

Revisiting Entrepreneurial Intention from the Perspective of Desire-Belief Model of Action

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the explanation of entrepreneurial intention through the desire-belief model of action. An interdisciplinary theoretical exploration allows moving beyond the dominant conceptualization of intention within the entrepreneurship field. The goal of the potential entrepreneur is proposed to be integrated as a prospective causal component to the entrepreneurial intention model. Emphasizing the linkage between intention and motivation, this study provides mainly theoretical implications, and yet may pave the way for new orientations in entrepreneurship incentive practices.

Keywords: Desire-belief model, Entrepreneurial intention, Goal, Motivation, Teleological action

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurial intention (EI) research relies on the teleological nature of the entrepreneurial behavior (Krueger, 1993; Krueger et al., 2000), and yet does not insist on purposive explanation of EI formation. EI is considered to be the sum of motivational factors in reference to Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the most commonly used theory of intentional behavior in EI research. However, the antecedents of EI borrowed from social psychology are mainly cognitive constructs, without significant mention to motivation (Bagozzi, 1992). Motivation to form an EI is considered to be inherent in intention construct, and therefore, non-existent in EI explanation. Obviously, for having an intention to perform entrepreneurial behavior (i.e. form an EI), one has to be motivated to perform entrepreneurial behavior. Nonetheless, the reason why one is motivated to perform entrepreneurial behavior is not in the area of jurisdiction of EI. In other words, the presence of an EI can only provide the proof that the entrepreneurial behavior is the one for which the individual has the motivation to perform, but to be able to explain the formation of EI, and thus to examine its antecedents, the origin of that motivation needs to be known.

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EI, the immediate antecedent of entrepreneurial behavior, is described as the intention to start a business (Krueger, 1993). Having an intention to start a business presumes that the entrepreneurial behavior is chosen among other career options. In EI models, this choice is assumed to depend on the evaluation of starting a business option alone. Consequently, empirical studies investigate EI by using questionnaires concerning subjects' proclivity only to entrepreneurial behavior (e.g. Linan and Chen, 2009). Entrepreneurial behavior is thus treated in isolation from other behaviors. Moreover, its selection process for evaluation is segregated from the process of EI formation. In sum, the motivation for choosing entrepreneurial behavior, as an option to be evaluated, is overlooked and simply taken for granted.

Yet, it is a well-known fact that an individual who faces a choice situation has at least two desirable alternatives. For the entrepreneurial behavior to be the chosen one, it has to be considered by the individual more rewarding than the other(s). Thus, the formation of EI depends on the motivation to perform the behavior, which springs from its capacity to respond to the individual's goal(s).

The omission of goal and subsequent motivation within the EI formation process reduces the predictive power of EI (i.e. EI-entrepreneurial behavior relation) and leaves EI explanation incomplete (cf. Sheeran and Abraham, 2003; Audet, 2004). In this sense, motivational antecedents of EI formation deserve more consideration (Linan and Fayolle, 2015). To remedy this situation, the goal of the potential entrepreneur, which has been omitted so far, is proposed to be included in the explanation scheme of EI. As the goal is the privileged source of both motivation and intention (Nuttin, 1980/2005), its presence would enhance the explanation of EI formation.

