




How does an entrepreneur rise? Proposition of a conceptual model of entrepreneurs' background analysis

Como surge um empreendedor? Proposição de um modelo conceitual de análise do background de empreendedores




¿Cómo emerge un emprendedor? Proposición de un modelo conceptual de análisis de antecedentes de emprendedores.

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ABSTRACT

Goal: We propose a conceptual model that gathers different factors preceding the entrepreneur's formation, the so-called entrepreneur's background. **Methodology/approach:** The present research was operationalized according to three stages, namely: systematic literature review, in-depth interviews with experts and focus group with entrepreneurs; being followed by the model stage, which comprised in-depth interviews based on reports by 12 entrepreneurs. **Originality/relevance:** Much is studied about the life of an entrepreneur after starting his/her activity. However, little is analyzed about this before the initial moment of the entrepreneurial activity. **Main findings:** The study proposes a model for analyzing the entrepreneur's background, which presents six analysis axes capable of foreseeing the entrepreneurial profile, named: family, place of birth or raising, schooling, sociodemographic relationships, professional activity; and philosophical or religious aspects. **Theoretical contributions:** The present study introduces an instrument that enables mapping prior characteristics to the entrepreneurial activity. **Management contributions:** As its general contribution, it can be used in public policies focused on encouraging entrepreneurship, as well as help private institutions for entrepreneurship support.

Keywords: Background. Entrepreneurship. Entrepreneur. Rise. Model.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Propomos um modelo conceitual que reúne diferentes fatores que antecedem a formação do empreendedor, o chamado background do empreendedor. **Metodologia/abordagem:** A presente pesquisa foi operacionalizada segundo três etapas, a saber: revisão sistemática da literatura, entrevistas em profundidade com especialistas e grupo focal com empreendedores; sendo seguida pela etapa do modelo, que compreendeu entrevistas em profundidade baseadas em relatos de 12 empreendedores. **Originalidade/relevância:** Muito se estuda sobre a vida de um empreendedor após o início de sua atividade. No entanto, pouco se analisa sobre isso antes do momento inicial da atividade empreendedora. **Principais achados:** O estudo propõe um modelo de análise do background do empreendedor, que apresenta seis eixos de análise capazes de prever o perfil empreendedor, nomeados: família, local de nascimento ou criação, escolaridade, relações sociodemográficas, atividade profissional; e aspectos filosóficos ou religiosos. **Contribuições teóricas:** O presente estudo introduz um instrumento que permite mapear características prévias à atividade empreendedora. **Contribuições da gestão:** Como contribuição geral, pode ser utilizada em políticas públicas voltadas ao incentivo ao empreendedorismo, bem como auxiliar instituições privadas de apoio ao empreendedorismo.

Palavras-chave: Background. Empreendedorismo. Empreendedor. Surgimento. Modelo.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Proponemos un modelo conceptual que recoge diferentes factores que preceden a la formación del emprendedor, los denominados antecedentes del emprendedor. **Metodología/enfoque:** La presente investigación se llevó a cabo en tres etapas, a saber: revisión sistemática de la literatura, entrevistas en profundidad con expertos y focus group con emprendedores; seguida de la etapa del modelo, que comprendió entrevistas en profundidad basadas en relatos de 12 emprendedores. **Originalidad/relevancia:** Se estudia mucho sobre la vida de un emprendedor después de iniciar su actividad. Sin embargo, poco se analiza sobre esto antes del momento inicial de la actividad emprendedora. **Principales resultados:** El estudio propone un modelo para analizar los antecedentes del emprendedor, que presenta seis ejes de análisis capaces de prever el perfil emprendedor, denominados: familia, lugar de nacimiento o crianza, escolaridad, relaciones sociodemográficas, actividad profesional; y aspectos filosóficos o religiosos. **Contribuciones teóricas:** El presente estudio presenta un instrumento que permite mapear características previas a la actividad emprendedora. **Contribuciones a la gestión:** Como aporte general, puede ser utilizado en políticas públicas enfocadas al estímulo del emprendimiento, así como ayudar a instituciones privadas para el apoyo al emprendimiento.

Palabras clave: Antecedentes. Emprendimiento. Emprendedor. Elevar. Modelo.

■ INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is seen to ascend in social mobility and as innovation, economic growth, job-position creation, and social well-being generation booster. Accordingly, some public policy programs destined to encourage, maintain, and develop entrepreneurship activities have emerged all around the globe. These activities, in several cases, have impacted the economy and the social capital in some countries (Crowley & Barlow, 2022). At early 21st century, research started to head towards assessing entrepreneurs, even if they were addressed in a subtle way; however, such studies aimed at understanding who these individuals are, as well as how they are formed. Based on such a research spectrum, it was possible observing the publication of research focused on personal characteristics, schooling, professional background, family history, relationship with companies they have worked in, or even on other factors (Ahn & Winters, 2022).

In fact, scholars have consistently highlighted the importance of character for personal and societal good over the years and across cultures. Nevertheless, little is known about how character matters for entrepreneurship (Pirhadi et al., 2023). Entrepreneurs cannot be featured, as stated by common sense, as individuals who create companies. Thus, it is necessary to expand the way to feature entrepreneurs to contemplate a world view, according to which entrepreneurs are individuals who own a company, but who also manage it, account for it, or even represent it. Managers in strategic positions can also be called entrepreneurs, as well as all those who help the organization to seek innovation and market opportunities (Fernandes et al., 2020).

According to this scenario, it is possible to identify some studies that have substantiated entrepreneurs' background characteristics; however, their elements were addressed in separately. Accordingly, one can observe aspects such as family (Bocanegra et al., 2022), place of birth and/or raising (Dewitt et al., 2023), schooling (Harlez & Malagueño, 2016), and the significance and experience deriving from informal education (Botelho et al., 2021; Uemura et al., 2023), previous labor experiences (Boca, 2014; Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015), socio-demographic information such as age, sex, ethnic origin, nationality, language and mobility (Diochon et al., 2005), philosophical and religious traditions, and cultural values (Wang et al., 2012).

Although the studies present characteristics or aspects influencing entrepreneurs' background, the literature on entrepreneurship lacks models that gather different entrepreneurs' characteristics and that enable having a holistic sight over factors that precede the social construction of the entrepreneur subject. Thus, the current study aimed to propose a conceptual model that gathers different factors that precede entrepreneurs' formation, the so-called entrepreneur's background. To do so, the following aims were listed: (i) reviewing the literature on personal characteristics of entrepreneurs' background; (ii) debating with experts the applicability of elements forming the conceptual model to the entrepreneurship field; and (iii) discussing with

entrepreneurs the applicability of elements forming the proposed conceptual model to the activities they perform.

The paper is structured as follows: after this brief introduction, we present the research methodological aspects; subsequently, we describe the development of the proposed conceptual model which took place through a three-stage process. The fourth section introduces the empirical stage of the proposed model, which is followed by discussions about the model and, finally, by the conclusions about the research.

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

The first proactive research stage, which presented an exploratory and bibliographic nature, aimed at conducting a systematic literature review on the personal characteristics of entrepreneurs' background. Searches in the *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, and *Science Direct* databases were carried out to collect data. The following descriptors were adopted: “personal background” and (entrepreneur*) and “personal background” and (innovat*). The terms “entrepreneur*” and “Innovat*” were adopted due to the use of the English language, an interest in the articles that were part of the scope of the research; they were sought from filters *title*, *abstract*, and *keywords*. In total, 64 articles published between 1991 and 2019 were identified.

To develop the a priori analysis categories related to the research, studies were conducted referring to keywords related to the entrepreneur's background in the articles collected for the systematic literature review. In this context, four categories emerged from four dominant clusters: personal characteristics, educational background, professional background, and family background. Figure 1 provides a brief description of this stage.

Figure 1.

Analysis categories – Systematic literature review

Analysis category	Description	Recurrence	References
Personal characteristics	Articles that consider age, gender, nationality, mother tongue, and number of children to describe the entrepreneur's background	14	Popelka et al. (1992), Diochon et al. (2005), Weng (2013), Alonso-Almeida et al. (2015)
Schooling	Articles that consider education and its meaning for the background of entrepreneurs	12	Diochon et al. (2005), Weng (2013), Boca (2014), Harlez e Malagueño (2016)
Professional background	Articles that consider the position occupied by entrepreneurs in previous companies as well as the time worked in the company to describe the entrepreneurs' background	10	Diochon et al. (2005), Wang et al. (2012), Weng (2013), Boca (2014), Harlez e Malagueño (2016)
Family background	Articles that consider childhood and family relationships to describe the background of entrepreneurs	4	Westley (1992), Harlez e Malagueño (2016)

