunately, many of them are unprepared to consider any other form of employment. Consequently, a lot of time is wasted as graduates search for that elusive job. Stimulating entrepreneurship interest among students in institutions of higher learning is one way of curbing youth unemployment in Kenya.

Discussions with a few graduate youth entrepreneurs indicate that the decision to go into business is driven by factors such as prior exposure to entrepreneurship, attitude towards taking risks, ability to persist, need for independence, pursuit of financial success, expectations from family etc. In addition, this decision is influenced by support structures such as peer groups, family, reliable information, mentors etc. These observations find support in Carter *et al* (2003) who identify the reasons for starting a business as innovation, independence, recognition, roles or traditions, financial success and self-realization. Using general entrepreneurship literature, self-determination theory, social cognitive theory, utility theory and group theory, the current researchers explore the possibility that the environments in educational institutions that operate in

competitive markets may inadvertently encourage the development of entrepreneurial intentions among students.

GOSSARY OF TERMS

Debate exists on the relationship between ‘self-employment’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ but for purposes of this study, the two terms will be used interchangeably to indicate ‘running a business’. Fresh graduates going into business are likely to set up small and micro businesses due to limitations on capital. In Kenya, many such small firms operate in the informal sector where trade licensing fees and government taxes have historically been easily avoided. This study will therefore refer to the importance of the informal sector in curbing youth unemployment. The term youth unemployment as used in this study will mean unemployment among college and university graduates. The term ‘graduate’ will be used to mean a college or university graduate.

BACKGROUND

My interest in youth entrepreneurship stems from observations in the last fifteen years as a lecturer and director of one of the premier colleges in Kenya. During the fifteen years, students have consistently sought assistance from the college secure formal employment. None of them have sought assistance to set up business. This tendency to focus on formal employment has a historical explanation. Until the mid eighties, Kenyan university and college graduates were assured of employment in the civil service or the private sector. Self-employment was therefore primarily the preserve of non-college graduates or school dropouts. Until very recently many institutions of higher learning

have also perpetuated this tendency by setting up job placement offices without a counter effort to set up entrepreneurship support units.

The Scope of Youth Unemployment

The International Labor Organization (ILO) indicates that in 2003 there were 186 million people out of work worldwide and that about 47% of these were youth. In addition, about 130 million of the 550 million people who earn less than I dollar a day are the youth. *"We are wasting an important part of the energy and talent of the most educated youth generation the world has ever had"*, says ILO Director-General Juan Somavia. *"Enlarging the chances of young people to find and keep decent work is absolutely critical to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals."* (www.ilo.org). These figures reflect the scale of the challenge in tackling the growing worldwide problem of youth unemployment.

According to data from the Ford Foundation, in Kenya, every year over 500,000 students join the workforce from various levels of the education system. Only approximately 300,000 jobs are created annually on average, the bulk of which are self-employment opportunities in the informal sector. In 2005 for example, the informal sector created 430,000 jobs while the formal sector created only 30,000 jobs. The bulk of the unemployed are the youth, defined by the Ministry of Youth Affairs as those between 15 and 30, a group that makes up 75% of the population (Mbogo, 2006). In 2003, the national level of unemployment stood at 40% with over 78% of this representing the youth (www.fordfound.org) while in 2005 the youth accounted for 67% of the national unemployment.

Faced with such a world wide problem there is need to prepare the youth for self-employment." *Young people are likely to experience a 'portfolio' career consisting of*

periods of paid employment, no work and self-employment. Flexibility and creativity will be necessary survival skills in the work place. The changing nature of firms suggests that a team or project focus and small scale working will be important within large firms while the role of the small firm will increase with 'downsizing' and 'outsourcing' encouraged by technology" (pg. 242 Henderson & Robertson 1999). Speaking to the UK of the 21st century, these words ring true for all youth in the world including Kenya. The society has an obligation to ensure the youth are prepared adequately to cope with such 'portfolio' careers.

The Kenyan Education System

The Kenyan education system is in two parts, basic and higher education, with basic education taking 14 years as follows: kindergarten and pre-primary education (2yrs), primary education (8yrs), high school (4yrs). Students dropping out of school any time before completing basic education have the option of joining training institutes known as youth polytechnics. High school graduates have an opportunity to join higher education, which comprises of colleges and universities. Over 240,000 students complete their high school education each year and more than 30,000 qualify for university courses. However due to the small number of universities (7 public and 5 private) only 10,000 are able to join universities each year. Approximately another 10,000 join middle level colleges, which are a level below universities, for diplomas and certificates. College courses take 1-3 years while university degrees take 4-7 years.

At independence in the early 1960s and over the following decade, education was squarely in the realm of the public sector in Kenya except for a few select private schools and colleges that catered for the needs of foreign expatriates. Qualified Kenyans who

could afford the fees were able to secure place at primary schools, secondary schools, colleges or universities. Apart from the foreign-catering private institutions, all schools followed the same curriculum and all teachers and lecturers were trained and employed by the government. Since the late seventies, however, community ran schools started to come up at secondary school level to bridge a rapidly growing gap between supply and demand. This trend made room for private entrepreneurs and today there is a thriving private sector presence in the provision of education in Kenya, from kindergarten to university level. The number of students seeking college education has continued to grow attracting many investors in the sector. Competition is rife and many private colleges have to be extremely ingenious in order to survive and keep a step ahead of the competition. Public institutions have historically obtained funding from the central government and have therefore not faced the same pressures faced by the private institutions.

