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Personal Career Success in the Eyes of Nascent Entrepreneurs Internationally

Abstract

Entrepreneurship is of key importance to economies and societies around the globe, and knowledge about how to support and stimulate it is needed. The purpose of this paper is to review the concepts of experiential learning, meaning-making of the self, and self-efficacy theory to investigate and understand young entrepreneurs' career development choices and their definitions of career success. Findings draw attention to the complexity of the concept of a successful career, emerging from the shared experiences of the entrepreneurs from different parts of the world. It is clear that young entrepreneurs seek work-life balance and bring this concept into their vision of success. They are also driven by self-evolving forces that push them into domains of self-exploration and self-discovery. Given these findings, the study highlights the importance of supporting young people through the presentation of challenges, as well as inspiring role models and the opportunity to learn from them.

Key words: entrepreneurs, success, career, experiential learning, personal development

Introduction

The importance of young entrepreneurs for the economy and society is growing. Not long ago, a job for life was a real option, however nowadays the average job tenure is shrinking, and young people are joining an increasingly dynamic job market. According to Word Economic Forum (2016), more than six out of ten children entering primary schools today will work in jobs that do not currently exist and many of them will start their own businesses. Entrepreneurship is a propeller for the world economy. Entrepreneurs create new businesses, add to national income and create social change. Entrepreneurship can be both a disposition and a behaviour (Voss, Voss & Moorman, 2005) but most importantly it is a learnable skill that can be taught. By 2030 almost 50% of existing jobs will have become automated (Frey & Osborne 2017), and we will need a new generation of job creators and independent thinkers, therefore we need to find ways to facilitate their development through education and work experience. The prospect of success is undoubtedly one of the strongest motivations to undertake any activity (Ibid.). In this paper, we investigate how young entrepreneurs from five countries define a successful "career", who they perceive to be successful, and what they consider their biggest successes to date. We will combine experiential learning theory with focus on the transformative learning, with related meaning-making of the self and self-efficacy theories to explain young people's perspectives on career development.

This paper investigates young, nascent entrepreneurs – individuals who are interested in starting, or have recently started an entrepreneurial journey. Whilst some of these start-up businesses will evolve into fully formed companies, many others will not succeed. In this instance, the young talent may enter the workforce through traditional employment in a full-time or part-time role, where HR Managers could benefit from being aware of their aspirations and interpretations of career success. Furthermore, these perceptions may not be unique to nascent entrepreneurs, and present young workers within existing businesses may share similar underlying motivations to varying degrees. The findings here hope to help HR managers to better understand the range of potential motivations and aspirations which may underpin employee behaviour within their workplace and to help young people maximise potential and achieve career success in both private and public sectors.

The paper is structured as follows: the first section presents a literature review around experiential learning, meaning-making of the self, and self-efficacy, before demonstrating how these concepts link together in the context of entrepreneurial success. In the second section, methods of the study are explained and in the third section results of a qualitative study of young entrepreneurs are presented, analysed and discussed. The final section of the paper presents conclusions and implications for Human Resource management professionals when working with young, entrepreneurial talent.

Literature review

Career research highlights the importance of self-knowledge and a systematic and thorough career exploration for making successful career choices (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988). There are several theories that can be drawn upon for research on career planning and development and they include Krumboltz's (1976) social learning theory of career development, Super's (1957) developmental self-concept theory and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. In the context of career development, Kolb's theory is particularly relevant given that learning plays a key role in constructing one's career choices (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988).

Therefore, for this research, Kolb's experiential learning theory together with meaning-making of the self (Kegan, 1982; 1994) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) theories will be used to explain career perceptions and career development of young people. The concepts of the meaning-making of the self and self-efficacy are closely linked to experiential learning. The choices individuals make regarding their career development require both a good self-knowledge, and a strong determination and belief in one's capability to achieve them. These

concepts, reinforced through experiential learning, contribute to forming the perception of a successful career. This paper discusses career development and perceptions of success from the perspectives of young entrepreneurs building their careers in different parts of the world. The following sections discuss the concepts of experiential learning, meaning-making of the self, and self-efficacy in more detail to demonstrate their connection to successful careers.

Experiential learning

'Experiential learning is a process that enables learning through 'doing', 'learning while experiencing', and learning through 'hands on practice' and 'reflection'' (Hill, 2017, p. 934). This type of learning plays a key role in personal and professional development for employees, however it is especially relevant within the context of young entrepreneurs who often have undefined career paths when initially starting their businesses.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model comprises of four stages of learning (see Figure 1) and is based on dual dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction (Kolb, 2015). Atkinson and Murrell (1988) provide a useful insight into this model. The cyclical learning journey starts with *concrete experience* which is managed through intuitive and affective responses to a situation. This is followed by *reflective observation*, which requires 'impartial perspective towards the learning situation' (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988, p. 375). Following this, *abstract conceptualisations* take place. Ideas for further actions are then created from logical thinking and rational evaluations of specific situations. Then the ideas are pragmatically tested during *active experimentation*, which requires action, participation and risk taking in learning. The cycle can then start anew, however usually with more complexity (Ibid.).
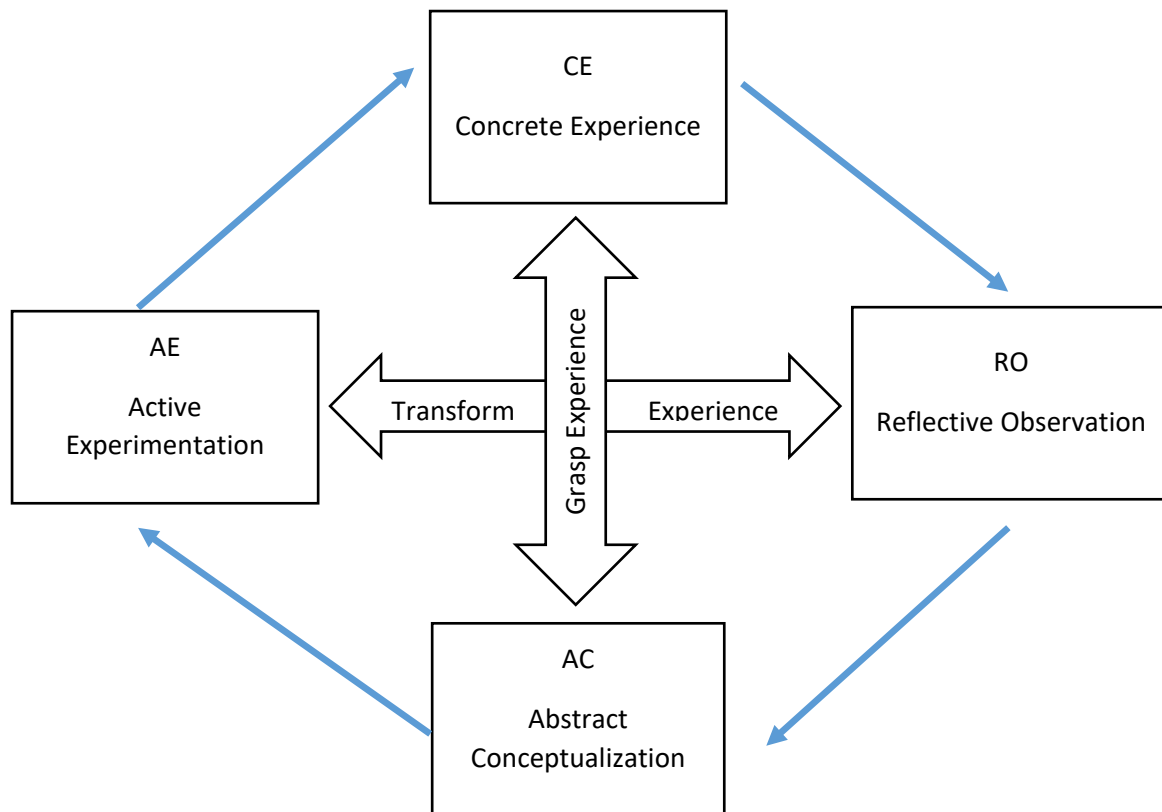
Figure 1. The experiential learning cycle. Adapted from Kolb, D.A. (2015).

