

## SUMMARY

### THE EFFECT OF AGE ON ENTREPRENEURIAL COGNITION: A LIFESPAN PSYCHOLOGY APPROACH

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#### Principal Topic

Enterprising individual is a critical component of new business creation. While individuals' psychological traits or demographic characteristics such as gender and ethnicity have been widely studied in entrepreneurship literature, very few researches have focused on age as a theoretically relevant attribute.

By blending the entrepreneurial event model with the lifespan developmental perspective, this study investigates how individuals' age affects people's entrepreneurial cognition; in particular perceived desirability – the degree to which one finds a certain behavior to be attractive – and perceived feasibility – perceived personal capability to do a specific job or set of tasks. Recent entrepreneurship research suggests the importance of a life span developmental perspective, as it focuses on the study of individuals' development, or ontogenesis, along one's life span and is based on the assumption that such development does not cease with adulthood; indeed, each major period of life is considered to have its own developmental challenges and achievements, and adaptive intellectual processes occur along the whole life span.

#### Method

We claim that both perceived feasibility and desirability to start a new business decrease as age increases due to loss in cognitive abilities and a shift in goal settings. In addition, we hypothesize that declines in perceived feasibility and desirability over the lifespan are not unavoidable: we maintain that a country's cultural and institutional variables moderate the negative effect of individual's age on feasibility and desirability; in particular the paper deeply discusses and hypothesizes that in societies characterized by high levels of future orientation (the degree to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as planning, investing in the future, and delaying gratification, cfr. GLOBE) the decrease of both perceived feasibility and desirability occurs at a lower rate. We also discuss the role of youth unemployment as a contextual dimension that should affect individuals' cognition toward entrepreneurship.

We test our hypotheses on 20,587 individuals from the 2012 Flash Eurobarometer survey.

#### Results and Implications

The results strongly support our theoretical considerations, and lead to important contributions: (1) the confirmation of a robust theoretical explanation on how individuals' age influences people's perceived feasibility and desirability, and how institutional variables moderate such relationship; (2) an extension to previous theorization in entrepreneurship studies that suggest a generic curvilinear association between age and entrepreneurial behavior and performance. This opens avenues for future research that could fruitfully address other dimensions of entrepreneurial cognition, such as intention, satisfaction, imagination and opportunity evaluation.

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