

# Meaningful Entrepreneurship? Work Orientation and Entrepreneurial Success: The Mediating Effect of Entrepreneurial Persistence

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**ABSTRACT** Based on the motivation theory, this paper focuses on the "thinking -- behaviour -- result" analysis framework; and develops a theoretical model between work orientation and entrepreneurial success which takes entrepreneurial persistence as the intermediary variable. This paper analyse the direct effect of entrepreneurs' work orientation on entrepreneurial persistence and entrepreneurial success, meanwhile analysing the intermediary effect of entrepreneurial persistence between entrepreneur's work orientation and entrepreneurship success. This research is helpful for guiding individuals who are preparing or have started a business to make rational persistence choices, thus improving the entrepreneurial success rate.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the current research on entrepreneurial success, entrepreneurial cognition research and entrepreneurial process research are two main streams<sup>[1]</sup>. The entrepreneurial cognitive school takes the entrepreneur/team as the main body of analysis and emphasizes the behavioural results. The main basic logic is "situation-thinking-behaviour", which aims to explain the cognition and decision-making mechanism behind specific entrepreneurial behaviours<sup>[2]</sup>. Its disadvantage is that it ignores the impact of entrepreneurial behaviours on entrepreneurial results triggered by entrepreneurial cognition. The entrepreneurial process school takes process and key elements as the analysis objects, and emphasizes entrepreneurial results. The main basic logic is "factor-behaviour-performance"<sup>[3]</sup>. The basic assumption is that following a specific behaviour combination process in a specific situation is more conducive to entrepreneurial success, but in reality, it is found that the entrepreneur's behaviour process is often not tied to a fixed model, and even similar combinations of behaviours in specific situations will still lead to different result, so it is difficult for research results to fully explain and predict entrepreneurial phenomena<sup>[1]</sup>.

To fill this gap, this paper proposes an integrated research framework of "thinking -- behaviour -- result", focusing on the individual's work orientation, discussing the relationship among entrepreneurial work orientation, entrepreneurial persistence and entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurship persistence is considered to be one of the most important factors influencing the success of entrepreneurs to achieve their goals. Previous studies have discussed the entrepreneurial persistence behaviour from the aspects of entrepreneurial environment, the emotion and efficiency of entrepreneurial subjects, but ignored the entrepreneur's implicit driving force-the important role of entrepreneurial orientation on entrepreneurial behaviour. Bellah et al. (1986) classified work orientation as job, career and calling orientation<sup>[4]</sup>, each work orientation emphasized different goals and pursuits, which played an important role in individual entrepreneurial behaviour and entrepreneurial results<sup>[5]</sup>. According to the theory of planned behaviour, the individual to performing a certain behaviour is affected by the attitude toward the behaviour, the different value orientation reflects the entrepreneur on entrepreneurial attitude and motivation, driven entrepreneurs show different hold on in the face of difficulties and setbacks.

Therefore, this paper focuses on the deep-level orientation of entrepreneur, discusses the influence of work orientation on individual entrepreneurial persistence behaviour and

entrepreneurial success. The content of this paper is arranged as follows: firstly, review relevant literature to clarify the connotation of each variable. Secondly, develop the relationship model between work orientation and entrepreneurial success, put forward the research hypothesis, and discuss each hypothesis. Finally, discussion and future research are described.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Entrepreneurial work orientation

The work orientation was first proposed by American sociologist Bellah et al(1986)<sup>[4]</sup>. They classified work orientation into three dimensions: job, career, and calling<sup>[6]</sup>. It is the subjective positioning of people about their work value and expectations, and it is a concept that interprets the meaning of work from the perspective of work purpose. Entrepreneurship<sup>[6]</sup>, as a form of work, belongs to the field of career management together with work. Therefore, this article considers that these three work orientations are equally applicable to the entrepreneurial field.

Work orientation is the deep personal characteristics of entrepreneurs. It is actually the embodiment of the needs and motivations of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs with a job orientation focus on the economic and material returns that entrepreneurship brings. Entrepreneurship itself is not an end for them, but only a means to obtain external financial income. That is to say, entrepreneurship is a means of making a living. The reasons for them to start a business may be limited by huge employment pressure, or they may seek for flexible working hours.