Kolb (2015) views experiential learning as a process that creates knowledge through transformed experience which starts with grasping experience and transforming it through interpretation and new actions taken as a result of that interpretation. In other words, grasping is achieved through conceptualising a concrete experience (CE) whilst transformation derives from engaging in a reflective observation (RO) and active experimentation (AE). This suggests that learning is a holistic process and involves all four learning modes – experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting (Kolb, 2015).

Experiential learning theory describes an individual's learning process that can take place in various situations and areas of life (Kolb, 2015). Experiences are channelled into learning if they are 'inferred by a process of learning that questions preconceptions of direct experience, tempers the vividness and emotion of experience with critical reflection, and extracts the correct lessons from the consequences of action' (Kolb, 2015, p. XXI). Thus, the outcomes of learning are linked to past experiences and knowledge rather than predictions of the future and demonstrate an adaptation process to the social and physical environment in which the learning takes place (Kolb, 2015).

The process of experiential learning is unique to each individual as it is shaped by firstly the learner's experience, and then their individual reflection of the experience (Hill, 2017; Kolb, 2015). According to Kolb (2015), experiential learning is a continuous process 'whereby the learner will bring individual learning needs and experiences to their learning environment and learning communities' (Hill, 2017, p. 934). Thus, to benefit most from the learning, an individual must construct personal understanding based on previous experience and knowledge combined with reflections upon these (Hill, 2017).

Whilst experiential learning is clearly an important process in a wide range of work and career development settings, there is a particular relevance for young entrepreneurial talent. Entrepreneurship and innovative activities are inherently risky, as the outcome of such activity is not known at the start of the venture (Drucker, 1985). As there is no set path to follow, a process of 'learning by doing and reflecting' (which is the essence of experiential learning) is the norm for many new start-ups (Gartner, 1988). This concept of experiential learning at a business level has been proposed in 'learn start-up' theory, which encourages start-up entrepreneurs to test and redefine (pivot) their business based on first-hand experiences with customers (Blank, 2013). The 'build, measure, learn' cycle of business development proposed by Ries (2011) has distinct similarities to Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984), albeit relating to venture creation rather than personal development.

For individuals, the process of going through experiential learning cycles, specifically once they have reflected and analysed experiences, can also lead to transformational personal developments. An area of significant development can occur when individuals start to attach meaning to themselves and their situations.

Meaning-making of the self

Experiential learning not only leads to the individual having an enlarged fund of knowledge and expanded repertoire of skills, the process can also lead to extended cognitive structures. Kegan (2009) notes that such transformational changes can either occur within an established frame of reference (a short-term change), or outside a frame of reference which results in a higher-order change in the way the individual views the world. Such frames of reference relate to a way of knowing (an epistemology); which is *how* something is known, rather than *what* is known (Ibid.). When a person changes the way they construct meaning from an experience, it is referred to as an *evolutionary truce* (Kegan, 1982). These evolutionary truces occur when a person aims to find balance between themselves and either others or the external environment (Ibid.).

Each evolutionary truce is both an achievement of, and a constraint on, meaning-making, therefore they possess both strengths and limitations (Kegan, 1982). Each evolutionary truce presents a new solution to a life-long tension between *integration* (how people are connected, attached and included), and *differentiation* (how people are distinct and independent). Kegan (1982, 1994) argues that separation from the true self, others and nature causes psychological distress resulting in a sense of anxiety and depression. This feeling is triggered when an evolutionary truce requires renegotiation and a new self-system must ultimately emerge.

Kegan (1982, 1994) divided individuals into those that have a *socialized-mind* (3rd order of consciousness) and those with a *self-authoring mind* (4th order of consciousness). The meaning-making of individuals with a socialized-mind is shaped by the definitions and expectations of the surrounding environment and society. The socialized-mind individual is faithful to, and be defined by, the expectations imposed onto them from their surroundings; their family, educational upbringing, companies, social norms and regulatory requirements. Thus, the socialized-mind individual becomes more responsible and trustworthy to the wider community, which in itself is an achievement.

However, in modern society, there is an increasing demand on individuals to step back from the expectations of others (their surroundings), and to generate an internal 'set of judgments' with personal authority to evaluate and make choices based on their own, independent belief systems. The person who is able to self-author their own identity has progressed to a 4th order of consciousness and is referred to as a *self-authoring* mind. A self-authoring 'self' adheres to their own belief system, ideology or personal code; providing an ability to self-direct, take stands, set limits, create and regulate boundaries on behalf of their own voice.

It is important to understand the different orders of consciousness proposed by Kegan (1982) and how they may affect individuals. Firstly, individuals must undertake meaning-forming activity through drawing meaning from their raw experiences. By then changing their framework the individual can construct new ways of finding meaning (Kegan, 2009).