The Kenya College of Accountancy (KCA) is a private college initially set up to offer professional accountancy training but which over the years has had to expand the number of courses on offer in order to beat competition. Set up seventeen years ago, the college almost went under in the first three years except for the quick action to start offering Computer studies in 1995. This kept the college going but as the number of institutions offering computer courses grew, the numbers became unsustainable. In 1999, the college management made a decision to augment professional training academic training where the demand far outstripped supply. This meant making a transition to a university but the process of conversion is lengthy, and in the interim period, a decision was made to approach universities that would be willing to collaborate with KCA to offer

degree courses. This led to a partnership with one foreign university in 1999 and another local university in 2002. In making this decision, it was recognized that the college needed to move to its own premises to create an image that set it apart from the colleges it had been competing with and in 1999, the college moved to its own premises procured on a long-term loan. The pressure to repay the loan while expanding and improving human and physical resources in preparation for university status has created a culture of efficiency and innovativeness in revenue generation. Today the college offers professional and academic courses as well as consultancy services in finance, management, information technology and human resources management.

These activities have taken their influence on students. Many times when a new course starts, rooms and lecturers have had to be re-allocated. Students have also been involved in fundraising activities and management has kept them apprised on the progress of the university plans through regular management/student meetings. This has engaged the students and has exposed them to a dynamic management style, risk assessment and management, innovativeness etc. Students who spend a long period in such an environment are likely to pick up the entrepreneurial culture.

Entrepreneurship Initiatives in Kenya

Various efforts to promote self-employment among the youth in Kenya exist. These tend to focus on equipping students with technical skills or to provide finance through micro finance institutions. To this end the government has invested in a nation-wide network of youth polytechnics that aim at equipping the youth with practical

self-employment skills such as metalwork, furniture making, bakery etc. These initiatives however have in the past tended to target non-graduates.

At college level, entrepreneurship promotion initiatives tend to be in form of entrepreneurship courses; for example, teacher-training colleges offer a higher diploma in entrepreneurship education, a practical-oriented course that includes an internship. All the universities offer business degrees and most of the programs have electives in Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management, while some graduate-level degree programs specialize in Entrepreneurship. The impact that these programs have on youth entrepreneurship, however, is limited due to a tendency to have a theoretical approach. There is therefore a need to have practical sessions such as internships incorporated in degree programs. Internships provide an opportunity for real life business experience in structured out-of-class experiences. Internships offer students an opportunity to experience, first hand, how a business runs, helping build confidence that one can set up and run their own business. This is particularly so when the business outfit is so small that individual workers handle an array of operational matters.

A few institutions have attempted to address this problem. Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), a public university whose location makes it difficult for it to raise enrolment numbers, has innovatively designed and franchised courses that incorporate credit-earning, three-month internships in every one of the three years it takes to complete a degree. Similarly, all Kenyan technical colleges require students to undertake a compulsory Entrepreneurship and Business Plan Project. This encourages students to develop innovative value-adding business ideas and promotes interest in self-employment. These initiatives show that in the more recent

past, Kenya has scaled up attention to youth entrepreneurship. Indeed the country has joined the rest of the world in a global initiative to address youth unemployment through the Youth Entrepreneurship Summit (YES) launched in September 2002 in Alexandria and will be hosting the third YES summit in September 2006. The theme of the summit is **‘Creating markets....unleashing entrepreneurs, building trade capacities, attracting foreign direct investment and building an entrepreneurial culture’.**

The Importance of self employment and the Informal Sector Among Graduates

Due to lack of credit facilities for small businesses, People going into self-employment typically tend to be non-graduates whose prospects for formal employment are limited. These businesses tend to be low-investment businesses such as small retail shops or crafts based businesses. Such businesses are concentrated in the informal sector where trading licenses and taxes are not well enforced. Since the mid eighties when the IMF-prescribed structural adjustment programs (SAPs) resulted in a freeze on civil service employment in Kenya, employment opportunities for graduates have been on the decline. The Kenyan society has however, taken time to adjust to the post eighties world and still stereotypes college graduates as formal sector employees. A frowning on self-employment as a career choice for college graduates continues to be evident in the Kenyan society, in the media, among parents, the youth, and even among educators, who are some of the most important influences on career choice among the youth. This tendency to shun self-employment narrows the range of employment opportunities for graduates and furthermore, denies the informal sector a much-needed injection of good quality technical and managerial skills.

This apparent irrational behavior by a group one would expect to be logical and rational is not unique to Kenya or to developing countries. In their UK study, Henderson & Robertson (1999) find “*positive images (for entrepreneurs) are hampered by a lack of identifiable role models, poor media presentation of individuals or small firms, and lack of encouragement from important influencers on career choice such as teachers and career guidance specialists*”(p 236). Similarly, although today in the US and many developed countries, entrepreneurship attracts highly educated people, it was not always the case. Collins and Moore (1970) observed ‘*independent entrepreneurs*’ tend to be men with ‘*educational deficits*’ (pg 49).

Phan *et al* (2002) suggest that this negative relationship between formal education and the propensity to start business may be due to perceptions of risk and ‘*the high opportunity cost of human capital*’; (pg170). Highly educated people would like to recoup their investments as quickly and as safely as possible making self-employment unattractive. Similarly, Amit *et al* (1995) explain this phenomenon in terms of career opportunity cost. Due to comparatively higher potential among college graduates to obtain well paying jobs even in poorly performing economies, and the relatively safer incomes associated with employment, choosing entrepreneurship constitutes a high opportunity cost. For the less educated the opportunity cost is comparatively lower.