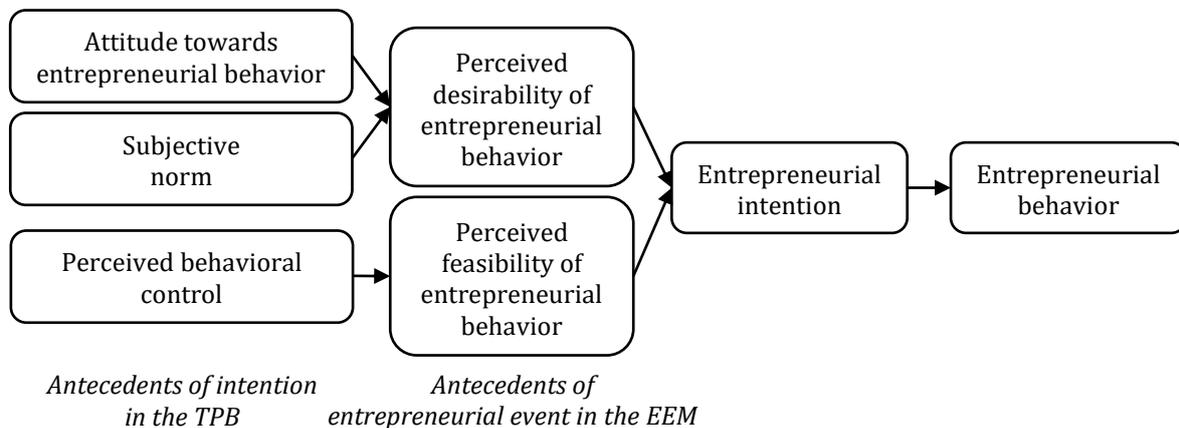
The goal involvement in deliberation process which determines entrepreneurial behavior is not new for the field of entrepreneurship. Studies on entrepreneurial motivation insist on the role of goals in entrepreneurial behavior (e.g. Locke and Baum, 2012). Yet, the emphasis is usually given to the content of the goals (e.g. need for achievement, need for autonomy, etc.), rather than the goal striving process. Therefore, there is a need for an integrated approach which will bring together goal, motivation and intention to fully explain the choice of entrepreneurial behavior (cf. Carsrud and Brannback, 2011). This study aspires to meet that theoretical need.

On the basis of a theoretical exploration, the present study attempts to improve the EI explanation by proceeding in an inductive manner (Charreire and Durieux, 2003). Following a presentation of EI models in the entrepreneurship literature in section two, the desire-belief model of action philosophy is revised in section three, to finally propose an enhanced EI conceptualization in section four.

2. Entrepreneurial Intention Models

Entrepreneurship is assumed to be a planned behavior for which intention models are ideally suited (Krueger et al., 2000). In this mind-set, several intention models have been developed within the entrepreneurship literature. The model of Bird (1988) revisited by Boyd and Vozikis (1994) and that of Learned (1992) can be counted as early examples. In spite of their consistency with the current EI modelling, the use of these models is far behind the Shapero and Sokol's (1982) Entrepreneurial Event Model (EEM). Although it does not specifically refer to intention, the EEM is a key reference for EI research, together with the TPB of Ajzen. The combination of the EEM with the TPB (Krueger and Brazeal, 1994; Krueger et al., 2000; Schlaegel and Koenig, 2014) presents prevailing theoretical understanding of EI. This combination can be observed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Combination of the EEM and the TPB



The antecedents of intention in the TPB correspond to desirability and feasibility perceptions of entrepreneurial behavior in the EEM. Firstly, the attitude towards the behavior and the subjective norm integrate within perceived desirability; and secondly, the perceived behavioral control (PBC) integrates within perceived feasibility. EI is formed when these perceptions are positive. In the EEM, a shift in perceptions is supposed to be generated by displacements in the life of the potential entrepreneur. They can be negative (e.g. job loss) or positive (e.g. inheritance). Negative displacements serve as push motivators, whereas positive displacements serve as pull motivators for the occurrence of entrepreneurial behavior. In the TPB, intention, as a central construct, is a function of attitude towards the behavior, subjective norm and PBC. Attitude towards the behavior referring to favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior is defined by behavioral beliefs; subjective norm referring to perceived social pressure to perform or not the behavior is defined by normative beliefs; and PBC, which refers to perceived capacity to perform the behavior similar to perceived self-efficacy of Bandura (1982), is defined by control beliefs (Ajzen, 1991).

These antecedents are occasionally called “motivational antecedents of EI” (e.g. Linan and Chen, 2009) even though they do not explain how the individual becomes motivated to perform the entrepreneurial behavior. The only emphasis on motivation is provided by the ‘displacements’ within the EEM, which are considered as push or pull motivators of entrepreneurial behavior (e.g. Kirkwood, 2009). In fact, these displacements, as triggering events for the occurrence of entrepreneurial behavior, give an individual the reasons to consider starting a business. They do not motivate per se, but lie behind the entrepreneurial experience of the individual. In the case of the antecedents of EI imported from the TPB, none of them refers to motivation for performing behavior. Their components can be seen in equations below.

