Engaging the Student entrepreneur building upon a typology of student entrepreneurs

Jerry Allen, University of Greenwich, j.allen@gre.ac.uk

Abstract

The paper aims to add to the debate on student entrepreneurship and employability. It builds upon earlier work postulating a typology of student entrepreneurs. It studies the motivations of 184 student entrepreneurs using an online survey with refined questions and fresh findings to substantiate three of the original five key typologies of student entrepreneur. These are: the 'Dabbler', those who are first time experimenters with entrepreneurship; the 'Persistent Pursuer', representing those with previous experience of entrepreneurship and the 'Family Followers' presenting a family history of entrepreneurship (Allen 2015)

Alternative perspectives on entrepreneur typologies are discussed, which feature: the type of enterprise (Smith 1967); innovation (Risker 1998); inventor (Miner, Smith et al. 1992) and second generation (Masurel and Nijkamp 2004) (Fraboni and Saltstone 1990). These typologies are juxtaposed with comparative studies examining the motivation, attitudes and self perception (Zhao and Wu 2014), (Leon, Descales et al. 2007), (Miner 1997) and comment on the debate surrounding entrepreneur education particularly concerning effectuation (Sarasvathy 2001) and the lean movement approach (Blank 2013)

The paper concludes with reflection on a pull approach advocated by (Hammer and Van der Meer 2013) involving entrepreneurs in the pedagogical process. It concludes with the identification of further research opportunities for a longitudinal cohort study of student entrepreneurs.

Context

The climate for entrepreneur education flourishes at the behest of a wind of change emerging from a series of influencing factors. A higher education agenda driven by a growing league table awareness of student employability. Universities are increasingly vying to demonstrate the benefits of choosing their brand rather than a competitor. Securing a graduate job at the end of a course becomes an influencing choice of institution forming the basis for competitive advantage in a busy market place. Secondly, the merits of entrepreneur education integrated into the lifelong learning process particularly amplified in Higher Education (Young 2014) advocating that education is the preparation although not exclusively, entrepreneur education just makes sound economic sense set in a UK economy where 99.5% of our businesses are small and medium sized enterprises, notably erring on the small side employing fewer than 10 (Young 2014)

Initial exploratory work postulating on the 5-fold typology of student entrepreneur was based on the experience of supporting university nascent entrepreneurs at the University of Greenwich (Allen 2015). It prompted further research to provide further substance to the typology. This study forms the next stage in refining the typology but inevitably raises further questions for investigation. It is noted that this paper is submitted to a conference track 'students as change agents' since the very essence of the subject matter of this research revolves around entrepreneurs as change agents in society.

Methodology

Primary quantitative data was gathered using an online survey. The 900 students who registered an expression of interest in the voluntary extra curricula annual student business planning and social enterprise challenge at the University of Greenwich during the autumn term 2015 were sent the survey link. The ten questions on four pages were based on the previous year's survey with the aim to be easy to understand and complete within five minutes. Questions were designed in four batches: thinking of you the entrepreneur, your views on enterprise, what you need help with and respondent personal data.

Findings and Analysis of Results

The survey generated 198 replies, there was an initial rush of 100 replies received with the first 30

days of the survey request with 98 supplementary responses received over the following 6 months September 2015 to March 2017 resulting in 184 completed responses as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Completed responses by typology
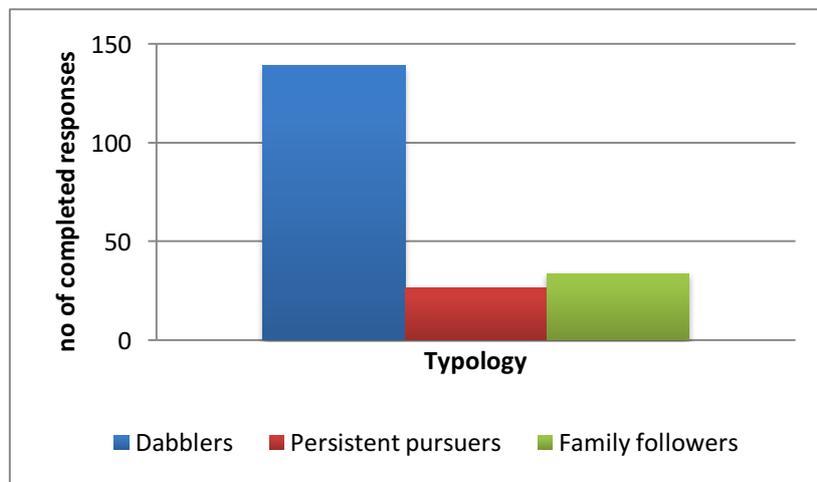
An overview of the survey results provide an indicative picture of the three clear typologies as follows:

The Dabblers
139 respondents feature as first timers, 88 (63.31%) report as having a business idea with 28.78% being not sure (40); 54.24% (64) see impressing others as not important; but 48.36% (59) see making a difference in the world as important; 57.17% (64) see self motivation as very important; 81.29% (113) are undergraduates; 42.45% (59) are first year; 59.71% (83) are female; 68.35% (95) are aged 18-24; 59.71% (83) study business; they need help from the university with idea development 57.66% (79); financial planning 57.69% (75); mentoring 57.81% (74); online video support 71.88% (92) regular workshops 42.06% (53)

Persistent Pursuers
27 respondents reported that they were had either previously entered an enterprise competition or run a business, not surprisingly, 74.07% (20) had a business idea; they are motivated by impressing other with a weighted average of 4.25, although 62.50% reported that impressing others was not important; 72.22% see being in control as either very important or important, closely followed by self motivation 66.66% and personal achievement also at 66.66%. This group is almost evenly split between undergraduate and postgraduate 51.85% and 48.15% (14/13). The majority are first years 44.4% (12) with 59.26% female (16) and aged between 18-24 40.74% (11). Similarly to the First timers, 48.15% are from business (13). This group report that they are very likely or likely to require help with 87.5%, idea generation, marketing 83.33%, financial planning 75% and mentoring 91.67%

Family Followers
34 respondents reported that they had family who were in business, 61.76% (21) claimed that the had a business idea; 52% (13) report that are impressing others is not important, but that 40.74% claimed making a difference in the word was important with an similar emphasis 40% on personal satisfaction. Of note 44% reported that self motivation is very important. This group are typically post graduates 58.82% (20) with an split between male 52.94% (18) and 47.06% (16) female; aged 18-24 82.35% (28); 79.41% (27) studying business, they see their support needs very likely to be with idea development 65.63% and mentoring 77.78%.

Review of Entrepreneur Typologies
There is debate over the criteria underpinning entrepreneur typologies, albeit limited. The classical approach associates the characterises the entrepreneur with the type of enterprise advocated by (Smith 1967) who proposed the 'craftsman-entrepreneur' and the 'opportunist entrepreneur'. The former predominantly with a technical education, focused on the present and past, with low levels of confidence and flexibility in contrast to the latter who is more advanced education and social awareness, a high degree of flexibility and an orientation to the future. The implications being that the Opportunistic Entrepreneur is more capable to innovate and likely to experience the highest growth in

sales. Subsequently classifications revolve around the entrepreneur and the organisation, (Miner, Smith et al. 1992) advocate that the entrepreneur develops the organisation as the vehicle for innovation, hence the emergence of the 'inventor-entrepreneur', who demonstrated a proclivity for taking out patents. The entrepreneur's relationships with innovation features in a typology proposed by (Risker 1998) where the classification is determined by the entrepreneur's behaviour and the type of innovation they introduce. Risker's typology emphasises the autonomy needs of the entrepreneur, which aligns with their technical orientation and duration on the entrepreneurial career. Further studies by (Masurel and Nijkamp 2004) (Fraboni and Saltstone 1990) highlighted the differences between first and second generation entrepreneurs, with their entrepreneurial traits.

An alternative perspective, based upon entrepreneurial attributes proposed four entrepreneurial typologies juxtaposing two dimensions of high verses low entrepreneurial alertness and internal verses external attributional style resulting in a 2x2 matrix of entrepreneurs described as: the true believer, clueless, practical and the reluctant (Tang, Tang et al. 2008) who noted the emergence of three key entrepreneurial characteristics: the need for achievement, risk taking propensity and commitment

It is the attributional dimension, which provides us with the, often disputed, drivers of entrepreneurship. Focusing on nascent student entrepreneurs, (Zhao and Wu 2014) reported that the need for achievement is a powerful predictor of entrepreneurial persistence supporting the theory of attraction-selection attrition. Recent approaches to entrepreneur typologies are scant, in contrast to the popularity of research on the entrepreneurial drivers

Implications for enterprise education

The conference brief focuses on how we foster student engagement through initiatives as change agents within the business school. This paper focuses on enterprise education as a medium for implementing change. The various needs of the sample group are identified such as help with idea generation, marketing, financial planning, mentoring etc. Yet the question remains as to how these needs can be utilised in the current extra curricula model of entrepreneurship education at the University of Greenwich. Currently students opt into a programme of workshops to equip them with the knowledge to refine their business idea, create a business proposal and ultimately a business plan and complete a series of financial projections. At the heart of the debate is the knowledge or the 'what' we are teaching, but this cannot be considered in isolation as the 'where', 'how' and 'to whom' are equally relevant (Williams Middleton and Donnellon 2014). The survey results indicate the relative demand for the knowledge the 'what' dimension and the online videos and workshops indicate the 'how' or contribute to the pedagogy.