Youth willing to go into business are disadvantaged in that they are generally constrained financially confining them to small businesses, many of which may not require a large initial capital outlay. The businesses that this study focuses on are therefore all going to be micro, small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs). We suggest that the Kenyan society has failed to prepare the youth for a possible life of self-

employment. Few Kenyan graduates today complete school with the thought of setting up business. Constant 'get a job' messages, lack of a comprehensive public policy to specifically address graduate youth unemployment, negative societal attitudes towards entrepreneurship and inadequacy in business enterprise programs have all served to create a situation where the majority of college educated youth focus their attention on employment rather than self-employment and entrepreneurship. There is need to change the 'get a job' message to one encouraging entrepreneurship.

It is our belief that college settings could be particularly important and useful in turning around the negative attitude towards self-employment. The average college graduate spends three to four years in college at a time when career considerations are weighing most heavily on his/her mind. Providing college experiences that promote self-employment as a viable and desirable option has the potential to have a widespread and immediate impact on entrepreneurial intentions among the graduates. Although there are debates on the matter, literature exists supporting SMEs as vehicles for economic growth and employment creation. Aquilina *et al* (2006) for example indicate that "*in a very large cross section of countries at different levels of economic development the importance of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) is positively related with GDP per capita growth*" (pg 203). Encouraging more youth to set up small businesses should therefore have the added advantage of improving economic performance, further improving availability of employment opportunities.

III: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A. Concept of Autonomy: Self Determination Theory and Career Decision Theory

Self determination theory (SDT) is an approach to human motivation concerned with *'people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs...the basis of their self-motivation and personality integration as well as the conditions that foster those positive processes'* (Ryan *et al* 2000 pg. 68). According to SDT, at the root of all motivation are three fundamental psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The pursuit of these needs may either be supported, or frustrated, by social and environmental factors.

Guay *et al* (2006) propose a career decision theory based on SDT that links career decision *'to personal constructs such as self-efficacy as well as to some contextual factors such as the quality of the relationships with parents and peers'* (pg. 4). SDT focuses on contextual factors and proposes that these affect career decisions through both self- efficacy beliefs and perceptions of autonomy. Chen, Greene & Crick (1998) define self-efficacy as a cognitive estimation of the capability to control one's life by mobilizing motivation and cognitive resources and taking the necessary action.

Perceptions of autonomy refer to the extent to which individuals *'experience choice in the initiation, maintenance, and regulation of their behaviors'* (Guay *et al*, 2006, pg. 3). It is related to the concept of internal locus of control, one of the attributes associated with entrepreneurship, which refers to perceptions of being in control for what happens in one's life. People with an internal locus of control take responsibility for what happens in their lives and are not fatalistic. Perceptions of autonomy are affected by interactions with significant others such as peers, friends and family whose attitudes can

either frustrate or support autonomy. Guay *et al* note '*autonomy-supportive behaviors displayed by significant others, such as considering individuals perspectives, acknowledging their feelings and perceptions, providing them with information and choice, and minimizing the use of pressure and control, can give individuals the chance to perceive themselves as competent and autonomous,*'(p3). Educational institutions that invite students input in decision making on matters that touch on their studies, avail information about matters that affect their college life, provide unbiased career information etc. promote perceptions of competence and autonomy among students. Such institutions would be more likely to encourage self-employment. Conversely, institutions where the environment and culture is perceived to be controlling, where students feel powerless to control their destiny thwarts perceptions of competence, relatedness and autonomy reducing the inclination towards careers perceived to be high-risk such as entrepreneurship.. This conclusion agrees with Wilson *et al* (2000) model in which the '*level of interest in entrepreneurship is correlated with both perceptions of self efficacy and individual motivations for career interest* (pg.177).

Motivation may be intrinsically or extrinsically regulated. Thus, educational institutions can influence career motivation and cause a tip in favor of entrepreneurship. Ryan *et al* (2000) define self-regulation as a concept that '*concerns how people take in social values and extrinsic contingencies and progressively transform them into personal values and self motivations*' (p 69). Internalized values become part of intrinsic motivation and are persistently manifested in behavior. The degree of such integration will be higher the more the external stimulation is perceived to be congruent with ones values. Un-integrated external regulation only elicits compliance behavior in order to

avoid punishment or attract rewards. It is therefore not long lasting. Internalizing and assimilating externally regulated behavior results in a permanent change in behavior and greater autonomy in action as manifested in greater engagement, greater behavioral effectiveness, greater volitional persistence etc (Ryan *et al*).

As noted, the basis for career motivations is psychological and includes the need of autonomy as defined above. Other psychological needs are relatedness, which refers to the extent of connectedness to significant others, and the need for competence, which refers to the extent to which individuals feel they can effectively perform a task. According to Ryan *et al*, environments supportive of autonomy, competence and relatedness foster greater internalization and integration of external stimuli. Motivation can therefore be corrected by addressing the individual's immediate social context and the developmental environment affecting their need for competence, autonomy and relatedness.

Educational institutions with autonomy supportive environments have a good chance of getting students internalize positive entrepreneurial values. This can be done through creating an open climate where self-confidence is nurtured and fear of failure is replaced by a healthy attitude towards risk. Availing opportunities for more student involvement in management and decision making, through internships, through greater parents/college associations, through peer-to-peer interactions, availing adequate and accurate information on entrepreneurship and other career options etc.

B. Concept of Intentions

Motivation concerns *'energy, direction, persistence and equifinality-all aspects of activation and intention'* (Ryan pg. 69). Without motivation, there would be no intention to act. The term 'intention' is a state of mind that focuses a person's attention, experience and behavior, toward a specific object or method of behaving (Boyd & Vozikis). Intentions are therefore a person's willingness to pursue a given behavior and are a link between beliefs and subsequent behavior. People form attitudes towards a given behavior based on a belief that performing that behavior will result in certain consequences.