Meaning-forming is closely related to informational experiential learning, with meaning-construction being linked to transformation experiential learning. Transformational learning expands the horizon for the individual, allowing a more objective analysis of the self, which is ultimately important for career and personal development. Meaning-making of the self resulting in career or personal development will therefore impact on decisions and actions for many young entrepreneurs. The stages of human development are age dependent, and therefore meaning-making structures will also be shaped by age. Between 20- and 30-years old individuals mainly occupy socialized self, with only a minority of people at this age occupying the self-authoring stage (Kegan, 1994). In general, only 20%-30% of adults reach

the stage of self-authoring self, usually later in life (Eriksen, 2006). Kegan (on his RSA Talk) and Zaytoun (2012) put forth a tentative proposition that the core evolutionary challenge of contemporary humanity is to get a greater portion of population moving from socialized self, to self-authoring self and even further to the self-transforming self.

Within the context of young entrepreneurial talent, it is important to consider this meaning-making activity to understand how individuals attach meaning to their experiences. It could be proposed that individuals with the socialized sense of self have distinctively different career meaning-making than people characterised by self-authoring sense of self. Similarly, their definitions of successful careers are likely to be different depending on their loyalty to socio-cultural reasoning. This theoretical framework provides an interesting backdrop when considering young talent, the career decisions they make, and their perceptions of success.

Self-Efficacy

An individual's willingness to take entrepreneurial steps can relate to their self-efficacy and locus of control. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief that they themselves can perform at the required level to succeed in their endeavours (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy is seen as something which can be developed, rather than simply being innate.

Bandura (1994) proposes ways that self-efficacy can be built up within an individual. The most significant way to build self-efficacy is through 'mastery experiences', which relate closely to experiential learning. Mastery experiences occur when an individual carries out a task successfully themselves – understandably raising the individual's belief that they can accomplish this task on subsequent attempts (Bandura, 1994). Although Bandura (1994) states that first-hand experience is the most effective for raising self-efficacy, seeing other people succeed also creates belief. Within a sub-culture where an individual simply observes another individual succeeding, the observer's belief in their own ability also rises (Ibid). These factors could be relevant when considering entrepreneurial activity and career decisions within young talent, as often within University settings or similar they are exposed to other successful entrepreneurs. Bandura (1994) further highlights 'social persuasion, where individuals are verbally persuaded by others that they have the capabilities to succeed, and 'reducing stress reactions', as the remaining two situations which enhance self-efficacy. It is interesting to note that whilst Bandura (1994) highlights the importance of mastery experiences for raising an individual's belief, there are instances where this is not the case. Bandura and Locke (2003) proposes that for some individuals the pressure of duplicating a particularly challenging successful feat can cause self-doubt and lower self-efficacy.

An individual's motivation to pursue entrepreneurial activity can also be dependent on their perception of locus of control. Individuals either have an internal or external locus of control. An individual with an internal locus of control believes their own actions and behaviours alone contribute to the resultant outcome. Whereas, an individual with an external locus of control tends to believe that chance, luck or external factors are the biggest influence of resultant outcomes (Rotter, 1990). Rotter (1966) proposes that individuals with an internal locus of control, who believe their actions and attributes contribute to success, are likely to be more motivated and open to trying and learning new things. Individuals with an external locus of control, who are more likely to attribute success to luck, are often less likely to put in the required effort.

Through experiential learning and mastery experiences an individual's self-belief rises. For individuals deciding whether or not to pursue entrepreneurial activity, the culture they surround themselves with also needs to be considered. Bandura noted the impact of seeing other people succeed, and Nowiński & Haddoud (2019) and Abaho et al. (2015) further note the impact that role models can have on the individual. This may mean that the observation of success does not need to be first-hand but could be through watching role models at a distance. This could be important when analysing entrepreneurial talent's career choices.

This part of the paper reviewed experiential learning, self-meaning making, and self-efficacy theories within the context of individual career development and entrepreneurial activity. These different learning, understanding and psychological concepts show a certain level of interconnectivity when applied to the development of entrepreneurs and their career choices. As the literature highlights, career development requires a complex process of actions to allow the individual to move from one stage to the next in both personal and professional development. This process involves undertaking experiences, reflections and observations to create new conceptualisations and meaning-making. New sets of actions then need to be aligned with the new, more developed, self of the individual. Entrepreneurial activity can then be undertaken and monitored with the support of a strong inner sense of control and self-efficacy. Such characteristics are often required to counteract the perceived risks and challenges on the path to success.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to achieve a deeper understanding of what *success* and the concept of a *successful career* means to young entrepreneurial talent. In order to achieve this objective, a qualitative approach was taken in the form of individual interviews which allowed in-depth understanding of the complexity and multi-dimensionality of these phenomena (Miles

& Huberman, 1994), and enabled the respondents to share their views and experiences freely (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

A semi-structured interview scenario was used. It was divided into 5 sections. For the purpose of this analysis this paper mainly focused on one of these sections; section 3 'understanding success and a successful career'. This semi-structured interview provided a certain formality, helped build rapport with the respondents and allowed unexpected issues to emerge from the conversation (Seidman, 1998; Wengraf, 2001). The interviewers asked open-ended questions and encouraged the respondents to elaborate whenever possible (Lindolf, 1995). The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via Skype and typically lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. The language of the interview depended on both the interviewers' and the interviewees' preferences and language proficiency, with most of them being conducted in English, and others in the national languages of the participants (e.g. Polish and Slovenian).

The sample selection procedure was based on convenience, however the respondents were considered 'knowledgeable agents' because they discussed their personal and work-related experiences (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). The sample comprised 20 respondents of 5 nationalities (British, Irish, Korean, Polish and Slovenian) with 6 female and 14 male respondents. All respondents were 20-39 years old and had experience running their own business. Detailed respondents' characteristics are presented in Table 1.

ID	Gender	Nationality	Age range	Current occupation
R1	F	Korean	35-39	Business owner (private school of English language)
R2	M	Korean	35-39	Business owner (pet products)
R3	M	Korean	35-39	Company owner (protein production)
R4	F	Korean	35-39	Business owner (café)
R5	F	Korean	25-29	Private tutor (English)
R6	M	Korean	25-29	Business owner (guesthouse)
R7	M	Korean	35-39	Business owner (guesthouse)
R8	F	Korean	25-29	Works at a company, plans starting own business
R9	M	Irish	30-35	PhD student, owner of several businesses
R10	M	Irish	25-29	Business owner (apps)
R11	M	Irish	25-29	Family business (café)
R12	M	Irish	20-24	Digital engineer

R13	M	British	30-35	Business owner (marketing)
R14	F	Polish	30-35	Business owner (interior design)
R15	M	Polish	25-29	Works at a company, plans starting own business
R16	M	Slovenian	20-24	Starting own business (vending machines with healthy food)
R17	M	Slovenian	25-29	Employed at a company (marketing)
R18	F	Slovenian	30-35	Co-founder of a start-up (talent marketplace and matching platform)
R19	M	Slovenian	30-35	Co-founder of a start-up (talent marketplace and matching platform)
R20	M	Slovenian	20-24	Artist and artist liaison

Table 1. Respondent's Characteristics

All interviews were recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim. Data was coded in an iterative manner to accommodate emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The coding was performed by all authors and discussions led to identification of major themes. Table 2. presents how final concepts and categories emerged.

