

THE IMPACT OF SPECIFIC WORK EXPERIENCE OF JAPANESE SME EMPLOYEES ON ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION

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Abstract: *Although entrepreneurial activity is an engine for stimulating innovation and economic growth, its growth rate in Japan has been declining since 1980 and is at an internationally low level. While policies to increase the growth rate must be strengthened, as the first step, increasing the number of entrepreneurs will require increasing the number of people interested in starting a business. Thus, it is necessary to identify the factors that promote entrepreneurial intention to increase the number of entrepreneurs. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is well-known for identifying factors that determine entrepreneurial intention regarding human psychology and attitude. However, it is also considered that there are other factors (experience and knowledge) from the aspect of work and practice. We focus on employees in their 20s and 30s working in small and medium-sized companies that have produced many entrepreneurs, and measure the degree of knowledge influence about entrepreneurship and practical experiences such as new product planning, job change, side job, and sales on entrepreneurial intention. Multiple regression analysis using a questionnaire (self-administered), which is based on hypotheses drawn from previous research, reveals that, among the six factors, entrepreneurial education and experience in new product planning, experience in selling products, and side job experience were the most important factors in influencing entrepreneurial intentions.*

Keywords: entrepreneurial intention, work experience, SME, office worker, Japanese company.

JEL Classification: M0, M1, M50, M13.

1. Introduction

Japan's business start-up rate was high in the 1960s and 1970s but has continued to decline over the long term since 1980; it has remained stagnant since 2001, at around 4–5% (SMEA, 2017). In the United Kingdom (UK), United States (US), and France, the rate exceeded 9% and compared to these countries, Japan has a low rate of business start-up, at about less than half of the other countries' (SMEA, 2018). Therefore, for more than 20 years, the Japanese government has identified increasing the rate of business start-ups as one of its economic policy challenges. This is because active entrepreneurial activity induces employment growth and innovation and contributes positively to a country's economic development (Van Stel et al., 2005; Acs et al., 2008; Naude, 2008).

Since 1997, the number of would-be entrepreneurs (the number of people interested in starting their own business) has also been declining. There were 2.81 million would-be entrepreneurs in 1997, and 1.52 million in 2012, representing a 46% decline over 15 years (SMEA, 2017). One factor identified as contributing to this decline in the number of entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs is the high level of indifference to

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entrepreneurship among the population. International comparative data indicate that the percentage of people in Japan who are indifferent to entrepreneurship (77.3%) is more than twice as high as in the US (22.9%), the UK (36.0%), Germany (30.6%), and France (39.2%) (SMEA, 2017).

Therefore, to increase the number of entrepreneurs, it is important to increase the number of people interested in entrepreneurship. However, to achieve this goal, it is necessary to identify the factors that make people want to start a business. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) model (Ajzen, 1985), which explains entrepreneurial intention using three variables, was developed to answer this question. This model uses psychological factors as explanatory variables and has been used intensively in previous research with university students as the research subject. On the other hand, in Japan, it is rare for a person to start a business immediately after graduating from university. Instead, most start a business after working for a company. Therefore, it is assumed that in addition to psychological factors, practical knowledge acquired on the job profoundly influences interest in entrepreneurship. Fatoki (2014) found that university students with work experience have higher entrepreneurial intentions than those without. This indicates that work experience is a factor that positively influences entrepreneurial intention. However, most previous studies that dealt with the relationship between work experience and entrepreneurial intention have measured the former in terms of years of experience and do not mention the specific nature of work (e.g., product planning, sales work, experience in side-jobs).

In addition, the system of personnel transfers is another factor peculiar to Japanese companies. Most Japanese companies train their employees to be generalists by having them experience many different types of jobs. For example, recruits are typically assigned to product planning, accounting, and sales for a few years. Young employees (especially 20s and 30s) often supervise product planning, where they have opportunities to develop product ideas and create sales plans. This could induce their interest in starting up a business. Therefore, this study presents the following research question.

RQ: Do company employees increase their interest in entrepreneurship as they gain specific work experience and knowledge?

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Entrepreneurial intention

It is important to increase the number of young employees in their 20s and 30s who have a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship to increase the number of entrepreneurs in Japan. Therefore, knowledge about entrepreneurship and experience related to entrepreneurship in daily work, such as planning new products and overseeing sales operations, is considered a major driving force for increasing the number of entrepreneurs. Generally, the degree of interest in entrepreneurship is referred to as entrepreneurial intention, but strictly speaking, there is no consensus on its definition (Thompson, 2009; Yuan et al., 2019). According to Ajzen (1991), intentions mean intrinsic motives. Krueger and Brazeal (1994) defined entrepreneurial intention as the orientation to commercialize a new business. Crant (1996) defined it as the desire to own a company. Thompson (2009) stated that entrepreneurial intention is the belief that an individual will start a business.