Research on entrepreneurship in the past focused on either personality (inherent) traits or situational/contextual (socio-economic) determinants of entrepreneurship. Boyd & Vozikis (1994) review trait and situational theories to show that none of these theories can adequately explain entrepreneurial activity. They show that entrepreneurial intentions models go beyond situational factors and entrepreneurial traits focusing on the conscious and intended act of new venture formation. Entrepreneurial intentions models emphasize the convergence of attitudes and situational factors in the decision to start up business. According to this framework, predisposition to entrepreneurial intentions is determined on the one hand by personal factors such as past experience, personality and ability and, on the other hand, by contextual factors relating to social, political and economic environments such as displacement events, markets and government policy. These two sets of factors are then incorporated into the broad framework of rational analytical behavior and intuitive or holistic thinking to influence intentions.

Two distinct intentions models exist. These are Ajzen's model based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, which argues that intentions in general depend on perceptions of personal attractiveness, social norms and feasibility; and Shapero's model

of the 'Entrepreneurial Event' which states that entrepreneurial intentions depend on perceptions of personal desirability, feasibility and propensity to act. Krueger *et al* (2000) employed a competing models approach and compared the two intentions-based models using a sample of students who were all facing career choice decisions. The results of the analysis offered strong support for both models leading to the conclusion that intentions are the single best indicator of any planned behavior including entrepreneurship, and that personal and situational variables have an indirect effect on entrepreneurship through their influence on key attitudes and general motivation to act.

Entrepreneurial intentions are determined by perceptions of feasibility and desirability (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994). Enterprise education has been found to have a positive impact on entrepreneurial intentions. Peterman & Kennedy (2003) studied the impact of participating in an enterprise program and noted "*after completing the enterprise program, participants reported significantly higher perceptions of desirability and feasibility towards entrepreneurship*" (pg. 129). Educational institutions can therefore promote entrepreneurial intentions through enterprise education.

C. Concept of Self-Efficacy: Social Learning (Cognitive) Theory

Social learning theory "*emphasizes the prominent roles played by vicarious, symbolic and self regulatory processes in psychological functioning*" (Bandura, 1977, pg. vii). According to this theory, human behavior is the result of continuous reciprocal interaction of cognitive, behavioral and environmental factors. People not only react to external influences but also select and transform the external stimuli that they allow to have an impact on them. Thus, social learning theory is different from classical

conditioning in the sense that man does not play a passive role, but rather is an active participant continuously interacting with the environment in the learning process. While social learning theory is concerned with behavior, self-determination theory is concerned with motivation.

The concept of self-efficacy is derived from social learning theory and refers to a judgment of one's capability to accomplish a certain level of performance or achieve a desired outcome. It is the belief that one has the capability to perform certain tasks. Individuals gradually accumulate self-efficacy through prior cognitive, social and physical experiences. Self-efficacy is task and context specific. Thus, Hackett (1995) defines 'career self-efficacy' as measured by "*goal selection, career exploration, problem solving capabilities, planning skills and realistic self-appraisal skills*" (pg. 243), while Chen *et al* (1998) define entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) as the "*strength of a person's belief that he or she is capable of successfully performing the various tasks and roles of entrepreneurs*"(pg. 295). The following factors measure ESE; marketing, innovation, management, risk taking and financial control. Another concept of efficacy is group efficacy, which refers to efficacy at group level for group activities and goals.

Regardless of the context, the effects and determinants of self-efficacy are the same. Self-efficacy influences the choices we make, the effort we put in, how long we persist at a task, our reactions when faced by obstacles, and how we feel about it. If a person believes that the performance of a certain task is within their capability, he/she will act, even if the task is difficult because he/she perceives the successful completion of the task as a feasible goal given the belief in self. Self-efficacy is therefore related to perceptions of feasibility. To this extent, self-efficacy mediates entrepreneurial intentions

(Zhao *et al* 2005) which are determined by perceptions of feasibility and desirability (Boyd & Vozikis).

Sources of self-efficacy are the same regardless of context. Self-efficacy develops from mastery of experience (enactive mastery) or task accomplishments, vicarious experience (from observing others), verbal persuasion (or encouragement) as well as management of physiological states such as stress (Boyd & Vozikis). Vicarious experiences relate to the effects produced by the actions of others. *“Seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences can create expectations in observers that they too will eventually succeed.”* (Bandura, 1977, pg. 81). This source of efficacy is weaker than mastery experiences, but, when people are uncertain about their own abilities or have limited prior experience, as is the case with most students, they become more sensitive to vicarious experience. Institutions operating in competitive markets offer vicarious experience through exposure to competition, risk management, failure management, perseverance etc. The longer the period of such encounters the more likely the impact.

Interactions with a few recent university graduates who have started businesses indicated the environment and one’s experiences in college can influence the decision to go into business. Factors such as internships, group projects, and information sharing were quoted. This suggested that the environment influenced entrepreneurial intentions firstly through enhancing perceptions of self-belief and secondly through the presence of important supportive structures such as peer groups. These conversations alerted us to the importance of college environments and experiences in fostering entrepreneurial intentions among the youth. The focus of this research will be to explore the nature of

this link between the environment, the experiences and entrepreneurial intentions. These relationships will be discussed by use of propositions.