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Following, we carried out interviews with experts in the Entrepreneurship field. The experts were professionals and academics from this domain. We aimed to observe whether elements of personal background found in the literature could be adopted for the conceptual model, and which of them would not match the research object “entrepreneur”, as well as what would be the characteristics yet to be added to this initial series. We performed in-depth interviews with seven professionals, selecting entrepreneur consultants and professors of Entrepreneurship discipline in Brazil who have publications in relevant journals in the area. Searches were carried out in different databases to identify likely nominees for research participants. Subsequently, these researchers were invited by email to participate in the research. Figure 2 introduces a brief characterization of subjects participating in this research stage.

Figure 2.*Experts*

Interviewee	Formation
EXP1	Bachelor in Business Administration, specialist in Human Resource Management, Master's Degree in Business Administration and PhD in Business Administration.
EXP2	Bachelor in Business Administration, Specialist in New and Small Enterprise Promotion, Master's Degree in Business Administration, PhD in Business Administration, and Post-Doctorate in Entrepreneurship.
EXP3	Bachelor in Economic Sciences, Specialist in Business Management, Master's Degree in Environmental Education, and PhD in Environmental Education.
EXP4	Bachelor in Accounting Sciences and Master's Degree in Business Administration.
EXP5	Bachelor in Business Administration, Specialist in Marketing Management, MBA in Leadership, Innovation and Management 3.0, and Master's Degree in Business Administration.
EXP6	Bachelor in Business Administration, Film Specialist, Master's Degree in Business Administration, PhD in Strategy.
EXP7	Bachelor in Psychology, Specialist in Preventive Psychology, Specialist in Marketing, Master's Degree in Counseling Psychology, Master's Degree in Social Psychology, PhD in Social Psychology, and Post-Doctorate in Applied Social Sciences.

The interviews were carried out between May and June 2019, through videoconference; they were audio-recorded after consent was granted by the interviewees. A semi-structured script interview with nine open questions (Appendix A) was used to assess the elements identified in the literature. A new data collection stage was carried out after the experts' participation; it followed the same semi-structured script but, at this time, it was applied to entrepreneurs. Thus, it was possible to complete the evaluation performed with the experts; data triangulation enabled the proposition of the research's conceptual model. This stage was carried out through a focus group with eight participants; it aimed at debating with entrepreneurship practitioners the applicability of elements in the conceptual model that were identified in the literature and evaluated by experts. A focus group aims to encourage speech by different participants, as well as to observe the reactions from the others to it. It is a social-interaction exercise that opens room for the construction of symbols and meanings in opposition to interviewees' individuality (Bauer & Gaskell, 2008). Groups allow the rise of more complex interactions than in-depth interviews. Participants were selected based on

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the availability of entrepreneurs who work in Rio Grande do Sul State/Brazil, the region these researchers are inserted in. Figure 3 presents the profile of the focus group's participants.

Figure 3.

Entrepreneurs – Focus Group

Participant	Formation	Age when started undertaking	Current age	Type of current company	Is the current venture the first one?
EGF1	Bachelor in Business Administration	23 years	24 years	Elementary school	Yes
EGF2	Major in Production Engineering	19 years	20 years	Digital marketing company	Yes
EGF3	Bachelor in Economy	13 years	36 years	Cosmetics shop	Yes
EGF4	Bachelor in Engineering and Specialist in Business Management	19 years	60 years	Window and glass retail store	Yes
EGF5	Bachelor in Information Systems	8 years	24 years	Online service facilitation company	Yes
EGF6	Bachelor in Physiotherapy and Acupuncture Specialist	24 years	32 years	Health company - physiotherapy	Yes
EGF7	Bachelor of Business Administration and MBA in People Management	20 years	36 years	Retail store for women's clothing, lingerie, and erotic products	No
EGF8	Bachelor of Hospitality and Specialist in Business Management	13 years	36 years	Restaurant, pub, and brewery company	No

The final stage started with in-depth interviews with 12 more entrepreneurs. The selection criterion considered venture diversity and ventures located in Rio Grande do Sul State. Interviews were audio-recorded, being further transcribed and analyzed through content analysis. Figure 4 introduces the profile of participants selected for this phase of the study.