2.2. Entrepreneurship-related knowledge: entrepreneurship education

Although there are many opportunities to acquire knowledge related to entrepreneurship, it is particularly important to gain vital entrepreneurship education. This means learning the skills and abilities required to start a business, such as knowledge of marketing and accounting, sales and purchasing methods, and customer service techniques (Henry et al., 2005; De Clercq and Arenius, 2006; World Economic Forum, 2009; Bae et al., 2014). Individuals who have taken entrepreneurship-related courses in university or have received

various entrepreneurship-related training or lectures after leaving university are more likely to be entrepreneurially oriented than those without such experience. According to Kolvereid and Moen (1997), students who majored in entrepreneurship have a strong intention to start a new business after graduation. Based on a questionnaire survey conducted on 122 undergraduate students at San Jose State University in the US, Basu and Virick (2008) confirmed that entrepreneurship education positively impacts students' entrepreneurial orientation in their future career choices. Mei et al. (2020) conducted a questionnaire survey on entrepreneurship education among 599 university students in China and, using multiple regression analysis, found that taking entrepreneurship education has a positive effect on the decision to become an entrepreneur and entrepreneurial orientation. From the above, we propose the following hypothesis.

H1: Employees who have attended entrepreneurship education courses are more interested in starting their own business than those who have not.

2.3. Experience in a managerial position

Managers are responsible for managing subordinates in the execution of various projects while aiming for the completion of the project. In doing so, they plan, organize, and lead a group of people to completion while demonstrating leadership. This managerial experience develops leadership, communication, logical thinking, human resource management, time management, and project management skills (Tovmasyan, 2017). Since these skills are necessary for entrepreneurs, the managerial experience would mean they are experiencing entrepreneurship and would feel closer to starting their own business. Liguori et al. (2017) and Kautonen et al. (2011) argued that an individual's previous work experience and knowledge are important factors in enhancing entrepreneurial orientation. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H2: Workers with managerial experience are more interested in entrepreneurship than those without experience.

2.4. Experience in changing jobs

Suppose we compare those who have never changed jobs with those who have. In that case, the latter are exposed to different corporate cultures, supervisors, and job descriptions, meaning a more diverse work experience (Dragan, 2021). If this is the case, those who have worked in two or more companies would be more interested in entrepreneurship than those who have worked in only one company. Yuan et al. (2019) analyzed the results of a questionnaire administered to 438 men and women in their teens to 40s and found that previous work experience was significantly related to entrepreneurial orientation. In addition, Astebro and Thompson (2011) found that those who have a diverse labour market and diverse work experiences (preferring diversity) are more likely to become entrepreneurs than those who do not. Based on the above, we propose the following hypothesis.

H3: Workers who have changed jobs are more interested in entrepreneurship than those who have not.

2.5. Experience of side job

A side job is also called a "Second job" or "Side hustle." It implies a separate income-generating job alongside a full-time job (Henley Business School of Africa, 2019; Sessions et al., 2021). For company employees to engage in a second job that draws on their hobbies, experiences, skills, and qualifications in addition to their day job broadens their work, improves their skills, and increases their interest in entrepreneurship. Additionally, previous research shows that various work experiences are an important factor

in generating new business ideas (Shane, 2000; Shepherd and DeTienne, 2005). Thus, the following hypothesis is derived.

H4: Workers who have had a side job are more interested in starting a business than those who have not.

2.6. Experience in new product planning

The company employee in charge of planning a new product (including a new service) clarifies the product's features, calculates the expected sales and profit amount, and prepares a proposal. This is similar to a business plan prepared by an entrepreneur. Therefore, it is believed that the company employees who have engaged in the planning of new products are more interested in entrepreneurship than those who have not had such experience because they learn the knowledge necessary for entrepreneurship through their work. Furthermore, previous research revealed that writing a business plan reinforces entrepreneurial intentions (Bae et al., 2014). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H5: Workers experienced in planning new products are more interested in entrepreneurship than those without such experience.

2.7. Experience in product sales

Since the introduction of e-commerce sites such as Amazon and eBay, many people have started using these sites to sell their products or buy and sell products they own. For such company employees with experience in selling products and earning a profit, they can feel the ease of starting a business and the enjoyment of earning a profit, increasing their interest in starting a business. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H6: Workers with product sales experience are more interested in entrepreneurship than those without experience.