Codes in interviews with British and Irish entrepreneurs	Codes in interviews with Polish and Slovenian entrepreneurs	Codes in interviews with Korean entrepreneurs	1st order concepts	2nd order categories
Creation of something new Being an expert Independence Freedom Achieving goals Doing something well Balance Money Happiness	Time for family Time for self Growing business Sustainable business Helping people Profits Pride	Happy life Work-life balance and money Money Material things Good occupation Being a specialist Wealth and hierarchy	Happiness Pride Satisfaction	Feelings
			Creation/development Contribution Achieving goals	Actions
			Balance Respect Independence/freedom	State
			Money	Material means

			Possessions	

Table 2. Sample concepts and categories within a 'successful career'

Analysis of the results

This part of the paper presents the findings that emerged from the analysis of the data gathered via in-depth semi-structured interviews. It discusses the young entrepreneurs' understanding of a successful career, their perceptions of successful people and considerations of their greatest success so far. Analysis of collected data led to the identification of multiple constructs that have been combined into broader categories and themes. The results are presented in Figure 2. and discussed in subsequent sections of the paper.
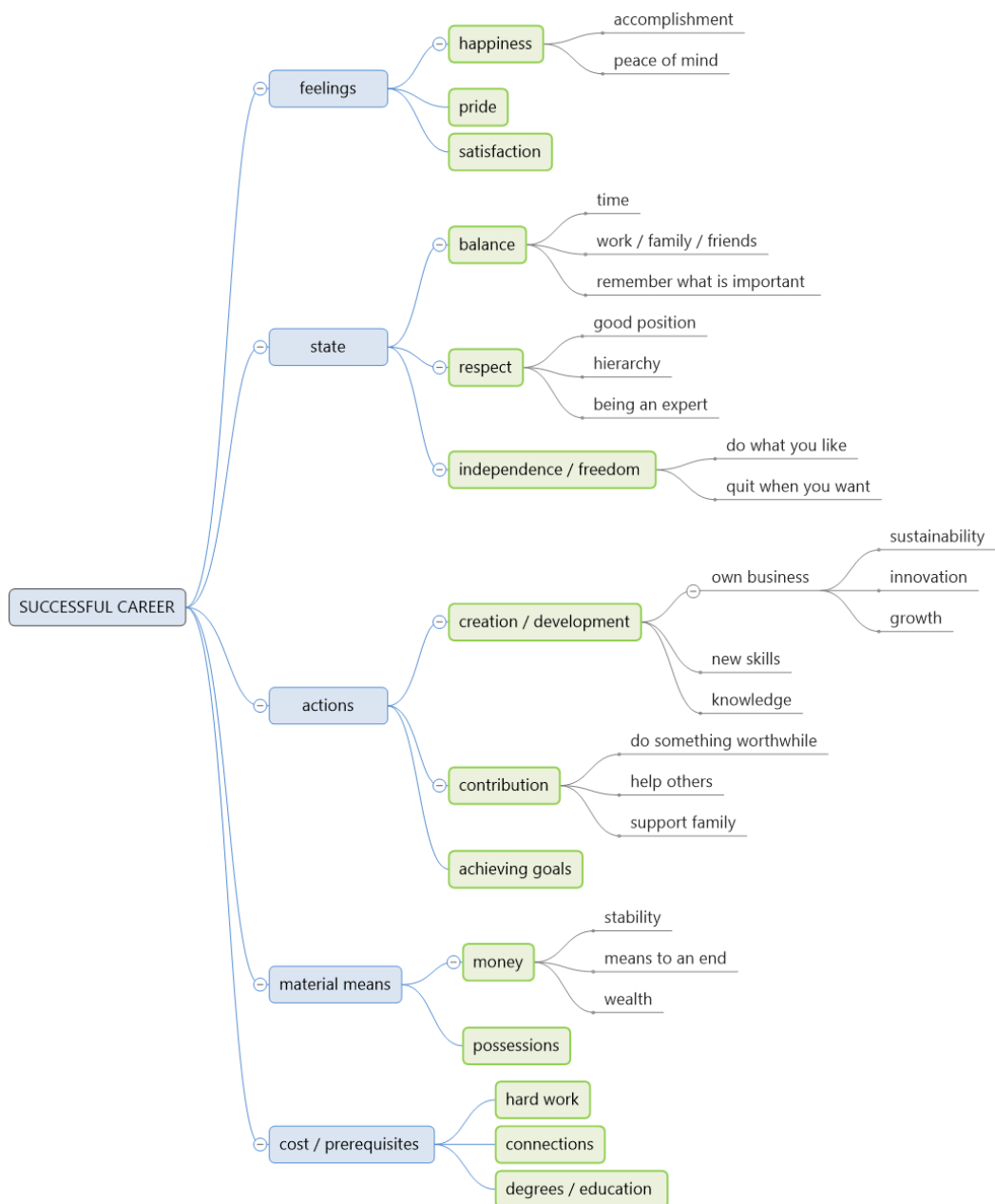
Figure 2. Themes within a 'successful career' concept

Successful career

According to our respondents, a successful career can be associated with certain feelings, actions and states of mind, as well as material artefacts. Success also comes at a certain cost. In terms of actions, the respondents claimed that having a successful career means that certain goals have been achieved. This is a rather generic statement, but it implies subjectivity of this concept; when every person can set different goals and strive to achieve them. When discussing actual activities, the respondents mentioned two aspects here: making a contribution and creating and developing something new. Contribution meant doing something

worthwhile or being able to help others, e.g. one's family or employees. The latter concept was understood mainly as establishing one's own company, where the company is ultimately characterised as sustainable, innovative and growing. This means that an endeavour has been positively verified by the market. A successful career was also associated with internal development that resulted in acquiring new skills and gaining knowledge that make a successful person stand out from the regular crowd. An interesting understanding of a successful career was reflected in the concept of contribution. According to some of the respondents this meant having a greater impact on society through helping others, supporting one's family and doing things that are worthwhile.

The respondents also associated a successful career with certain emotions and a state of mind. The emotions comprised of happiness, satisfaction and pride, which all resulted mainly from a job well-done and goal accomplishment. However, happiness seemed to mean more for the respondents – it was a general feeling of being happy with oneself, work and life. It was directly connected with balance, a desirable state of mind accompanying a successful career, which meant being able to combine work, family, hobbies, etc. and to remember what is truly important.