Figure 2. Formulations of attitude towards the behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control

$A \propto \sum b_i e_i$	$SN \propto \sum n_i m_i$	$PBC \propto \sum p_i c_i$
<p>b_i: Behavioral belief about the probability that the behavior will produce certain attribute</p> <p>e_i: Subjective evaluation of belief's attribute</p>	<p>n_i: Normative belief about the likelihood that the important referent individuals will approve or disapprove the individual's performing of the behavior</p> <p>m_i: Individual's motivation to comply with the referent</p>	<p>p_i: Perceived power of the particular control factor to facilitate or inhibit performance of the behavior</p> <p>c_i: Control belief about the presence or absence of requisite resources and opportunities</p>

Source: Ajzen (1991)

Attitude, subjective norm and PBC are, indeed, cognitive constructs which specify on what basis or on which beliefs the individual evaluate the entrepreneurial behavior. Even the attitude towards the behavior, which -if positive- is the closest variable to motivation, is built solely on the belief that the entrepreneurial behavior will probably bring about some valuable outcomes. Moreover, the evidence suggests that a positive attitude towards a certain behavior does not necessarily result in that behavior (LaPiere, 1934/1967). That is, in fact, the reason why the intention is proposed as mediating factor between attitude and behavior (cf. Theory of reasoned action proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). This possible incompatibility of attitude and behavior already indicates that a positive attitude towards entrepreneurial behavior cannot, on its own, motivate entrepreneurial behavior. As for the subjective norm, which is the second determinant of desirability of the behavior, the motivational power it holds is also doubtful. The entrepreneurs who did not have the support of their significant others report that they were not motivated to comply with these negative opinions; whereas those who received the social approval gave weight to the opinions of others (Tokatlıoğlu, 2010). In light of these findings, it can be said that subjective norm exerts

an impact on EI formation whenever the opinions of others converge with those of the potential entrepreneur. Furthermore, several empirical studies reported that the EI is weakly predicted by subjective norm (e.g. Krueger et al., 2000; Autio et al., 2001; Armitage and Conner, 2001). PBC, for its part, is decisive in particular for behavioral achievement (Ajzen, 1991). One who does not believe in his/her ability to perform the behavior cannot undertake to act even if he/she desires to. However, since the appraisal of feasibility does not arise for non-desirable behaviors, it is more likely that the PBC would intervene after the behavior is perceived as desirable. Moreover, someone who desires to start a business, but who does not believe in his/her ability to do so, can try to change his/her current conditions of feasibility. By contrast, someone who has no desire to start a business would not question its feasibility. Although its subsequent role in EI formation is not denied, feasibility perception is secondary for the purpose of the present study which focuses primarily on the relation between motivation and intention.

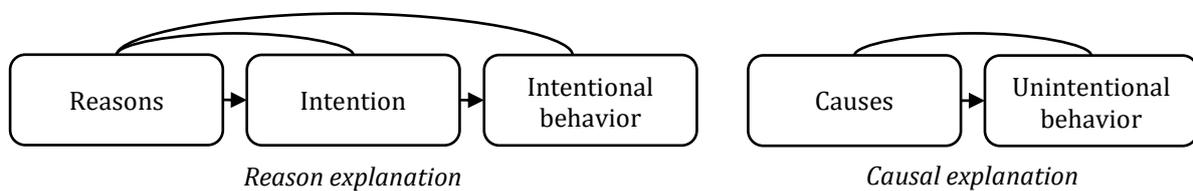
It is also worth noting that desirability and feasibility perceptions are certainly positive for someone who has an EI, but the fact that they are being positive would not lead alone to EI formation. One can have a positive attitude towards entrepreneurial behavior, a favorable social environment for him/her to perform entrepreneurial behavior and finally a positive PBC, but without the presence of any motivating reasons, he/she would not be an entrepreneur.

In sum, based essentially on beliefs, the EI formation process is currently explained in the entrepreneurial literature by individual's judgments on entrepreneurial behavior. Judgments, however, rely on beliefs and hence have no motivational power (cf. Perugini and Bagozzi, 2004). *A*'s believing that *p* is desirable is not the same thing as *A*'s desiring *p* (Engel, 1996). The fact that entrepreneurial behavior leads to certain valuable outcomes (i.e. judged as desirable), and assessed as feasible, can only ensure its place as a career option among other alternatives. To be motivated by entrepreneurial behavior, and then to form an EI, its outcomes have to be not only desirable, but also desired. Before believing that entrepreneurial behavior is the behavior to be realized in order to obtain desired outcomes, one must already have in mind these desired outcomes. Since the goal precedes the intentional behavior, the EI formation process needs to begin with the settled destination. Desire-belief model of action explanation is used to argue this position.

