

# Students' autonomous motivation in relation to self-management, initiative and creativity when becoming an entrepreneur

Elina Malleus<sup>ac1</sup>, Urve Venesaar<sup>b</sup>, Kaja Mädamürk<sup>ab</sup>, Grete Arro<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *School of Natural Sciences and Health, Tallinn University*

<sup>b</sup> *School of Business and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology*

<sup>c</sup> *School of Educational Sciences, Tallinn University*

## Summary

Motivation has been an important research object of entrepreneurship that helps to understand what drives individuals towards entrepreneurial activities and how different motives of starting entrepreneurship are influencing the company's further development (Aijzen, 1991; Carsrud & Brännback, 2011; Shane, 2003). Motivation does not only differ in the aspects of strength, but also its quality, offering different opportunities to describe motivation (Carsrud et al., 2009; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Within the framework of self-determination theory (SDT) that is gaining popularity in various fields, researchers have distinguished between autonomous motivation (e.g. being interested in the field and entrepreneurship, having thought through the reasons and necessity of starting entrepreneurship) or controlled motivation (e.g. pressure from the society, need to continue a family business, guilt about the family's financial situation; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Researchers have found that people who are autonomously motivated towards different activities are also more engaged and can thereby, for example, solve complicated problems better, acquire new knowledge more effectively and be less sensitive to setbacks (Eseryel et al., 2014; Reeve, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Specific motives can change whilst being an entrepreneur and thus, growth of specific motives (e.g. autonomous motivation) can be supported through entrepreneurship education. For example, the intention of starting a company can be induced by the necessity of making a living, but after exploiting a business opportunity, an internal interest may arise.

As exploiting business opportunities is possible only as a result of an active engagement by the entrepreneur, understanding entrepreneurial behaviour and factors affecting it can help to explain how entrepreneurs create new

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<sup>1</sup> School of Natural Sciences and Health, Tallinn University, Narva mnt 29, 10120 Tallinn, Estonia; elina.malleus@tlu.ee

organisations. In starting entrepreneurship, there are different factors that are emphasised more in the literature affecting the process. It is important to be resilient in constantly changing (difficult) situations and resilience has been found to be related with having higher self-management skills, creativity and sense of initiative (Frese et al., 1997). In entrepreneurship education, it is important to increase the students' awareness of their behaviour and different factors that may be related to various situations. An outcome of entrepreneurship education can, therefore, be seen as offering possibilities to give sense to entrepreneurship-related thoughts and activities, as well as supporting the emergence of autonomous motivation.

In connection to entrepreneurship, the topics of motivation has been previously emphasised, but the relationship between autonomous motivation and other factors related to entrepreneurial success have been studied less. Thus, the objective of the current study was to assess the causes of deciding to be an entrepreneur, based on continuum of autonomous and controlled motivation, and to study different types of motives in relation to self-management skills, initiative and creativity. More specifically, the reasons why students decided to become or not to become an entrepreneur were studied, using a sample of students from universities and vocational schools throughout Estonia ( $N=497$ ; age 16–64).

The results of the study showed that students had a variety of reasons when starting a business and autonomous and controlled reasons were highlighted. More studies should be carried out with different methods (e.g. interviews) to understand better the variety of students autonomous and controlled motivation, but this study showed that interest and desire to carry out one's ideas are the most popular motives connected to autonomous motivation. Making money and completing projects to get a grade at school were motives described more often by students as controlled motivation. Similar results are found in previous studies, but not explicitly related to autonomous and controlled motivation (Elfing, 2008; Zanakis et al., 2012). Entrepreneurship education can support students by way of being more aware of different reasons that are behind their acts related to entrepreneurship. Prior studies that are based on SDT also describe how autonomous motivation is related to better outcomes in different situations and how the learning environment can support the growth of autonomous motivation being therefore suitable also for entrepreneurship education (Reeve, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005).

Secondly, the goal was to understand if there was a difference in self-management skills, sense of initiative and creativity between students who had started a business with autonomous motivation compared to students that had started a company with controlled motivation or had not started a company

at all. The results showed that students who had started the business based on autonomous motivation had also rated their self-management skills, initiative and creativity higher. As we used students' own ratings in our study, the overall better self-awareness may have mediated relations between different variables and, therefore, more studies should be done using different methods. However, our study still highlights the importance of paying attention to different aspects in entrepreneurial competence and how supporting students' awareness of their own motives behind making choices can affect their overall entrepreneurial behaviour and success. Therefore, different aspects that are related to entrepreneurship competence should be systematically supported through entrepreneurship education. Paying more attention to supporting growth of autonomous motivation may also be important in entrepreneurship education for entrepreneurs to be more aware of their behaviour and, therefore, be resilient in various situations.

*Keywords:* entrepreneurship education, autonomous motivation, motives for entrepreneurship, self-management, creativity