To me personally reaching goals and be happy at what I do. A lot of people measure success just in financial income. To some extent it is but, in the end, what you need, is both happiness and financial sustainability and a lot of people along the way forget that happiness is also something you need to have [R16]

To be happy and satisfied with the things I'm doing [R17]

A successful career as many people like to think is something that makes you happy [R5]

I want to be proud of what I've created, of a company that I've created [R14]

First for all of my twenties, successful career meant for me, even though I didn't buy expensive things, I didn't wear expensive clothes, success was money. And my now wife, spent years trying to convince me that that's not what success is. And she finally got through me. And I'm a lot happier ever since, to be able to say, no I'm not going to work Saturday and Sunday. I'm actually gonna go, we're gonna take the dog and go for a hike [R9]

A successful career was also viewed as one which gave the individual independence and freedom to do what they liked or to quit when they wanted, instead of being blindly loyal to a company or attached to an endeavour:

> *Success is so strange, everyone has different measures… for me – being financially free; so I don't have to work if I don't want to, supporting my friends and family, and doing projects that I enjoy every single day* [R13]

Our respondents also expressed an opinion that a successful career is associated with certain external respect resulting from one's expertise in a field or a position held in a company's hierarchy.

A successful career meant material benefits: possessions and money. While material possessions were mentioned by very few respondents, money received significantly more attention. Interestingly, wealth as such was considered an imperfect indicator of a successful career. What mattered more were the outcomes of having money such as achieving financial stability. Some respondents claimed that money is merely a means to an end, not an objective in itself.

> *In Korea if someone is rich they think he is successful, like money... I think it's the same everywhere. But then also like a nice company, reputation is really important* R8
>
> *Those successful careers, usually people who are working on very high positions and get a lot of salary* [R4]

Our respondents were also aware that a successful career comes at a certain cost and one needs to meet certain prerequisites, such as having the right education and completing academic degrees. Hard work is definitely needed but occasionally the right connections can give one an extra push towards a career.

> *But in order to be successful, you need to gain some experience; you need to work, you need to get in touch with things in different business positions and so on* [R17]

Successful person

When discussing the perception of a successful person, the respondents' observations fell into two categories: *internal characteristics* of a successful person, such as their skills, personality traits, attitude and feelings; and *external aspects*, including achievements, status, inspiration and support (see Figure 3.). It can be observed that these concepts closely correspond with the concept of a successful career.
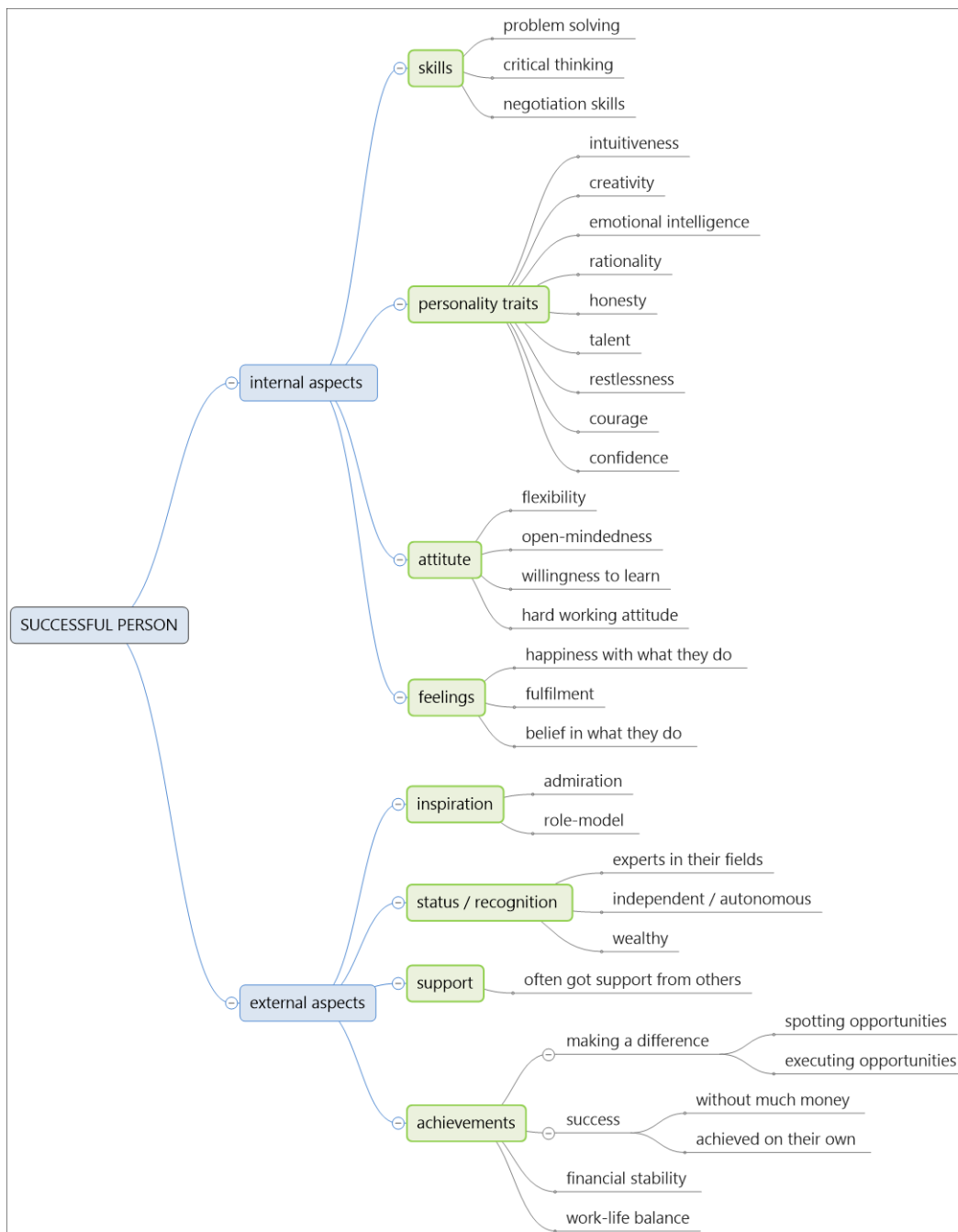

Figure 3. Themes within a 'successful person' concept

According to the respondents, a successful person should be a critical thinker, problem solver, have good negotiation skills and be able to spot opportunities, exploit them and make sure

other people follow and cooperate. In terms of personality traits, the list comprises many characteristics that sometimes seem to be contradictory; for example, being both rational and intuitive. In fact, given the variety of meanings of a successful career, various traits can be useful. The respondents emphasised a need for rationality, talent and confidence in one's actions, as well as intuition, creativity and emotional intelligence. A successful person is also perceived as someone who has the drive to achieve more and the courage to pursue their goals. They also need to be open-minded and willing to learn, as well as hard working. Most of these qualities are typical of good leaders and entrepreneurs. Finally, being a successful person comes with certain feelings - including happiness with what they do, and confidence that it is the right thing to do. This can be accompanied by fulfilment resulting from being the right person in the right place and making a significant contribution.