3. Desire-Belief Model

The teleological conception of action² holds that actions are done for a reason, and therefore they have a goal.³ This idea is at the core of the concept of intentional behavior and implies a close relationship between goal and intention. To put it briefly, the presence of an intention is what makes a behavior planned/goal-directed, and reciprocally, the presence of a goal is what makes a behavior intentional. In the former case, intention refers to its connotation as “have an intention to”⁴ realize the behavior (i.e. decision to act), and in the latter, “the intention with which” the behavior is or will be realized (i.e. goal of the behavior). Malle’s (1999) illustration could be useful to clarify the distinction between these two senses of intention.

Figure 3. Reason and cause explanations of behavior



Source: Malle (1999)

Demonstrating the differences in explanations of intentional and unintentional behaviors based on the attribution theory within the framework of naïve psychology (cf. Heider, 1982), Malle stressed that for a behavior to be intentional, the agent must form an intention to behave based on his/her reasons. This is the “have an intention to”. “The intention with which”, on the other hand, is embedded within the reasons. When there are no reasons, the behavior is produced by causes, and is therefore unintentional. Reasons, in turn, consist of desires and beliefs of the agent (Malle and Knobe, 1997; Malle, 1999; Malle, 2001). To behave intentionally, the agent must have a desire for an outcome or an end-state and a belief that a specific action will bring about that desired outcome or an end-state. In sum, the desire-belief pair is the content of the agent’s reason for behaving, and therefore explains his/her behavior.⁵

² Although they are used interchangeably, the terms “behavior” and “action” have different meanings. Action is a behavior caused by an agent. Desire-belief model concerns intentional behavior, which is action (Dretske, 1991).

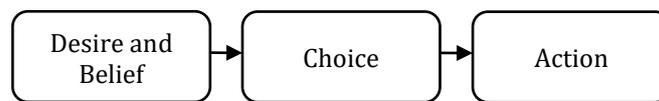
³ This conception represents Aristotle’s traditional view which is also consistent with the control theories in psychology (e.g. Miller et al., 1960; Powers, 1973; Carver and Scheier, 2001).

⁴ This connotation is typically termed as “prior intention” in action philosophy.

⁵ Reasons can be represented by desires alone without any reference to the belief, and vice versa. For example, if a potential entrepreneur says he/she will start a business because he/she believes that he/she can contribute to job creation by means of establishing a business, there is no need to mention his/her desire to contribute to job creation.

In the same manner, action philosophers also consider reasons as the explanans of intentional behavior (e.g. Anscombe 1957/2000; Davidson, 1963). Even though there is no agreement on their intervention ways on the action mechanism (cf. Bratman, 1987), the desire-belief pairs are recognized predominantly to be the reasons for action.⁶ Also, in Aristotelian practical reasoning and Humean view of action explanation, reasons are supposed to be the combination of the agent’s desires and beliefs. Aristotle states in *Nicomachean Ethics*: “*The origin of action –its efficient, not its final cause– is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end.*” (NE, Bk. VI, Ch. 2, 1139a). This can be illustrated as follows:

Figure 4. Aristotelian practical reasoning



According to Aristotle’s practical syllogism, the choice implies deliberation about action (i.e. intention), and is originated from desire and belief. Desired end is a major premise, followed by a means-end belief: “*X desires that G, and X believes that doing A will be a means of bringing about G*”. In this situation, since the action *A* is desirable for *X*, because it will make *X* achieve his/her goal *G*, *X* will deliberate in favor of *A*, or *X* will intend to do *A*. Hence, the conclusion of the syllogism is action: “*Therefore, X does A*” (Engel, 1996). Here, *A* is an instrumental action which is believed to be the means of bringing about the desired end, i.e., the goal *G*. The deliberation process ends with the formation of the intention to perform the *A* (in the sense “*have an intention to*”). Henceforth, *A* will be performed with the intention of bringing about the goal *G* (in the sense “*the intention with which*”).