How does an entrepreneur rise? Proposition of a conceptual model of entrepreneurs' background analysis**Figure 4.***Entrepreneurs – Final phase*

Interviewee	Formation	Age when started undertaking	Current age	Type of current company	Is the current venture the first one?
ENT 1	Bachelor in Law	24	25	Law Office	Yes
ENT 2	Master's student in Administration; and Post-graduate MBA in People Management and Leadership	24	40	Management and technology	No
ENT 3	Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics	14	54	Language school	No
ENT 4	Technician in Accounting Sciences; Bachelor in Accounting Sciences	23	48	Accounting Office	Yes
ENT 5	Bachelor in Business Administration	16	44	People training and management	No
ENT 6	Technologist in Internet Systems	34	38	Hotel information systems	Yes
ENT 7	Bachelor in Accounting Sciences;	46	48	Accounting Office	Yes
ENT 8	High school	30	37	Print shop	Yes
ENT 9	Technologist in Management Processes	21	45	Pub; bar	No
ENT 10	Technologist in Logistics and Foreign Trade; Bachelor in Economics	21	22	Commercial adviser	Yes
ENT 11	Technical in Secretarial; Gastronomy Technologist	29	32	Cakes and candies	Yes
ENT12	Master's Degree in Business Administration	26	41	Retail	Yes

Data analysis at all empirical stages was carried out through content analysis, from the thematic categories' perspective (presented in Figure 1). The thematic categories were elaborated based on the adjustment of categories previously established through the literature review. The preceding word in all categories was replaced by the word 'aspects' to overall cover the subjects' speech. The category concerning 'family' aspects was kept in the model; the category 'schooling' was turned into a macro-category related to 'education'; the professional background was adjusted to 'professional activity'; personal characteristics were subdivided into two categories: 'place of birth and/or raising', and 'sociodemographic aspects'; finally, the emerging category 'faith or religion' was inserted in the model.

■ PROPOSITION FOR AN ENTREPRENEUR BACKGROUND MODEL

Interview with experts

At first, two aspects were recurrent in the interviewees' speech: aspects pointed toward family issues, such as having entrepreneurs at home, family firms, or even educational aspects, followed by personal feature aspects – entrepreneurs' competencies have also emerged. It is essential to highlight that one of the interviewees referred to personal characteristics as a factor not interfering with entrepreneurs' formation, and such a position was different from that taken by the other participants. In sequence, schooling or informal education aspects stood out in the interviewees' speech, as well as aspects related to professional background, besides networking with other entrepreneurs.

Family aspects emerged when experts talked about how the family can influence entrepreneurs' background. For Kinias (2013), the receptiveness to the idea of entrepreneurship and the decision to pursue the entrepreneurial process depends on the family and, therefore, it is very common for people who grew up in a family with entrepreneurial activities to continue the family tradition, whether by continuing a business or starting a new business. Likewise, it is common for children of public or private employees to be pushed by the family environment towards a career as an employee and to face any entrepreneurial prospect with fear. These aspects can have either positive or negative influence; furthermore, the family can influence, encourage, or even discourage adolescents or youngsters' will to undertake a business. Finally, living with entrepreneurs in the family can create an environment open to talks that could lead to entrepreneurship.

Among people I have met who wanted to undertake, most of them had in their biography an entrepreneur environment at home (EXP1).

The family upbringing can influence the formation of a more traditional vision of business, because creation influences the way a person sees the world (EXP4).

Experts explained that knowing entrepreneurs in social groups and, more specifically, having entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship experiences in the family are ways to inspire business-undertaking actions. Accordingly, they explain that having entrepreneur parents can influence the will to follow this same path; they also explain that a person can look to his/her entrepreneur parents and feel like starting a business to take different actions from those of his/her parents, or, yet, it may not feel like undertaking a business at all, since it does not want to follow its parents' lifestyle.

Entrepreneurs' **place of birth and/or raising** are associated with local culture and the development of an entrepreneurial environment in the geographic region where the entrepreneur grew in and how such factors have influenced them to undertake a business. Lee et al. (2004) introduce the idea that the

place where a person was born or raised influences the entrepreneur's background.

Can you imagine if a person grows up in the Silicon Valley, it is quite unlikely to choose another lifestyle, because in there you can get to know your heroes and they are undertaking, making business. Seeing it, and seeing success models, having a reference, within the local labor culture, have much impact on a decision about a career to take (EXP1).