The external aspects mentioned by the respondents referred to actual activities and perceptions of a successful person. Achievements included endeavours that actually made a difference, as well as financial stability. Some respondents mentioned that successful people achieve everything themselves, while others emphasised that they often receive significant support from others. The latter issue specifically was mentioned by women (Polish and Korean) when they talked about successful men. Recognition comes with success and successful people are considered to be experts in their fields, which in turn results in their perception as being an inspiration and worthy of admiration. The respondents also believed that truly successful people had independence to do what they wanted and at the same time were able to balance their work and family life well. These opinions are illustrated by the following quotes:

Successful people have this vibe. I mean I don't like the people who are too self-confident, who brag about what they achieve. That's totally different. But you know someone who talks about business that make some impression and he does it every day, like it's so natural then I think that this person really is very far away. I have to catch up because that is this feeling of this natural being in the place, doing those things, knowing those people and… the scale of the enterprise, the money - when it becomes natural [R14]

I admire people who are successful in general [R17]

Successful people's financial conditions are really nice, or the educational, or the good family, nice car [R1]

Successful [person] is a specialist in his field [R3]

I think successful person would have would be in a role where you really enjoy your work and also have good life and work balance, yeah, and stable income, and working with good people with no politics. You're looking at the same aim, same vision you know everyone helping each other to solve same problem or achieve same goal. Because you get good energy from the people at work [R6]

Successful career and successful people are the two aspects of a definition of success to which entrepreneurial young people aspire for. We can see them as attractors which guide their future career choices. We can see that both the successful career and the successful people definitions provided by the entrepreneur interviewees expand beyond the narrow idea of success. Career success encompasses integration of work and life (not positioning them as two separate aspects), financial stability and contribution to society, rationality and intuition, courage to pursue goals one's of own value, capacity to stand out, be financially and otherwise independent. Wealth (material abundance or money) is not a dominant identifier of success. Also, happiness is a building block of success, being the outcome when one manages to balance multiple domains well (work, family, creating greater good etc.).

These are the identifiers of the self-authoring mind (Kegan, 1982, 1994), where one is capable of liberating one's own value system separate from those socially constructed, of creating meaning and of living by one's own definition of success. This is what the entrepreneurs here are driving at or are in the process of becoming. Furthermore, the discussions also imply that the entrepreneurs believe that many successful people became so because of their inner power or developed qualities/skills. This is associated with an internal locus of control, which again allows them to move away from socially defined conditions of success.

Success so far

When talking about their greatest success so far, the respondents referred to occurrences from the past, the present and the future (see Figure 4.).
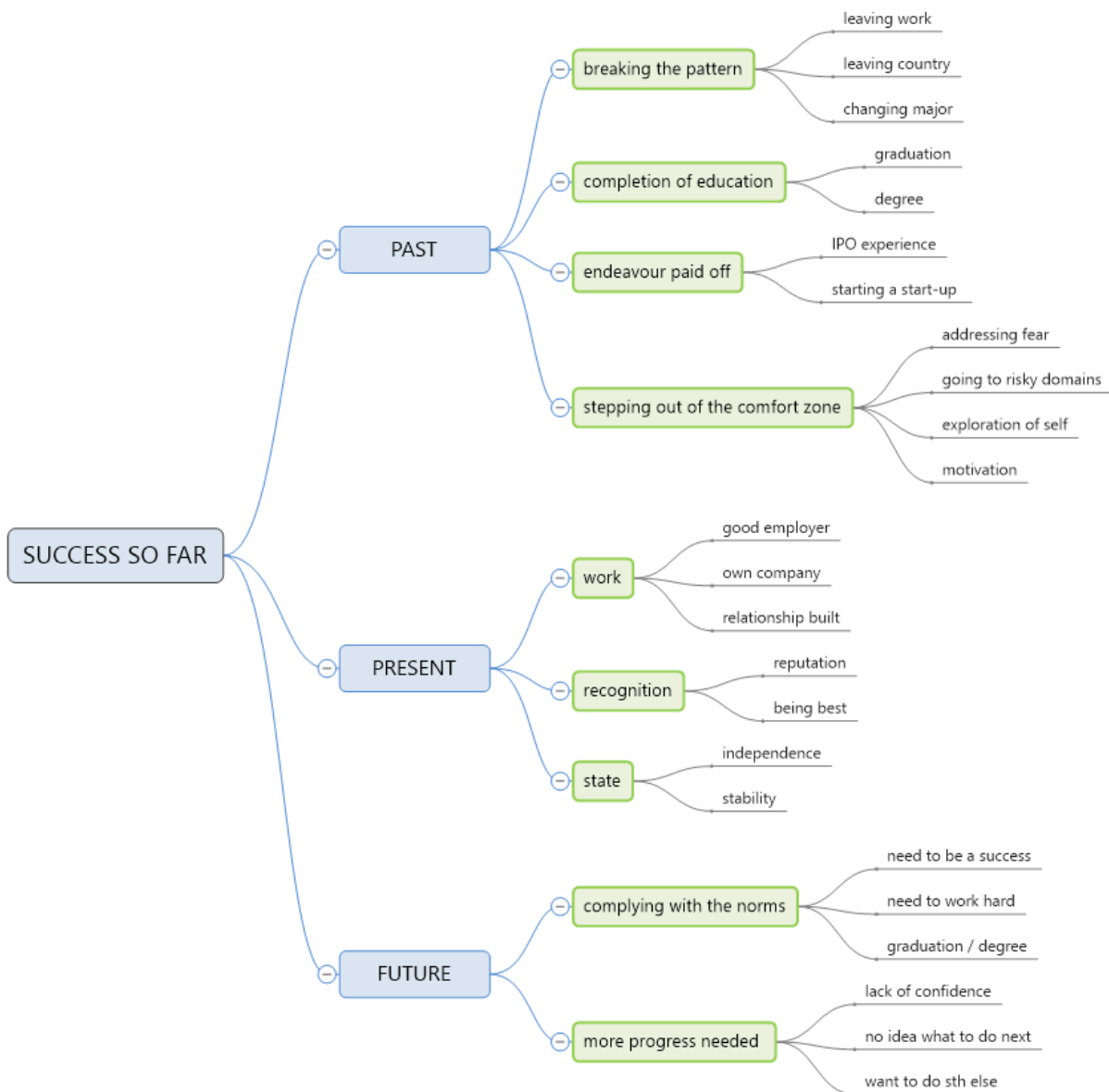
Figure 4. Themes within a 'success so far' concept.