Career oriented entrepreneurs work for higher social status, reputation, job challenges and social recognition<sup>[6]</sup>. They usually have high self-esteem and are unwilling to be employed or work for others. Compared with those who prefer to earn a living, individuals with a career orientation will invest more time and energy in their work. Besides material return, entrepreneurship is a way to achieve personal development and gain recognition.

For calling-oriented entrepreneurs, they attach more importance to the entrepreneurial process, aiming to obtain the subjective achievements, significance and dedication brought by the entrepreneurship itself. They pursue the inner enjoyment and far-reaching significance beyond personal interests and personal development. To some extent, the differences between job, career and calling are reflected in the differences in the goals that individuals strive to achieve in entrepreneurship<sup>[5]</sup>, which will affect the behaviours adopted in the entrepreneurial process and the entrepreneurial results.

### 2.2. Entrepreneurial persistence

Persistence in the traditional sense emphasizes that if you don't succeed at first, do not easily give up, and try more times. The persistence in the field of entrepreneurship is not the same as that emphasized in the traditional sense. Through the analysis of relevant studies on entrepreneurial persistence, we found that scholars define the connotation of entrepreneurial persistence mainly from the two perspectives: entrepreneurial situation (adversity and setback) and external opportunities.

#### 2.2.1. *entrepreneurial situation perspective*

The situational perspective focuses on adversity and emphasizes that entrepreneurial persistence is a subjective judgment decision made by entrepreneurs based on their perceived control of adversity and assessment of the possibility of goal realization in a highly complex and uncertain entrepreneurial environment. Entrepreneurial activities are full of numerous setbacks, obstacles and even failures. Entrepreneurial persistence reflects the tenacity and duration of individuals in the face of failures, setbacks and other negative feedback<sup>[7]</sup>. Persistent entrepreneurs constantly seek ways to break down environmental constraints and help entrepreneurs overcome extreme forms of adversity such as resource constraints, competition, and other environmental dynamics. However, entrepreneurs who are not tough enough are easily frustrated by obstacles and unexpected challenges<sup>[7]</sup>. To be specific, entrepreneurial persistence is the continuous efforts of the entrepreneurial subject in the face of objective existence subjective perception and imagination

of the difficult and difficult<sup>[9]</sup>. Wu et al. (2007) pointed out that persistence means not only multiple attempts in a specific direction of action, but also repeated efforts in the face of adversity, challenges or difficulties<sup>[10]</sup>.

### 2.2.2. external opportunity perspective

The external opportunity perspective holds that persistence is an "Alternative" choice between the current enterprise and Alternative employment. When other attractive alternatives emerge, entrepreneurs will be faced with whether to continue with their current venture or pursue other opportunities. Shane et al. (2003) point out that it makes sense to distinguish between individuals who continue to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities and those who give up<sup>[11]</sup>. Focusing on "why do some start-ups survive at the same level of poor performance, while others choose to quit ", confirms the economic performance and performance threshold jointly decided the enterprise's exit. It is proved that economic performance and performance threshold jointly determine the enterprise's exit. Their research shows that when the utility of staying in the current enterprise is less than the difference between the utility of pursuing other career opportunities and the switching cost, entrepreneurs choose to quit, and vice versa<sup>[12]</sup>.

Combining the above two perspectives, this paper believes that entrepreneurship persistence should include two aspects :(1) negative feedback in the face of challenges and setbacks (e.g. resource shortage, poor performance, and lack of family support); (2) continue to pursue your current business regardless of other attractive opportunities and options.

## 2.3. Entrepreneurial success

Entrepreneurship is often defined as the creation of a new enterprise, while entrepreneurship success usually refers to that the indicators of a new enterprise (such as turnover, sales, profitability, customer satisfaction, corporate reputation, etc.) meet the high standards of the industry or meet the expected demand<sup>[13]</sup>. For entrepreneurial enterprises, especially most small and new enterprises, entrepreneurs are responsible for the operation decisions of enterprises, and master the development direction and life and death of enterprises. Therefore, some scholars believe that entrepreneurial success is the success of entrepreneurs. However, for large and medium-sized enterprises, entrepreneurial success is not simply the same as the success of entrepreneurs, other key elements like entrepreneurial team and entrepreneurial network are also play important role in the success of entrepreneurship which cannot be ignored. Whether it is individual success or organizational success, the entrepreneur's personal value orientation and persistence behaviour will have an important impact on the entrepreneurial outcome. A large number of studies have shown that work orientation can have an important and positive impact on the ultimate career success of workers. For example, the research of Wrzesniewski (1999) shows that the variables related to work motivation such as work orientation, self-efficacy<sup>[5]</sup>, motivation and effort may play a role in some form between work orientation and work outcome.