Experts added information that having a more developed economic environment also encourages the will to undertake a business, even if it does not happen through disruptive products, but through ordinary ones, although they would present high-quality and would be following the region's needs. Furthermore, aspects associated with the local context, such as unemployment, can influence entrepreneurs. Finally, it is important to highlight the part played by the outspread of entrepreneurship information in the city. According to the experts, entrepreneurs who achieve successful businesses are in the mainstream of the local media and influence others to seek this alternative in regions with high unemployment rates.

Schooling aspects deal with education as a tool to boost entrepreneurship, as well as extra-class entrepreneurship education projects. Paes et al. (2019) present some variables as determinants for people's choice of entrepreneurship, such as education, age, personality, and risk aversion, in which the levels of human capital are measured according to the years of academic or professional training, making these people more assertive regarding the recognition and execution of projects or opportunities, enabling them to be entrepreneurs.

(...) the university can have some impact on the way how professionals will understand the act of undertaking a business. (...) universities, or even professors who have a Marxist materialist view, see the undertaking process as capital overlapping persons' subjectivity, and it has some impact on how to address entrepreneurship in the classroom (EXP1)

Education can influence the formation of a more traditional view of business because education influences how people see the world (EXP4).

Opinions about the part played by formal education in forming an entrepreneur diverge from each other. Experts who understand education as a tool to boost entrepreneurship see formal education as the way to change family conditions linked to entrepreneurship. Similarly, based on this same line of thinking, experts state that it is in college that several adolescents become more mature and become professional adults. Thus, at this point, the way certain ideas are transferred to them can change their way of thinking as entrepreneurs.

On the other hand, some interviewees place education in the position of a neutral factor, or even in that of a negative factor. According to

some experts, one of the goals of entrepreneurship teaching lies in working an action plan out. Therefore, by using such a plan, students can, somehow, feel discouraged, because they understand that undertaking a company can be quite difficult. Besides, experts make it clear that entrepreneurship disciplines in universities can end up having a shorter workload or being taught through distance education; they also say that the environment in Business Administration courses, at the undergraduate level, leads to the will to become an employee and that it does not encourage students to entrepreneurial actions.

They also talked about extra-class entrepreneurship education projects. Experts stated that such projects trigger the entrepreneurial experience because they put it in front of the theoretical aspects of the contents taught in the course. Consequently, such a teasing experience helps develop the idea of running a business to make the incubation process easier, among other factors. Furthermore, these projects help develop the expertise of those who will undertake a business, but who do not have any managerial formation, since they teach how to use some managerial tools.

Sociodemographic aspects were approached from the perspective of entrepreneurs' age, sex, and nationality, and from how these factors affect the background substantiating them. For Diochon et al. (2005), sociodemographic antecedents such as age, gender, ethnic origin, nationality, language, and mobility, for example, influence this background. In a complementary manner, Hadzic and Dinç (2016) suggest that age, gender, as well as education, and professional experience, affect entrepreneurial intention.

(...) the early age has in it a predisposition to undertake a business because newer generations are born within a new scenario where the sense of working to somebody else as lifestyle is not a rule, they can be entrepreneurs and work for several people at the same time (EXP6).

(...) women need flexibility because of their lifestyle and it leads to the search for activities according to which they can better manage their time (EXP1).

(...) entrepreneur women have a double family/job workload; however, women can set good relationships, and it helps the process to become an entrepreneur (EXP8).

Interviewees understand that age has some impact on entrepreneurs' background, either when one considers earlier or older ages. Sex is seen as an element affecting entrepreneurs' background, mainly if the entrepreneur is a woman who must combine her family routines with the act of undertaking a business. As for nationality, experts compared it to war refugees who get to another country. According to them, because they do not find a job, they end up opening their businesses to survive, and it leads to entrepreneurship motivated by need.

Religious aspects approached divergent perceptions about prosperity and accumulation deriving from religious beliefs and how they affect the background helping to form an entrepreneur. Wang et al. (2012) put forward the

idea that the entrepreneurial background is also made up of philosophical traditions, cultural and religious values. Dornelas (2015) highlights the born entrepreneur, identified as one who starts working very early and acquires negotiation and sales skills, is visionary, optimistic, and whose references and examples come from family and religious values.

Several customers who search for consultancy services state to have opened a business or that they want to do so because the church subsidized them with reasons to it (EXP6).