When speaking about the past, they often evoked memories of important events such as a successful business endeavour, completion of an education level and obtaining an academic degree or introducing a major change (e.g. leaving work). Another reference to past successes was made when the respondents described significant experiences in their lives that included stepping out of their comfort zones and pushing their boundaries, which subsequently led to self-enhancement and self-exploration. These past successes are illustrated by the following quotes:

I finished this study, masters, quite difficult masters with nice grades. This was a good achievement [R17]

So instead of two exams, you get to write the thesis. I decided to do it, and probably not a lot of people decide to do this because obviously it's quite an effort. I would say that was a success for me [R18]

I think that I wanted to do master's in marketing abroad and I did it and I feel satisfied. And I worked in Germany as well. I didn't intend to go there but then I got an opportunity... I applied for a job but without expectation because I didn't think to go to Berlin and then I got the offer and it was such a huge experience, short but still... I am a Korean in a European country and it gave me confidence [R8]

The second theme referred to present accomplishments. Three major topics emerged from data analysis: work, recognition and state of mind. Work-related successes mostly focused on running a company that was sustainable and allowed the respondent to make a living. One of the respondents named being a good employer as his major success, while another one spoke of establishing good relationships with business partners. In terms of recognition, the respondents listed having a good reputation and being the best in their fields. The last topic in this theme pointed towards a respondent's state of mind – success was linked with comfortable stability and the freedom to do what one wants.

I haven't worked for anyone else for the last 4 years. Every penny I have is because of me. I've given 4 different people work. I've given people their first job – and it's been a good job. I've looked after them, because I remember what it was like having a first job that was really crummy. So, I'm proud that the first job that these people have on their CV was working for me, and they get me to write their references, and they go on to bigger and better things. No one can take that away. I've not relied on anyone else [R13]

But I think that's the place I'm in right now, that I haven't looked for customer in months or if not longer… that I earn good money, I have very nice clients, nice co-workers, that I like to work with. I have interesting projects, so yeah, I think that everyday life now is the success that I was dreaming about [R14]

My success is just my ability to be flexible [R3]

Interestingly, the third theme referring to the future was marked with some tension and uncertainty and the respondents focused on what they would need in order to be considered successful. They mentioned that achieving success requires compliance with certain social norms and expectations, such as completion of education and hard work, while others worried whether they would be able to accumulate enough money. Some respondents felt pressure to be successful but did not have full confidence in themselves. This could result from the fact that some people had a rather vague idea of what they wanted to do within their career, so success could not be clearly visualised.

A lot of confusion. Probably also a lot of stress. A lot of unpredicted situations. But at the end of this tunnel, it should be one little spotlight, and that's it [R18]

If I wanted to give myself some security for the future in case anything changes […] then I would definitely have to do more formal education [R5]

For example, even if I get my undergraduate degree I mean it was like "well okay", but I need to get my master's degree. I'm still thinking about more [R18]

If you're not as confident with yourself and maybe even if you have an idea and you know how you want to do it, you are just afraid to do it [R19]

For me it's very important to save some money for my future [R4]

The analysis of 'my success for far' reveals the reality of the career success the entrepreneurs actually live now. Thus, it implies their current way of living and being, as opposed to the previous which indicated their trajectory of becoming. Their current way of living, their 'successful career', is dominated by the patterns compliant with socially dominant definitions of success as presented in the media, education and the economic system (in general by modern society). Success is realised by complying with the definition of success in education (finishing master's degree, Ph.D.), media and business (creating one's own start-up, being a good employee, having good relationships). Being one's relationships and one's attachment is the dominant paradigm of the 'socialized mind' (Kegan, 1982, 1994), implying that the analysed young entrepreneurs are situated in this order of consciousness.

Interestingly their underlying force for evolving their 'self' is also emphasised in this stage, where success is related to the willingness and courage to self-explore and step in to the unknown. This force being present in their immediate awareness postulates that their self-evolving power is strong and thus they try to live by it. Living self-exploration is the core

indicator which makes the move into the higher-order of consciousness, the self-authoring mind which is signified by more independent definition of career success.

Another interesting pattern revealed by the data, shows the interviewees' concept of self-efficacy is in the process of construction. Self-efficacy and locus of control are considered key characteristics of people starting business ventures (the stage at which all our interviewees are). Further traits, including 'hope' and 'resilience', then become important in the ongoing running of the venture and resultant business success. On the one hand, they have belief in their own capacity to develop a successful company, which is elaborated enough that they are willing to set up their own business, yet on the other hand their immediate experience of business creation can also result in self-doubt.

Discussion and Implications

The interviews collected the viewpoints of success and successful careers from a range of Korean, Polish, Slovenian, Irish and British self-identifying young entrepreneurs and business founders, and they helped to identify culturally engrained ideas pertaining to career success. For this study, all of the interviewees were in the early-stage or pre-start of their career paths. The opinions sought were based around their personal self-perceptions providing a primarily subjectivist set of responses where respondents themselves defined their own personal success criteria.

In the interviews, success emerged as a very subjective term, deeply shaped by individual learning experiences. Lifelong learning is inseparable from entrepreneurial journeys. It can be argued that entrepreneurial and career success in general can be determined by how much of that learning is used by entrepreneurs to shape their future careers. According to Kolb (2015), lifelong learning is controlled by the individual, therefore the outcomes of learning very much depend not solely on the experience but how much the individual is able to use their own learning in order to question 'preconceptions of direct experience', 'temper the vividness and emotion of experience with critical reflection', and extract 'the correct lessons from the consequences of action' (p. xxi).

In this study, the shared experiences of the entrepreneurs from different parts of the world demonstrate that success is a complex concept. It cannot be achieved without making an effort to reflect and learn, to understand oneself and believe in oneself. In theoretical terms, this relates to experiential learning, sense making of the world and oneself and self-efficacy needed to push oneself to the next level of one's consciousness and career experiences. The interview excerpts show that young people, who in Kegan's research line predominantly occupy the stage of socialized-minds (Kegan, 1994), deviate from societal definitions of

success understood predominantly as a materialistic betterment, higher status and achievements.