In this deliberation process, desires and beliefs, which constitute the reason for action, have clearly distinct functions. While desires set the destination, beliefs point the direction. Also, they differ in their direction of fit and conditions of satisfaction (cf. Searle, 1983). Desires have world-to-mind direction of fit, that is, for being satisfied, they need to be fulfilled (i.e. the world has to match the mind).⁷ Beliefs, on the contrary, have mind-to-world direction of fit, that is, for being satisfied, they need to be true (i.e. the mind has to match the world). Beliefs strive to represent the world as it stands, and thus they can be true or false. For being true, they have to fit to the reality. Desires, on the other hand, cannot be true or false. They strive to fit the reality to their content, and for this reason, they have the ability to motivate. Through this feature, the content of desires specifies “*the intention with which*” or “*the goal for which*” one performs his/her action.

⁶ According to the causalist view of action, reasons are causes of action (cf. Davidson, 1963).

⁷ Similarly, intentions also strive to change the world in accordance with what is mentally represented (Proust, 2005).

This approach, which is as old as Aristotle, can be used to enhance EI conceptualization. EI will be formed if entrepreneurial behavior is believed to be capable of carrying out the desired end, and not some desirable outcomes. More precisely, what motivates one to perform an action is not its likelihood of bringing about desirable outcomes, but the desired end itself for which action is chosen. The former depends on belief, the latter on desire, and the desire is the one which fulfils the motivational function.⁸

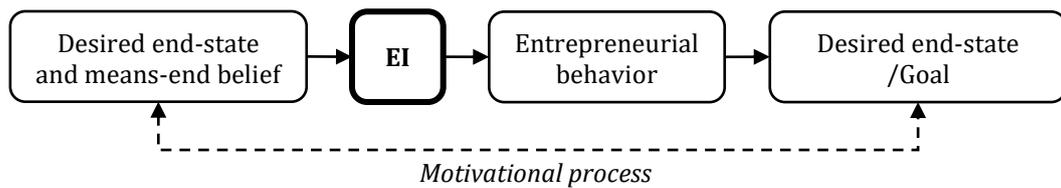
4. Reason explanation for entrepreneurial intention

Resulting from deliberation, an intention to start a business indicates that the entrepreneurial behavior promises to bring about the content of desire. Given the fact that the content of desire is mentally represented as a goal (Austin and Vancouver, 1996), one intends to act to attain his/her goal and acts in the intention of attaining that goal. Therefore, motivation to form an EI arises from the goal of the potential entrepreneur.

In psychological literature, motivation is defined as a state of tension that occurs from the discrepancy between actual and desired states (Nuttin, 1980/2005). It has a temporal scheme, hence it persists until the desired state is achieved (Martin, 1975). As a result, the boundaries of motivational process are determined, both in the present and in the future by desired end-state, since the latter is defined at the present time. It is thus possible to argue that the goal “from the future” makes the individual to form an EI in the present. The goal can be, consequently, stated as a prospective causal component of EI formation.

The integration of the goal into the EI conceptualization is an attempt to fill the gap of motivation. This line of reasoning emphasizes the purposive explanation of EI formation by moving beyond the dominance of cognitive factors in behavior evaluation. The EI formation is linked to the goal through the responsiveness of entrepreneurial behavior to the goal's criteria. This feature of the entrepreneurial behavior constitutes the reason why it is selected as the means-action over other career options. It is judged as the instrumental action, not because of its desirable consequences, but because of its desired consequences. Indeed, these desired, and thus motivating consequences are those which make entrepreneurial behavior desired. Figure 5 illustrates the reason explanation of EI formation which implies the relationships between desire-belief pair, goal, behavior and motivation, in connection with the EI.

⁸ As stated by Hume: “...reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will.” (THN, Bk. 2, Part 3, Sect. 3).

Figure 5. Reason explanation of EI formation

Desired end-state, which is determined in the present as a goal to be attained in the future and as a selection criterion of behavior alternatives, occupies the outset of EI formation process. This position underlines goal-intention link. As regards means-end belief, the second component of reason to act, it stands next to desired end and serves to find a way (i.e. one or more means-actions) to bring about that end. Once formed, EI represents the selection of entrepreneurial behavior as a means to goal attainment.