3. Measurement

For Entrepreneurial Intention, four items by Zhao et al. (2005) are included: "I am interested in becoming an entrepreneur," "I will probably become an entrepreneur," "I am interested in acquiring a small business," "I am interested in starting and building a high-growth business," and one item by Thompson (2009), "I read books on how to set up a firm" are taken as dependent variables. For each of these five questions, respondents answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1= strongly disagree" to "5= strongly agree", and the means are used as the variable representing Entrepreneurial Intention. Cronbach's alpha (after adjustments) for this scale reached 0.921.

Entrepreneurship education was determined by the question, "Have you ever attended lectures or training on entrepreneurship?" For the managerial question, respondents were asked, "Are you in a managerial position?" The questions about changing jobs and side jobs are "Have you ever changed jobs?" and "Have you ever had a side job?" For new product planning, we asked, "Have you ever been in charge of new product planning?" Finally, for product sales experience, we used, "Have you ever sold a product on Amazon or other online retailers?" For these six questions, a Yes/No Scale was used.

In Japan, 84% of entrepreneurs were employees of small and medium-sized firms with fewer than 299 employees at the time they started their business (Japan Finance Corporation Research Institute, 2021). Therefore, the survey targets are full-time employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who are university graduates and are in their 20s and 30s (from 23 to 39 years old). These produce most of the entrepreneurs. The survey was conducted in September 2021 using web-based questionnaires, and 630 valid responses were received.

4. Demographics of respondents

The variables of "Gender," "Age," "Marital Status," and "Parent or Sibling run a business" are controlled. Table 1 presents a summary of responses to these variables. There were slightly more female respondents than males; about half were in their 20s and the rest in their 30s. Singles accounted for about two-thirds of the respondents, while married respondents accounted for about one-third (33.5%). The proportion of respondents with a parent or sibling running a business was 18.1%.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	305	48.4
	Female	325	51.6
Age	23-29 years old	319	50.6
	30-39 years old	311	49.4
Marital status	Single	419	66.5
	Married	211	33.5
Parent or Sibling run a business	Yes	114	18.1
	No	516	81.9

Source: Author's calculations using the data collected

5. Results

Regression analysis tested the six hypotheses using SPSS version 26. Table 2 summarizes the statistical analysis results for correlation. The correlation between entrepreneurial intention and other variables is positive, and eight variables are significant at a 1% level except for age and marital status.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlations matrix of study variables (N=630)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	2.900	1.456	1										
2	.484	.500	.168**	1									
3	30.594	4.602	.023	.253**	1								
4	.335	.472	.058	.120**	.281**	1							
5	.181	.385	.249**	.007	.012	.164**	1						
6	.106	.309	.274**	.099*	-.041	.159**	.319**	1					
7	.098	.298	.175**	.149**	.081*	.161**	.246**	.370**	1				
8	.546	.498	.170**	.073	.228**	.167**	.139**	.149**	.098*	1			
9	.208	.406	.302**	.028	-.007	.059	.216**	.331**	.212**	.232**	1		
10	.133	.340	.276**	.171**	.124**	.167**	.240**	.455**	.262**	.198**	.248**	1	
11	.398	.490	.284**	-.094*	-.042	.013	.140**	.182**	.025	.149**	.198**	.177**	1

Notes: 1=Entrepreneurial intention, 2= Gender, 3=Age, 4= Marital status, 5= Parent or Sibling run a business, 6=Entrepreneurship education, 7=Managerial position, 8=Experience in changing jobs, 9=Side job experience, 10=Experience in new product planning, 11=Experience in selling products. Pearson's correlation coefficient.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Source: Author's calculations using the data collected

Table 3 reports the results of our multiple regression analysis. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was measured to assess multicollinearity. The VIF for all variables in the table is less than 2, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a problem in the analysis. A score of 20.574 ($p=.000$) for the F value means that the model fits well. Among the control variables, "gender" and "Parent or Sibling run a business" influenced entrepreneurial intention.