V: THE MODEL

According to Richards (1999), many young people are high degree of creative and have a capacity for flexibility and persistence when motivated, as well as a tolerance for risk if success is perceived to be possible. They are also highly innovative when intellectually engaged, and have a passion when the goal is viewed as worthy. These are the skills that make entrepreneurs. However, these skills are latent and can only be mobilized in an environment that values them (Richards). The environment in a college is therefore critical in mobilizing entrepreneurial intentions and the model proposed has college environment as the independent variable whose various aspects affect the dependent variable, entrepreneurial intentions. The environment is seen as playing a two-fold role, on the one hand encouraging entrepreneurship by exposing students to entrepreneurial skills both vicariously and directly, and on the other hand through the creation of self-confident students with an internal locus of control and strong relational links with staff and other students.

A) THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS, UTILITY AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR

‘Career decisions and behavior include generating alternative courses of action, seeking information about them, evaluating the information, setting goals, making decisions to behave in various ways, and carrying out decisions’ (London, 1983 pg. 624). Quoting a study by Douglas & Shepherd (2000), Lévesque *et al* (2002) model an individual’s career choice between employment and entrepreneurship as a utility maximizing process involving, assessing information on not just forgone earnings, but also the aversion/preference for work effort, risk, independence and other working conditions. *“People intend to be self-employed when the combination of income, risks, work effort required, and independence provides greater utility than does the corresponding combination for the best employment option”* (pg. 191). Career decisions are therefore made on the basis of utility expectations, which are in turn likely to be more accurate, when there is sufficient knowledge on which to base decisions.

Career decisions and in particular entrepreneurial careers are made under conditions of uncertainty. *“The willingness to bear the perceived uncertainty associated with an entrepreneurial act is representative of a belief-desire configuration in which belief of what to do is a function of knowledge”* (McMullen & Shepherd 2006 pg.148). Entrepreneurship knowledge accumulation is therefore indicative of a belief-desire configuration. In their study looking at the antecedents of entrepreneurship among university students in Singapore, Phan *et al* (2002), found that *“students who have been exposed to news broadcasts, newspaper, and other common sources of information on business related issues, would have developed some general beliefs about what may be important for success”*. The study also found that *“students with stronger beliefs would*

have been predisposed to seek more information.....and therefore display a greater propensity for venturing” (pg. 159-160). Thus, the more convinced one is of the viability and desirability of entrepreneurship as a career, the more they are likely to seek more information.

We propose to gauge existence of entrepreneurial intentions through the existence of the behavior of gathering and processing information on entrepreneurship.

Proposition 1:

Graduate entrepreneurs will have high perceptions of entrepreneurial feasibility and desirability and will have demonstrated their entrepreneurial intentions while still in college by actively seeking and processing information on entrepreneurship.

Many students are ill equipped to gather career information due to both the cost as well as the limitation of their knowledge. Collecting information is a costly process and, furthermore, gathering of information by potential entrepreneurs has been found to be subject to the concept of ‘bounded rationality’ (Cooper *et al* 1995). This means that one tends to look for the information that they know about. Thus, their search is bounded by what they know. If an individual is considering going into a business that they know little about, they are likely to seek less, not more information because they do not know what to look for or where to get it. Cooper *et al* also found that, “*when inexperienced entrepreneurs enter fields they do not know they lessen their search consistent with the bounded rationality model*” pg 119. They also sought more information when operating in fields they were familiar with although they tended to do so from less formal sources such as family, friends and other business owners. Such information may not be complete

or accurate and may therefore lead to poor career insight and poor career choices. In a study to find out the extent of graduate participation in SMEs, Mukhtar *et al* (1999) found out that an overwhelming majority (84.3%) of science and technology graduates of British universities “*had never considered applying to SMEs for work*”. Among the main reasons for this were that the graduates lacked adequate information of what SMEs are, how SMEs operate and lacked experience on SMEs’ work environment. Lee & Venkatakaraman (2006) show that the quality of decisions depends on the quality of information gathered.

Educational institutions are better placed to provide the necessary career information as they can seek the services of career experts who would be able to collect and process more accurate and complete information via a well functioning career counseling service. This will enhance career insight and students would leave college already aware of the career that most suits them. Those who identify with entrepreneurship would not waste time after graduation before they start arranging to set up a business. An important determinant of realistic career expectations is therefore the amount and quality of information one can access.

Proposition 2:

Graduate entrepreneurs are likely to have attended institutions that provided opportunities for students to obtain adequate and good quality information on careers including entrepreneurship.

B) INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS, ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF-EFFICACY AND PERCEPTIONS OF FEASIBILITY

The intention to choose an entrepreneurship career may be influenced by the environment that one studies in at college level. College environments may be structured in such a way as to encourage entrepreneurship among both staff and students. If there permeates a sense of innovativeness and risk taking in the college, something that is likely to occur if the institution is operating in a competitive environment, innovativeness may be observed in nature of courses offered, sources and types of teaching materials and teaching methods. Similarly, such institutions are likely to depict risk-taking behavior as measured by the frequency and nature of new programs, expansion into new geographical locations, innovativeness in solving problems etc.

Entrepreneurial intentions depend on perceptions of desirability and feasibility. Similarly, self-efficacy is positively related to perceptions of feasibility (Boyd & Vozikis). People with high general self-efficacy believe in their capability to succeed in ventures that they undertake and therefore expend the necessary effort and have a positive attitude even in face of challenges. High entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) is evident where there is competence in marketing, innovation, management, financial control and risk management (Chen *et al*). Such people high on ESE are more likely to have entrepreneurial intentions as they consider a career in entrepreneurship to be feasible. Differences in effort expended in information search have been found to be related to self-efficacy. In a study looking at self efficacy as a moderator of information seeking among employees, Brown *et al* (2001) found that “*employees with high self efficacy effectively seek, integrate and use information....*” (pg. 1049).