Furthermore, the younger generation seeks work-life balance and happiness and brings these concepts into their vision of future success. Success requires sacrifice, devotion and determination which can be achieved through self-control and self-efficacy. However, it equally depends on the individual's ability to reflect and learn from past experiences. The participants of this study proved to be constructing their new concepts and understandings of the world continuously given that their perceptions of success change from materialistic visions to more balanced ideas about success and successful careers. This happens as a result of reflecting on their primary experiences of earning income through their own entrepreneurial efforts and applying these experiences to the new ways of working and living.

These findings also show a certain level of self-authorship relating to which definition of success an individual uses. Whilst Kegan (1994) would state that individuals within this age-range (20 to 30 years old) would usually have a socialized-mind, many respondents appear to possess elements of a self-authoring mind regarding their meaning-making around the concept of 'a successful career' as the object of this study. The young, entrepreneurial subpopulation appears to have removed themselves from socially imposed expectations, and instead self-author their own ideas about what it means to have a successful career. The ability to subvert normal trends is often essential for entrepreneurs when starting a new business. The respondents in this study further rebel from the societal norm by seeing work (career) and life as one intertwined domain, rather than separate elements. This results in career choices not being made solely within the context of the individual's work career, however by also considering the impact choices will have on all aspects of their life.

Human Resource Managers intending to manage young entrepreneurial people should consider the implications of these findings relating to the meaning behind the concepts of success in career specifically and in life generally. Depending on the level of consciousness of the individual, the appropriateness of societally defined rewards will vary considerably. Understanding the intertwined nature of young talented people's work career with their wider life and ambitions could help to provide insight into their driving motives and corresponding behaviours. Furthermore, how a company positions itself in order to attract and retain such talent (how they support and reward their employees) could be shaped around enhancing well-being and life, rather than simply career progression within work.

Analysis of the results further demonstrates that the sample group of entrepreneurial young people are driven by a strong self-evolving force that pushes them into different domains of self-exploration and self-discovery. These developments occur through business creation, education, relationships, and the accumulations of other strong experiences including travel or working abroad. The transition from socialised-mind to self-authoring mind applies to all aspects of life, rather than just within a work career. Therefore, any structured assistance or coaching provided by the company that aims to develop their young talent from socialized to self-authoring mind would be beneficial and would serve as an attractor to talent with strong self-evolving forces. This developmental assistance is critical for all managers who are transitioning to more complex and dynamic organizational roles. However, we also propose that it would create improved job engagement and loyalty for young people (especially those with more entrepreneurial mind-set). As proposed by Kegan and Lahley (2001), Human Resource Managers could look to implement coaching processes in to their organisations; identifying hidden beliefs about career success, noticing the implications of these beliefs, looking for any countering evidence, charting how these beliefs change, and then testing the truth of these beliefs. Young, entrepreneurial talent within existing organisations would be a good testing ground for HRM practitioners to observe and test career success beliefs.

Within the research findings, there are multiple mentions of the confidence gained from undertaking entrepreneurial activity or observing others doing so. Bandura (1994) identified that learning by doing (experiential learning) and seeing other, relatable people succeed have a distinct impact on an individual's belief that entrepreneurship could be a viable career path. The impact of role models is clear, however sometimes these can simply be other individuals within a business incubator or shared work space. As self-efficacy is something that can be developed, this could be managed well be HRM practitioners to ensure that the development of all young talent is properly nurtured. Either through company-wide showcasing of successful employee activity, or more organised buddy/mentoring schemes, proactive, innovative behaviour could be fostered.

The career paths of the youngest generations differ from the previous generations significantly with modern career patterns being described as 'boundaryless', a term indicating transitions occurring more frequently. Such transitions may however be driven by a desire to remain employable, flexible, and maintain market value rather than the benefit of increased objective career success.

Conclusions and limitations

Entrepreneurial education has increased in prominence recently due to the impact new businesses have on employment and the economy globally (Cooper, Bottomley & Gordon, 2004). This has seen government drives resulting in more educational courses and focus from an academic and practitioner perspective (Ibid.). Policymakers may look to avoid their responsibility of good quality job creation and ensuring social equality by placing bigger emphasis on individual employability (Wilton, 2011). Such external conditions can force young individuals to build their business experiences not only through educational degrees but also through entrepreneurial endeavours which often involve a high level of risk and uncertainty.

For previous generations, the burdens and responsibility of family and home life (and specifically the costs involved in these) were often there from the start of one's career, making the risk of setting up an entrepreneurial venture extremely high for the individual and their family. With a current social trend for lower fertility rates (Zhu, 2018), later in life marriage and pregnancy, and the delayed entry on to the property ladder, some could argue that the young generation have a certain ability to pursue business ventures or career aspirations without the associated risks of previous generations should failure occur.

Young people regard entrepreneurship as a form of freedom leading to financial stability. Yet, such privilege is pricey. As the data from this study shows, young people from different parts of the world need to make an enormous effort to keep their businesses sustainable. To move to a different level, they need to engage in reflective actions that lead to personal and professional growth.

The rising popularity and awareness of entrepreneurship and the minimising risk involved in pursuing entrepreneurial activity, when combined with a socio-economic consideration of the young generation, may be an important factor regarding the career aspirations of young people in the workforce. Although this initially applies to young talent setting up business, it could be argued that this similarly affects many young people entering the workforce through usual employment; with the lack of financial responsibilities allowing workers to pursue careers which satisfy other, more 'high level' needs. It can be assumed that although most young people will enter regular employment at some point, their understanding of success will be consistent with the one of their entrepreneurial peers. Thus, HR staff may want to consider the diminishing enticing effect which money alone may therefore have on the new generation of workers.

Limitations of this study result from the method used. A qualitative method provides us with a variety of perspectives and opinions and presentation of the data with other context information is sufficient to assess transferability (Herr & Anderson, 2005) and trans-contextual credibility (Greenwood & Levin, 2007) of the findings.

Also, a quantitative study such as survey could be conducted in order to find out what the actual distribution of the understanding of a success and successful career is among young entrepreneurs. Secondly, the data was collected mostly in English and in each interviewer-interviewee dyad at least one person was a non-native speaker. We are aware that this might create language bias resulting from various cultural accommodation and lack of participants' ability to express themselves in a non-native language (Harzing et al., 2005), thus more studies should be conducted in national languages of respondents.

Finally, there is a question of causality between the phenomena studies here. It would be worth exploring further whether the achievement of the 4th level of consciousness (self-authoring mind) (Kegan, 1994) is a *result* of undertaking entrepreneurial activity, or a *pre-requisite* for the individual to try entrepreneurship in the first place.

Acknowledgements

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