## 3. Theoretical Model and Hypothesis

This paper focuses on the mechanism of work orientation on entrepreneurial success. The following theoretical model is constructed (Figure 1).

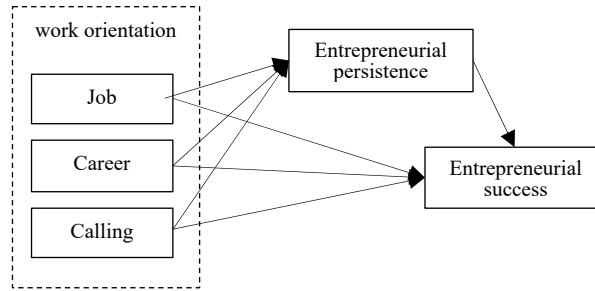


Figure 1 Working orientation and the mechanism of entrepreneurial success

### 3.1. The relationship between work orientation and entrepreneurial success

Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) showed that work orientation is related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of individuals<sup>[5]</sup>. Zhu, et.al(2016) found that those with more intrinsic motivation were more efficient than extrinsic motivation<sup>[14]</sup>. According to motivation theory, individual behaviour is driven by motivation to meet different levels of needs. Entrepreneurial motivation is an implicit driving force for entrepreneurs to achieve their personal goals by operating the enterprises they create<sup>[15]</sup>. The goals of entrepreneurs influence their behaviour patterns, thus influencing the success of entrepreneurship.

For entrepreneurs with job orientation, their entrepreneurial behaviours are driven by extrinsic motivation<sup>[15]</sup>, without strong achievement motivation, which makes entrepreneurs easy to retreat in the face of adversity and setbacks, thus reducing the success of entrepreneurship; Career oriented entrepreneurs pursue social status, industry reputation and social identity. Such external forces push them to work harder and achieve greater success to achieve their goals; Entrepreneurs with calling orientation have a strong intrinsic motivation. They regard entrepreneurship as an internal process of enjoyment, which can help them realize their personal value<sup>[16]</sup>, professional freedom and achievement needs. This kind of strong intrinsic motivation drives entrepreneurs to face challenges and difficulties in the entrepreneurial process with a more positive attitude<sup>[15, 17]</sup>, learn from failures, and more likely to set and work hard to achieve personal goals, thereby feeling psychologically successful.

Based on the above analysis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1a: Job orientation has a negative impact on entrepreneurial success.

Hypothesis 1b: Career orientation has a positive impact on entrepreneurial success.

Hypothesis 1c: calling orientation has a positive impact on entrepreneurial success.

### 3.2. The relationship between work orientation and entrepreneurial persistence

The personality traits of entrepreneurs play an important role in entrepreneurial persistence<sup>[18]</sup>. Entrepreneurs' work orientation reflects the cognition and identification of entrepreneurs to their own roles and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs with job orientation regard entrepreneurship as a mean of earning economic income, their entrepreneurship identity is the lowest. In contrast, calling-oriented entrepreneurs regard entrepreneurship as a sacred career to follow the inner call and realize self-value, and their sense of entrepreneurial identity is the highest. Research shows that the higher the entrepreneurial identity of entrepreneurs is, the more actively they can get involved in entrepreneurial work and even have "flow" experience. This flow experience is actually a positive emotional experience for the entrepreneur, which is of great significance to the entrepreneur's continuous efforts and persistence.

Entrepreneurs driven by passion can make continuous efforts, persist in spite of adversity and even failure, and focus on entrepreneurial activities. According to the self-concordant model, when individuals enjoy the process of their goal pursuit (intrinsic motivation) or identify with the ultimate value represented by the goal (determination of motivation), they will stick to the goal pursuit for longer. Wrzesniewski (1997) assumes that intrinsic motivation is most related to calling orientation,

while extrinsic motivation is most closely related to job orientation<sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, we speculate that call-oriented entrepreneurs will be more persistent in face of poor performance and setbacks, while the job oriented entrepreneurs will be attracted by other attractive external alternatives when facing negative feedback, so they are more likely to give up the current entrepreneurial opportunities. Although it is unclear whether career orientation is closer to extrinsic motivation or intrinsic motivation, but career-oriented entrepreneurs have strong personal self-esteem, which drives them to be more persistent. For example, Previous research found that, compared with those with low self-esteem, individuals with strong self-esteem persisted longer after being told the difficulty of adversity.