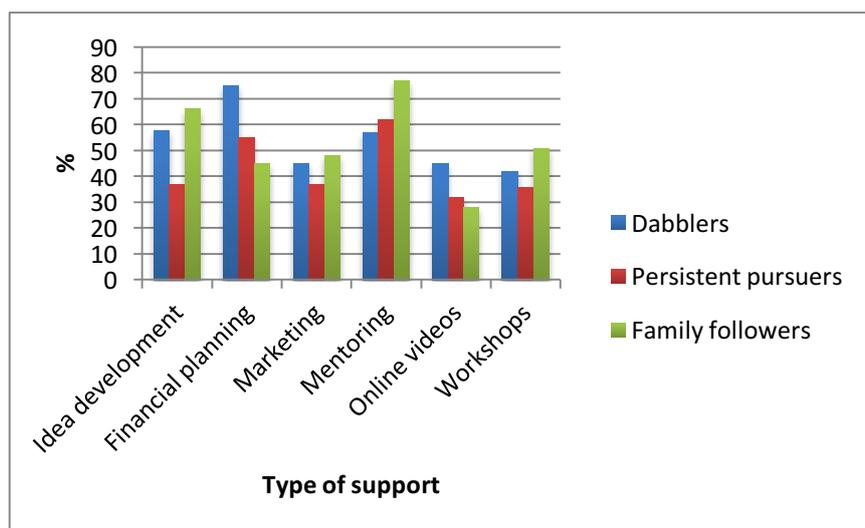Figure 2. Demand for support by typology

Figure 2 indicates three clear linear patterns:
(1) The need for financial planning is greater with the Dabblers, showing a progressive decrease for Persistent pursuers and Family followers.
(2) A need for online videos is greater with the Dabblers, showing a similar decrease for Persistent pursuers and Family followers.

(3) The need for mentoring increases between Dabblers, Persistent pursuers and the Family followers.

Financial planning identifies the one element of the 'what' aspect of entrepreneur education. For the Dabbler, embarking upon the entrepreneurial journey, there can be an overwhelming amount of knowledge to absorb. One explanation for high demand for financial planning might be attributable to perception of the complexity of this topic. Demand for other knowledge such as idea development and mentoring is notable but does not show any linear pattern.

Concerning the methodology or the 'how' part of entrepreneurship education. Demand for videos appears highest with the Dabblers; again the extra help available to support this new learning process may explain this. It is also noted that first timers expressed a similarly high demand for workshops, although no linear pattern emerges. Similarly the popularity of mentoring increases between the three typologies.

Adopting an alternative perspective on the how, an emerging model has been developed by (Sarasvathy 2001) based on the notion termed 'effectuation logic' that anyone can learn to think and behave entrepreneurially. Through the scientific application of effectuation logic, entrepreneurs are made. Sarasvathy created five principles she believes are the essence of successful entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours. Applying these principles forms an 'effectuation cycle' to help entrepreneurs get new product and service to market faster than the more conventional model of collating the business plan.

Another perspective on the 'how' growing in popularity is the 'lean model of entrepreneurship' based on the premise that most start ups fail (Blank, Benjamin et al. 2013). The Lean model aims to take a lot of the risk out of creating a new enterprise by encouraging the hypothesis of testing customer feedback making the traditional business plan obsolete.

Both effectuation and the lean methodologies shed fresh light onto the traditional methodology. To what extent they can be associated with the typologies outlined in this paper is open to question. However, they offer an alternative on the conventional 'push' methodology. If as enterprise educators we are to truly engage nascent entrepreneurs in their learning, then there is a justification for creating a 'pull' approach to facilitating the development of a pedagogy which meets the needs of the student entrepreneur (Hammer and Van der Meer 2013).

Conclusions and recommendations

The field of entrepreneurship education is growing in popularity and status within the context of this study at University of Greenwich. This follow on study exposes both the increase in student engagement and the challenges presented with supporting a diverse student audience. It is acknowledged that there is still further work to be completed in the evolution of the research methodology. But this study has provided a clearer identity of the typologies of entrepreneur beyond the traditional classifications. Fortunately each year creates a new and expanded potential for a research sample. Therefore, it is proposed to revise the survey to capture the full 5 typologies, make clearer the distinction between the 'what' and 'how' requirements and continue to refine the consequent entrepreneurial education programme.

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