Proposition 3:

Graduate entrepreneurs who seek and effectively use entrepreneurship information will display high levels of general and entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

While Peterman & Kennedy (2003) find that enterprise education has a positive impact on entrepreneurial intentions, Rae (2006) notes the following about entrepreneurship education “*while education can provide cultural awareness, knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, the ‘art’ of entrepreneurial practice is learned experientially in business rather than in educational environment*” (pg. 324). Audet, J. (2000), found that students who did a field study as part of their entrepreneurial studies showed a higher perceived desirability to start their own business than those students who opted for a Business Plan project. They also show an increase in their perceived feasibility for entrepreneurship. Attitudes towards entrepreneurship are therefore positively affected by exposure to entrepreneurship and the breadth of exposure is a better predictor of attitudes toward starting a business. Exposing young college students to field work in form of internships is therefore advisable in order to raise perceived feasibility and desirability in entrepreneurship. Effective entrepreneurship programs should therefore have components of practical internships. This provides opportunities for enactive mastery, the most effective source of self-efficacy. As one successfully participates in running a business a mastery of those activities results in enhanced self-efficacy resulting in enhanced perceptions of the feasibility of a career in self employment. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is therefore likely to be enhanced by practical experience in real business set-ups (Boyd & Vozikis).

While prior exposure to entrepreneurship is important, the breadth and quality of such exposure is even more important. Krueger(1993a) notes that prior exposure will be most useful if the source is *“one’s family business, a business started by another relative or friend, someone else’s small business, and starting one’s own business”* (pg. 10). The common characteristic of these three types of businesses is the extent to which one is likely to be exposed to all aspects of operations resulting in an intimate understanding of all the aspects of a business operation. The small businesses usually found in the informal sector in Kenya would provide an ideal internship environment for the promotion of entrepreneurial intentions. The positiveness of the experience matters so the selected firms should be those that have a success record. Zhao *et al* conclude, *“Our results suggest that those interested in emergence of more entrepreneurs should seek to provide both internship opportunities with established firms seeking to develop and market new products and more direct opportunities for students to try starting and managing their own businesses”* (pg. 1270). This would provide both enactive mastery and role modeling which should affect self-efficacy positively. Not everyone has the privilege to be engaged in a family or friend’s business but educational institutions can provide an intimate entrepreneurial experience by structuring courses that include internships in the small and medium sized enterprises.

Environments that are characterized by innovation, competitiveness and risk taking support entrepreneurial intentions by enhancing self-efficacy beliefs. Institutions of higher learning that frequently take on new courses, introduce new teaching methods, re-organize operations and resources depict innovativeness. Such institutions require to continuously sell the new ideas both internally and externally, providing a vicarious

source of entrepreneurial self-efficacy for students and staff. If in addition students are continuously invited to suggest solutions to problems, they get an opportunity for enactive mastery of other entrepreneurial self-efficacy components such as financial control through cost/benefit analysis considerations, budgeting and resource allocation, risk management etc. Students in such institutions may also have had opportunities to exercise their entrepreneurial skills through planning their own activities within set financial and other resource constraints.

Proposition 4:

Graduate entrepreneurs who demonstrate high perceptions of entrepreneurial self-efficacy may have been exposed to entrepreneurship through family businesses or internships in small successful firms, or may have attended entrepreneurial supportive institutions which themselves displayed a strong work ethic, innovativeness, a competitive spirit, healthy attitudes towards risk-taking etc.

b) AUTONOMY SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND PERCEPTIONS OF DESIRABILITY

An entrepreneurial oriented institution may not result in entrepreneurship activity unless at the same time the environment supports autonomy. This refers to perceptions of being in control of ones destiny rather than being dependent on fate. It is related to perceptions of competence and relatedness. An environment that is flexible, encourages interactions between management and students, and between students themselves, promotes trust and encourages self-expression may be seen to be representative of a surrogate family environment from which one can draw support while learning without fear of reprisal for failing. It is also an environment which may promote integration of desirable values, such as positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship, strong work ethic etc. According to Guay *et al* providing an environment that is non-controlling, one that encourages self-expression, that acknowledges individual views, that avails an array

of choice through provision of information etc. produces perceptions of autonomy. Educational institutions that nurture environments that engage students in open discussions, support information sharing through group work and projects, allows students to manage their own affairs and activities etc., are therefore more likely to produce graduates who perceive themselves as autonomous and competent.

An autonomy supportive environment enhances perceptions of internal locus of control, propagates perceptions of competence and perceptions of relatedness. *'When that occurs people feel not only competent and related but also autonomous as they carry out culturally valued activities'* (Ryan pg. 74). Thus, by enhancing autonomy in an entrepreneurial supportive environment, entrepreneurship, becomes a desirable career.

Proposition 5:

Graduate entrepreneurs who display a high sense of internal locus of control believing the success of their business to be in their control may have attended colleges that supported autonomy by allowing freedom of expression, student-planned activities, open discussion forums, free interactions with management and other staff, close ties with other students etc.

The importance of peer group climate

Students who have low perceptions of autonomy were hypothesized to *'experience low levels of autonomy support from parents and peers'* and vice versa (Guay *et al* pg. 4). In educational institutions, peer group climate is part of the environment and is of particular importance as it falls within the range of contextual factors that the administration of an institution can influence. Similarly, a management style that encourages students' perspectives, acknowledging their feelings and views, providing adequate information for decision-making and minimizing pressure, is supportive of autonomy.

Quoting several works, Choi *et al* (2003) note, “*Groups represent an immediate social context that shapes how individual members think and feel*” (pg. 357). The study also observes that group settings can change individual motivations, attitudes and behavior. The study identifies two routes of group influence on individuals. These are individual level processes i.e. an individual’s own experience in a group, and cross-level processes which refer to the influence of group characteristics and group processes on members.