Therefore, the following assumptions are proposed:

Hypothesis2a: Job orientation has a negative impact on entrepreneurial persistence.

Hypothesis2b: Career orientation has a positive impact on entrepreneurial persistence.

Hypothesis2c: calling orientation has a positive impact on entrepreneurial persistence.

### **3.3. Mediating effect of entrepreneurial persistence on the relationship between work orientation and entrepreneurial success**

The positive impact of entrepreneurial persistence on the individual level is mainly reflected in personal success, which is embodied in personal growth, goal realization and spiritual return. When faced with setbacks, adversity, and other tempting alternatives, the entrepreneur's persistence is essentially a process of growth and learning. All kinds of adverse feedback push entrepreneurs to constantly improve their knowledge and ability, summarize experience in failure, strengthen the analysis and judgment of complicated information, in this process, entrepreneurs' knowledge and skills are improved.

For entrepreneurs with strong intrinsic motivation, start-up persistence is an intrinsically enjoyable process that helps them realize their personal value, professional freedom, and achievement needs.

The positive impact of entrepreneurial persistence on the organizational level is mainly reflected in the establishment of enterprises and the improvement of enterprise performance. As road to entrepreneurship is difficult, the passionate long-term persistence of entrepreneurs is more likely to achieve entrepreneurial goals and improve personal performance. Entrepreneurship persistence is a goal-oriented long-term persistence behaviour<sup>[9]</sup>. In the face of adversity, setbacks and even failure, entrepreneurs with persistent persistence and continuous efforts are more likely to achieve success.

Therefore, the following assumption is proposed:

Hypothesis3: Entrepreneurship persistence plays an intermediary role between job orientation and entrepreneurial success

## **4. Discussion**

In recent years, the research of entrepreneurship persistence in the field of entrepreneurship has gradually increased. The road of entrepreneurship is full of uncertainty and risk, which may experience endless difficulties, setbacks and even failures. Entrepreneurs need to bear endless pressure, and persistence is one of the important determinants of entrepreneurial success. Scholars discuss the antecedents of entrepreneurial persistence from the aspects of entrepreneurial self-efficacy<sup>[19]</sup>, entrepreneurial passion<sup>[9]</sup>, social support and social support<sup>[20]</sup>. However, the nature of the problem "what drives entrepreneurs to persevere on the way of entrepreneurship, and why individuals with similar resource endowments behave differently in persistence Behaviour" remains to be further revealed. This paper makes some contributions to answering this question. Focusing on the deep value orientation of entrepreneurs, based on the motivation theory, this paper puts forward the theoretical model of the function mechanism between work orientation, entrepreneurial persistence and entrepreneurial success.

The model of this paper points out that the value orientation held by entrepreneurs towards the established enterprises reflects an individual's implicit motivation, which is invisible but directly



affects entrepreneurs' persistent behaviours in the face of difficulties, setbacks and challenges, has a direct and indirect impact on the success of entrepreneurship. One of the purposes of this study is to enrich the literature on entrepreneurial success and entrepreneurial persistence, which will be helpful for future empirical studies on the relationship between work orientation, entrepreneurial persistence and entrepreneurial success.

## 5. Future Research

The future research can be carried out from the following aspects. First, relevant scales of entrepreneurial work orientation should be developed. Entrepreneurship is also a kind of work, both of which belong to the field of career. Entrepreneurial work orientation is the application of work orientation in the field of entrepreneurship, but the scale of entrepreneurial work orientation directly used in the field of entrepreneurship is not very suitable. Tian Xizhou (2018) developed a scale of entrepreneurial calling, including two dimensions of work purpose and meaning, with 13 items<sup>[21]</sup>. However, the job orientation and career orientation with entrepreneurs have not yet been discussed. Secondly, relevant empirical research has been carried out to test the relationship among work orientation, entrepreneurial persistence and entrepreneurial success. Due to the scale problem, empirical research has not been carried out in our study, which is a shortcoming of this paper. Future research can develop scales and carry out relevant empirical research. Finally, future studies can explore whether boundary conditions exist to regulate the relationship between work orientation and entrepreneurial persistence.

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