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p	VIF
Constant	2.212	.289		7.645	.000	
Gender (0 female,1 male)	.455	.087	.194	5.254	.000	1.122
Age	-.006	.010	-.025	-.652	.515	1.225
Marital status	-.028	.093	-.011	-.297	.766	1.153
Parent or Sibling run a business	.343	.116	.112	2.962	.003	1.186
Entrepreneurship education	.550	.165	.144	3.344	.001	1.538
Managerial position	.133	.152	.034	.872	.383	1.234
Experience in changing jobs	.031	.089	.013	.356	.722	1.161
Side job experience	.488	.111	.169	4.392	.000	1.217
Experience in new product planning	.450	.141	.130	3.188	.002	1.375
Experience in selling products	.291	.088	.121	3.313	.001	1.105
R						
	.499					
R ²						
	.249					
Adjusted R ²						
	.237					
F						
	20.574					
p						
	.000					

Notes: Dependent Variable: entrepreneurial intension

Source: Author's calculations using the data collected

The hypotheses test results are as follows: entrepreneurial education in H1 ($\beta=.144$, $p<.005$), "side job experience" in H4 ($\beta=.169$, $p<.001$), "experience in new product planning" in H5 ($\beta=.121$, $p<.005$), "experience in selling products" in H6 ($\beta=.121$, $p<.005$) positively and significantly influence entrepreneurial intention. On the other hand, "managerial position" ($\beta=.034$, $p>.005$) in H2 and "experience in changing jobs" ($\beta=.013$, $p>.005$) in H3 did not support entrepreneurial intention.

The six hypotheses were examined using multiple regression analysis, and as shown in Table 4, four hypotheses were accepted and two were rejected. Entrepreneurship education to acquire various knowledge for starting a business is one of the factors identified in many previous studies, as mentioned above, and was also identified as a factor influencing entrepreneurial intentions in this study. In addition, experience in side job, new product planning and product sales, which have not been addressed in previous studies, were found to be important factors influencing entrepreneurial intention.

Table 4: Result of Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Result
H1. Employees who have attended entrepreneurship education courses are more interested in starting their own business than those who have not.	accepted
H2. Workers with managerial experience are more interested in entrepreneurship than those without experience.	rejected
H3. Workers who have changed jobs are more interested in entrepreneurship than those who have not.	rejected
H4. Workers who have had a side job are more interested in starting a business than those who have not.	accepted

H5.Workers experienced in planning new products are more interested in entrepreneurship than those without such experience.	accepted
H6.Workers with product sales experience are more interested in entrepreneurship than those without experience.	accepted

Source: Author's analysis

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Entrepreneurial intention plays an important role in entrepreneurial decision-making (Liñán and Chen, 2006). While previous studies on entrepreneurial intention mainly focused on the psychology and attitudes of the subjects, this study focused on the practical knowledge and experience acquired while working in a company to explore the factors influencing entrepreneurial intention. Therefore, six factors — managerial position, experience in, changing jobs, side job, new product planning, and selling products —, were explored, and their correlations with entrepreneurial intention were examined.

The results revealed that entrepreneurial education, experience in, new product planning, selling products, and side job are factors that would enhance entrepreneurial intention.

However, managerial position is not a factor significantly related to entrepreneurial intention. This may be because managers are more likely to continue working for their current company because of the benefits and higher annual salaries associated with managerial positions. The desire to start a business will diminish if this is the case. Experience in changing jobs is also not a factor that significantly impacts entrepreneurial intention. The main reasons for leaving a job in Japanese companies are dissatisfaction with salary and human relations and a deterioration of the company's management practices. Consequently, the reasons for leaving the current post will be resolved if they have successfully moved to another company. Furthermore, starting a business comes with high risk, and they tend not to choose that option. Therefore, it will be necessary to conduct a new survey in the future to verify these two variables.

The results suggest the following important policy measures to increase the number of people who want to start their own business in Japan: encourage companies that prohibit side jobs to lift the ban and have public organizations hold seminars on entrepreneurship for company employees.

This study also has several limitations. First, the study was limited to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). However, even large enterprises have employees who start their own businesses, albeit in small numbers. It is necessary to verify whether the results of this study apply regardless of company size.

Second, it is necessary to take into account that there are different types of side job experiences. In some cases, people take on a second job out of necessity because they cannot make ends meet on the salary from their main job alone, while in other cases they take a side job for work they like, work that makes use of their qualifications or work they are interested in. As the latter are expected to be more interested in starting up businesses than the former, it would be important to consider the content of side jobs by classifying them into several categories.

Furthermore, the salary currently received should also be taken into account. As the amount of average salary varies widely from company to company, it can be assumed that employees with higher salaries are less interested in starting their own businesses. Therefore, it may be necessary to examine whether the amount of salary or annual income is a factor influencing entrepreneurial intention.

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Bio-note

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