The most important determinant of how the group affects the individual is the group climate. Group climate is defined as group level phenomena such as shared norms, collective mind and information processing. Choi *et al* find that “*a group climate that is characterized by open communication and trusting relationships among members may be related to positive changes in members self-efficacy because it allows experimentation with new ways of doing things, the practice of new skills without fear of appraisal and frequent and open exchanges of feedback*”(pg. 347). This ties up with Guay *et al* who measure peer support and autonomy control in terms of feedback from group, controlling behaviors, involvement and information feedback. An open group climate promotes autonomy.

An open group climate also enhances self-efficacy beliefs. People tend to look to their significant others, especially families for affirmation. Many young adults, however, leave school and join college for three to four years where they separate from their families, usually for the first time. Many studies on parental influence in career choice use family characteristics such as cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, sociability, idealization and disengagement to operationalize family relationships (Penick & Jepsen,

1992). These factors can be replicated in college among peer groups and between students and staff. We believe that these factors may very easily describe relationships among students and between students and staff in educational institutions. Interactions in these ‘surrogate families’ often re-shape attitudes and beliefs affecting self-efficacy beliefs in all areas including career self-efficacy. Career decisions in such circumstances are more likely to be in line with group expectations.

The extent to which group values affect the individual depends on group climate and the general group self-efficacy. The more open the group climate the greater the impacts that group values have on the individual members and vice versa. An open group climate is defined by trust, extent of shared experiences, the ease with which individual members share with the group, identification with the problems shared by other members etc. These factors are precisely the same kind of attributes examined when the family unit is under study.

Proposition 6

The graduate entrepreneurs will belong to cohesive family like peer groups that will have been created when in college and which will be characterized by open group climates, information sharing, trust, shared experiences and an ability to resolve conflict amicably.

London (1983) conceptualizes career motivation as a ‘*multidimensional construct internal to the individual, influenced by the situation, and reflected in the individual’s decisions and behaviors*’ (pg. 620) and identifies the individual characteristics for career motivation as needs, interests and personality variables. These characteristics are clustered into three groups: career identity, career insight and career resilience. Career identity is related to self-efficacy, as it is the belief that one is suitable for a given career.

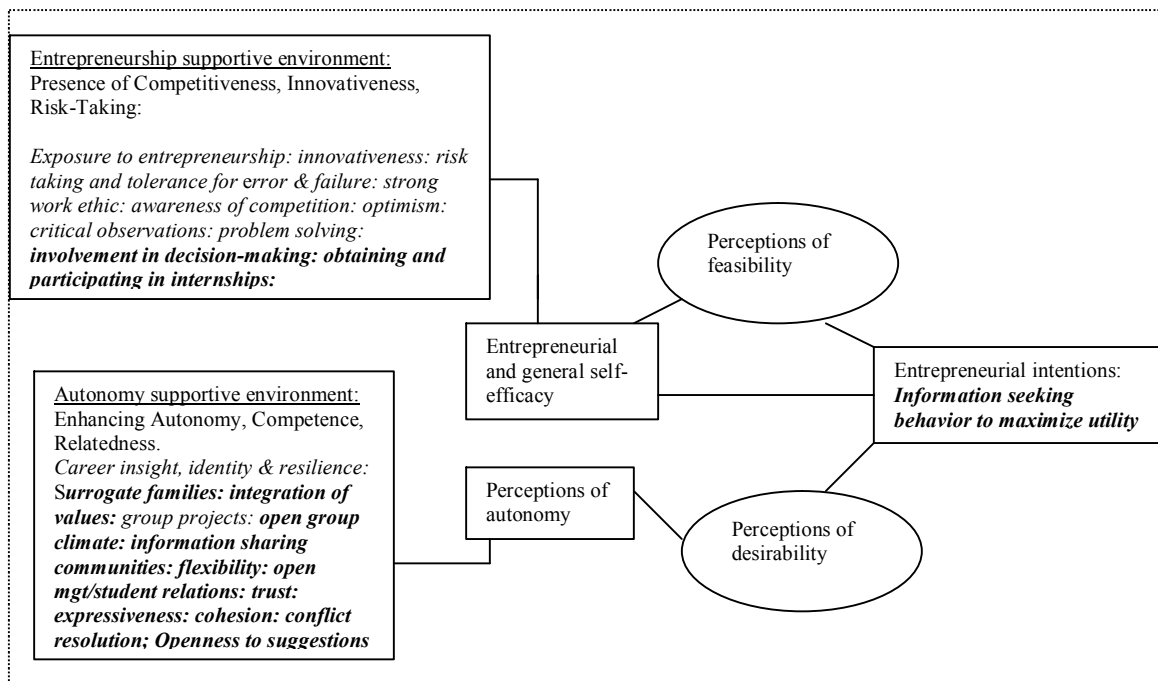
Career resilience is composed of competitiveness, independence, self-efficacy and risk taking orientations. People who are low on career resilience avoid risks, tend to be dependent on others, and have low perceptions of autonomy. Such people are likely to seek structured careers and to avoid careers in which *'organizational outcomes depend on their behavior'* (London pg. 621). This implies that such people are more likely to seek employment rather than entrepreneurship. On the other hand, people high on career resilience are more likely to *'take risks, be independent of others, create their own structures, and thrive on situations in which outcomes are contingent on their behavior'* (pg. 621). This description fits entrepreneurs and people high on career resilience are therefore, more likely to pursue entrepreneurship and to persist in their chosen career despite difficulties. An autonomy supportive environment enhances independence, competitiveness, risk taking, responsibility for ones actions and nurtures characteristics of career resilience resulting in enhanced intentions towards entrepreneurship.