Following this reasoning process, if there are no changes in one's mind-set or circumstances (e.g. presence of some conflicting desires or lack of opportunities in the environment), entrepreneurial behavior will be carried out to achieve the goal. However, forming an EI is not, in any case, a guarantee for the occurrence of entrepreneurial behavior (cf. intention-behavior gap). Intention to start a business may be compromised over time. But under all circumstances, the individual who has an intention to start a business will simply be in the attempt to start a business (cf. Theory of trying proposed by Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1990), and he/she can fail. Nevertheless, the predictive power of intention can be theoretically enhanced by questioning the strength of the motivation to attain the goal for which intention is formed. This would imply the study of "have an intention to" and "the intention with which" together and assure that the explanation of EI formation is provided by goals as well, not only by beliefs.

Given the hierarchical structure of goals (e.g. Carver and Scheier, 2001), the entrepreneurial behavior may be the goal itself (e.g. to be an entrepreneur) and can be realized for its own sake. In fact, the self-determination theory argues that, in cases in which behaviors are not the means-actions for any goals, the motivation will be intrinsic rather than extrinsic, and the strength of the motivation will be higher (Deci and Ryan, 2000). However, if entrepreneurial behavior is the leading action for the achievement of some high valued goals (e.g. to have financial security), the strong congruence between goal and behavior would increase motivational strength (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In this respect, the relation between the goal of the potential entrepreneur and the entrepreneurial behavior needs to be examined for an accurate estimation of predictive power of EI.

The reason explanation of EI formation process, which is initiated with the destination (i.e. desire) and proceeded with the direction (i.e. belief), provides a broader

view for explaining entrepreneurial behavior. Starting with the settled goal, the proposed EI formation process also allows inclusion of the evaluation and the comparison of other career alternatives. In this framework of EI, entrepreneurial behavior cannot be considered as a predefined choice by default. The 'why' of EI formation resides in the competitive responsiveness of starting a business option among others. Consequently, regarded as a result of a choice process, the EI could be identified as the decision to start a business. This decision is motivated by the desired consequences of entrepreneurial behavior and is a part of a broader motivational process which ends with the goal achievement. The goal of the potential entrepreneur supervises the entire process from the evaluation of different behaviors, until the realization of the one promising the desired state. Favorable perception of desirability composed of favorable attitude and subjective norm fails to amount to such a motivational state. By overcoming the lack of goal implication, reason explanation of EI revalues the linkage between intention and motivation.

The reason explanation of EI presented here, is an attempt to improve EI explanation, rather than a negation of the cognitive antecedents of the TPB-EEM couple. In addition, the beliefs on desirability and feasibility are undeniably involved in the process of EI formation (Linan and Fayolle, 2015). Still, the explanation of EI remains partial without any reference to the goal of the potential entrepreneur. As being the criteria for selecting a behavior, the goal stands at the origin of motivational process and explains the 'why' of entrepreneurial behavior. Therefore, it needs to be included in the conceptualization of EI, which intrinsically implies the goal.

5. Conclusion

The main issue addressed in this study is the insufficiency of cognitive constructs to fully explain EI formation. Especially, the desirability of entrepreneurial behavior is argued not to be sufficient for an individual to be involved in a process of deliberation. The emphasis is given to the composition of desirability perception, and the motivational power of desirability is questioned on the basis of desire-belief model of action explanation. Next, the goal of the potential entrepreneur is proposed to be integrated within the EI explanation scheme, as the primary source of entrepreneurial motivation. It is stressed that entrepreneurial behavior is selected only if it allows the desired end-state, mentally represented as the goal. In this manner, the goal is seen as the prospective causal component ensuring motivation-intention link. By reinforcing the motivational strength of EI construct, it is expected that this key determinant of entrepreneurial behavior would predict its occurrence in a more sustainable manner. For this purpose, further investigation and experimentation need to be carried out in order to examine more closely the links between the EI and the goal of the potential entrepreneur.

Despite its mainly theoretical aspirations and its lack of empirical analysis, the present study may have practical implications relevant for entrepreneurship incentive practices. Goal-EI relationship proposal may be an appropriate basis for designing promotion activities for entrepreneurial behavior. The study's suggestion that the entrepreneurial behavior should be first considered as a means-action to the individual's goal achievement indicate the need for fostering entrepreneurship by focusing on its rewards. Based on its responsiveness to certain goals, this kind of activities may be useful, particularly when the emphasis on feasibility of entrepreneurial behavior is inadequate for entrepreneurship promotion.

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