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Modeling the psychological characteristics of founders of industrial small and medium enterprises in Mazandaran

Seyd kamal Tourang¹ , Mohammad Hossein Hashemi Nasab² 

1- Department of Industrial Engineering, Faculty of Materials and Industrial Engineering, Babol Noshirvani University of Technology, Mazandaran, Iran.

2- Department of Public Administration, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to model the psychological characteristics of founders of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the industrial cooperatives of Mazandaran Province. This research is applicable in terms of purpose, and quantitative in terms of methodology. The statistical population consists of 893 business founders across the province, as defined by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM). Using Cochran's formula, a sample of 186 individuals was selected through simple random sampling. The data collection instrument was the Kiggundu (2002) questionnaire. Data analysis was performed by SPSS and LISREL software.

The findings indicate that the overall psychological construct under examination, within a measurement model and path analysis framework (structural equation modeling), explains the process of business start-up. Each psychological variable exerts both direct and indirect (interactive) effects on this process. Among these, the highest overall influence belongs to the sub-variable of internal locus of control, followed respectively by tolerance of ambiguity, job autonomy, need for achievement, motivation, and risk-taking. The study concludes by recommending that policymakers and relevant authorities, in order to enhance business start-up processes and foster productive employment, pay attention to these psychological variables in addition to other environmental and structural conditions.

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Publisher: Research Center of Resource Management Studies and Knowledge-Based Business

Corresponding Author: Seyd kamal Tourang

Email: sktourang@nit.ac.ir

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Entrepreneurs play a critical role in economic growth through leadership, management, innovation, efficiency, job creation, competition, productivity, and the establishment of new firms. It is widely believed that societies today require an “entrepreneurial revolution,” one whose significance in the current century surpasses even that of the Industrial Revolution. Business start-ups are considered a driving force behind economic development, employment generation, and social improvement (Jeanneaux et al., 2025). Entrepreneurship education focuses on equipping trainees with the knowledge and skills necessary to initiate and manage new ventures. In recent years, a notable shift has occurred, with increasing emphasis on developing broader entrepreneurial competencies such as creativity, problem-solving, opportunity recognition, and adaptability (Kallas & Parts, 2021).

Given the crucial role of business creation and the successful track record of entrepreneurs in the development of many countries—and considering the economic challenges faced by our own nation in both the private and public sectors—promoting and institutionalizing the concept of entrepreneurship, as well as establishing supportive cultural conditions and developing assessment models for identifying and supporting entrepreneurs, are of vital importance. The country’s young demographic structure and the urgent need for job creation, along with the necessity of reducing dependence on primary raw materials and moving beyond a single-product economy, combined with the dynamics of the information society, compel national policymakers to seek reliable alternative resources. Undoubtedly, in line with the requirements of the information society, such a resource is nothing other than creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurial business creation (Masoudi & Asgari, 2024).

In social network theory, business start-up is viewed as a process embedded within dynamic networks of social relationships—relationships that may either restrict or facilitate the entrepreneur’s access to resources and opportunities. Therefore, entrepreneurs as a group are both unique and diverse. Their similarities distinguish them from non-entrepreneurs, while their differences create a heterogeneous group, making the study of entrepreneurial characteristics inherently complex (Chauhan et al., 2024). Accordingly, based on the above discussions, the present study seeks to answer the following question: How can the psychological characteristics of founders of small and medium-sized enterprises in the industrial cooperatives of Mazandaran be modeled?

Theoretical Foundations

Business Start-Up

Business start-up is an interdisciplinary subject shaped by the cumulative contributions of various fields such as economics, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and management (Vajdi Vahid et al., 2024). Shams et al. (2025) examined the relationship between brand dependence and business performance through inter-organizational relationships and interactions within supply chain management environments. Their findings revealed that buyer–supplier interactive relationships and buyer–supplier commitment act as key mediators between brand dependence—specifically brand affordability, brand equity, and brand loyalty—and buyer–supplier communication, as well as between brand dependence and business performance. This study contributes to the branding literature by introducing the concept of brand dependence within the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In another study, Rezaei Sadrabadi et al. (2025) explored the role of open innovation, social capital, co-created knowledge, and collaboration with external partners in enhancing organizational agility amid the turbulence of today’s dynamic environment. Their research

proposed a new framework for applying open-agility enablers in selected SMEs located in the Yazd industrial zone. The findings indicate that organizational agility is significantly influenced by open innovation, and subsequently by collaboration with external partners and co-created knowledge. Moreover, social capital has a strong and positive impact on the development of co-created knowledge within these selected SMEs.

Research Methodology

This study is applicable in terms of purpose, and quantitative in its method of implementation. The statistical population consists of 893 business founders across the province, identified according to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) definition of business start-ups. Using Cochran's formula, a sample size of 186 individuals was determined and selected through simple random sampling. The data collection instrument used in this study was the questionnaire developed by Kiggundu (2002).

Research Findings

The data were analyzed by SPSS and LISREL software. The results indicate that the overall psychological construct examined in this study, assessed through a path-analysis measurement model (structural equation modeling), significantly explains the business start-up process. Each of the psychological dimensions demonstrated both direct and indirect (interactive) effects on this process. Among these variables, the strongest overall effect belonged to internal locus of control, followed by tolerance for ambiguity, work independence, need for achievement, motivation, and risk-taking, respectively.

The findings suggest that policymakers and relevant authorities should, in addition to other structural and economic conditions, pay close attention to these psychological characteristics in order to improve the business start-up process and promote productive employment.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted to investigate the modeling of the psychological characteristics of founders of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the industrial cooperatives of Mazandaran Province. The results of it align with the results of Shams et al. (2025), Jeanneaux et al. (2025), Omidi (2025), Monaisen et al. (2025), Rezaei Sadrabadi et al. (2025), Vahabi Abyaneh & Mobini Dehkordi (2025), Anne Magro et al. (2022), Baizhou et al. (2023), Mohtadi (2023), Bauwens et al. (2024), Chauhan et al. (2024), Farmahini Farahani et al. (2025), and Kallas & Parts (2021). Anne Magro et al. (2022) concluded that the prevailing viewpoints and perceptions toward entrepreneurship and its effects in France is not such positive. This study has also presented viewpoints about the factors effecting the success and failure of educational programmes, and investigated that how the business faculty of George Meissen University injects the free training approach into the business education, and utilizes a combination of effective methods such as primary year's seminars, shared thinking experiences, learning societies, cooperative assignments, specialized researches, society-based learning, training, final courses and projects, and global diversity and learning. The Meissen experience demonstrates the possibility and advantages of this integration.

According to the results, the following suggestions are presented:

In order to improve the entrepreneurship in the statistical population under study according to the entrepreneur's personal characteristics, it might be attempted by paying attention to the six personal variables which defines it in the real world. Therefore, it is necessary, at the first

step, the most attention paid to the inner control locus variable, following the rest variables according to their respective importance.