Career insight as career identity reflects the extent to which an individual has realistic expectations of him/herself and how these perceptions are related to career choice (London). Career insight is also promoted by autonomy support. A person who is high on career insight will be high on self-efficacy beliefs. One whose career insight points to entrepreneurship will waste little time upon graduation before going into business. Institutions of higher learning that support perceptions of autonomy result in positive perceptions of career identity and insight by engaging students in solving problems, keeping them informed of challenges faced in providing services as well as any progress on projects. Candidly explaining any setbacks and how these are handled gives

the students an opportunity to experience management in action. This exposes students to failure and risk management thereby building career resilience.

Proposition 7

Graduate entrepreneurs who will have made a quick transition from student to entrepreneurship careers may have attended autonomy supportive institutions that resulted in clear career insight, career identity and career resilience.



IV. THE FIELDWORK

In the qualitative part of the study, the purpose will be to understand how college environments can provide opportunities for experiences that influence entrepreneurial intentions.

The Research Question

How and what aspects of the environments in colleges and universities would foster experiences that influence entrepreneurial intentions among students? Could colleges operating in competitive markets create environments that inadvertently influence entrepreneurial intentions among students? Would such experiences enhance perceptions of entrepreneurial self-efficacy? How, why and what types of experiences in colleges and universities would enhance perceptions of autonomy? How would college/university environments encourage open interactions among students and what impact would these interactions have on career decisions? What influence and why would the management styles prevalent in colleges/universities in pursuit of institutional objectives influence intentions towards entrepreneurship among the students?

It is our belief that successful colleges/universities operating in competitive environments can help enhance entrepreneurial intentions if the management operates an open environment where students are aware of the challenges that the institution is facing and how these challenges are handled. Providing opportunities for internships and for forging meaningful relationships based on trust and information sharing, encouraging students to make suggestions, plan and control their own activities within the broader framework of the constraints faced by the institution etc. results in opportunities for students to gain experience in entrepreneurial decision-making.

Research Design

This will be a qualitative study using phenomenological interviews. The participants will be youth entrepreneurs, all running businesses in Nairobi and all holders

of 1.5-4 year degrees or diplomas. They will have acquired these qualifications in the last three years (i.e. 2003, 2004 and 2005) from Kenyan public (state) and private universities/colleges. School entry age in Kenya is 6 years and basic education takes 12 years. The minimum age at which students join university/college is therefore 19 and all the participants will therefore be aged over 20 having taken a minimum of one and a half years in college.

Selected participants will all be running small businesses mostly in the cellular phone industry, information technology services, clothing retail industry etc. Many of these businesses are housed in complexes that are subdivided into numerous, small, low-rent, low-maintenance stalls, known as 'exhibition stalls' which share common services. Exhibition stalls are found all over the country.

Degree courses are offered by universities either in their own university campuses or in colleges working in partnership with the universities while colleges offer certificate and diploma courses. There are 30 universities and colleges in Kenya. Of these, 17 are in Nairobi and its environs. We intend to conduct 15 phenomenological interviews, 6 for females and 9 for males. This ratio reflects the proportion of women and men who graduate from Kenyan institutions of higher learning where females account for approximately 40 percent and males 60 per cent.

In Kenya, entries in the public address directory are made at the request of subscribers of post office boxes and telephone subscribers who pay an annual fee for the listing. The majority of Kenyans choose not to pay and are therefore not listed. This makes the Kenyan directory a poor sampling frame. The researcher therefore proposes to

use purposeful sampling. The CI has over 20 years experience in the Kenyan training sector and will use her extensive network of educators and past students to obtain telephone or email contacts of young entrepreneurs who are recent university/college graduates. Once the CI receives authorization for the research, she will contact the entrepreneurs by phone or email using a recruitment script. If a prospective interviewee declines to participate, the CI will thank the person and move on to the next person on the list. This procedure will continue until six female and nine male participants are identified.

For every willing and qualified participant consent to audio tape the interview will be sought from the participants who will show agreement by signing an informed consent form. In the case of face-to-face interviews, the CI will take the consent document to the venue of the interview and ask the participant to read and sign it before the interview starts. In the case of telephone interviews, the CI will send the consent document at least one week before the date of the interview and will only conduct the interview once the signed consent document has been received. The CI will collect the signed document at the convenience of the subject. Participants will also be asked to provide a convenient telephone contact for any follow up interview. Any participant who would like to obtain a copy of the research findings will also be asked to provide a card with a name and a mailing address. These cards will be maintained separately from the data collected to avoid identifying the participant's recordings.

Under the Kenyan Law the ministry of education is the authorized vetting agent of all research conducted in the country for academic purposes. The researchers will not start any interviews until such authority is obtained.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- Please give me a brief history of your life touching on your family and education
- Please describe your college/university life, your experiences in and out of class and your personal growth in the course of your studies.
- Please describe your business and tell me where you see it going in the next five years.
- Were there any experiences in college/university that influenced your decision to start your own business?
- Which people influenced your decision to start your own business?
- Thinking about your own experiences and people that you knew in college, are there some things you believe colleges/universities could do to encourage and prepare students for self-employment rather than salaried employment?

The Questions will be followed with Probes of the following nature:

- Could you please expound....
- Please clarify.....
- That is interesting could you?
- Please go back to.....
- What did you do about.....?
- Can you tell me what happened during.....?
- What was your reaction to?
- Why is that?
- How did that happen?

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