(...) there is a networking of people in churches according to which one person opens a business and has a public to sell to (EXP3)

Experts understand that religion can interfere with entrepreneurs' background. There was the recurrent explanation that the Catholic Church spreads the sense of entrepreneurship as profit, as something linked to a moral view of wrong that is bonded to sin. However, this view changes in protestant churches, be they Evangelical, Lutheran or Neo-Pentecostal. According to them, it is important to encourage the sense that labor is good and that there is no problem in having profit. It is important to state that the question about religion was open, that it did not address a particular religion, but interviewees only addressed Christian religions – this observation justified the lack of comments about other religions, such as the case of the African matrix ones and of Buddhism for example.

Professional activity before entrepreneurship addressed the activity type performed by entrepreneurs in organizations before they decided to undertake a business. Accordingly, the way they deal with the activity, the time spent working, and how they work can influence the decision to become an entrepreneur. Alonso-Almeida et al. (2015) argue that the background is influenced by the type of activity of previous companies, previous work experiences (time and activities developed), position that these people occupied in these jobs, and even the type and size of the company.

(...) when they start to work more autonomously, along with a businessman, they discuss actions, interventions, they see things happening...these people say that they do not want to go back to a company, they think it is limiting to be part of the staff (EXP1).

(...) to have participated in any prior experience makes it easier to match the profile of a professional at the time to incubate a company (...) (EXP4).

Experts had some consensus about the influence of prior professional activities. They understand that previous professional experience can make a person realize the barriers a managerial position in a company can pose to entrepreneurs and that it can, consequently, lead to the decision to undertake a business, or not.

Formation meaning, in turn, is attributed by students when it comes to the formation process and to their formation's contributions to society. Harlez and Malagueño (2016) showed that managers with training beyond the man-

agement area, previous experience in their area of activity (the constitution of their background) through previous experiences or even a second training, have better performance in their strategic decisions because this training has meaning for the entrepreneur. Based on the experts, this aspect influences the decision to become an entrepreneur.

(...) there is still a lot of students who attend the Accounting Sciences course and who seek public positions after they graduate. It happens because students do not have a sort of holistic graduation process, they just see specific aspects of their formation, and they do not exercise their positioning towards the knowledge they acquire (EXP5).

Still, according to experts, courses' pedagogical political projects should guide courses in the direction of manpower formation for the labor market, instead of guiding them to the formation of independent professionals, a fact that would have an impact on the ideas of students who will be future professionals. Hence, experts state that students apply to their courses aiming at public tenders or at getting a job as soon as they graduate; the meaning these students give to their formation will be different and it may be influenced by a negative choice for being a future entrepreneur.

Focus group with entrepreneurs

The third stage referred to the proposition of the conceptual model, which took place through a focus group carried out with 12 entrepreneurs. The following aspects were highlighted as its main results:

Family aspects: ENT8 mentioned that his grandfather influenced the family's culture for entrepreneurship. He has reported that because his grandfather had a shop, he used to play to help customers when he visited him for vacations, and it was a lot of fun. He grew up seeing entrepreneurship as a very common thing – he did not see any negative predisposition in it. ENT1 understands that, although he has a major degree in Business, it was his mother who took the first step to undertake a business; she was the one with expertise about the business since she was a teacher, and the idea was to have a child-education school.

Entrepreneur's place of birth and/or raising: ENT6 graduated from another state and started working because her husband got a job opportunity far from her city. ENT5 came from another state as well to attend college in Rio Grande do Sul State. According to him, the fact that he was born in Minas Gerais State and has moved from one state to the other did not influence his will to undertake a business, because, as he said, it was a matter of inner will: to see oneself as an entrepreneur. ENT7 adds to this comment by saying that if she depended on being encouraged by her city, she would not have taken the action to become an entrepreneur, because people in her city talk bad about it, they say that it is not worth undertaking a business there.

Schooling: ENT5 mentioned that he presented an entrepreneurial attitude since he was a kid, at the age of 8 he used to sell candies at school. However,

his degree in Information Systems also influenced him, since his company acts in the facilitation field based on digital tools, such as social networks. In his own words, college influences maturity issues and networking, because what is taught is not deep enough, you only learn by practicing. College plays the role of helping a person to be more mature rather than teaching.

ENT2 does not see schooling as a tool to boost entrepreneurship. She started studying Mechanical Fabrication, and nowadays she studies Production Engineering. She owns a digital marketing company; however, according to her, studying production brought along some tools that helped her manage her company. ENT4, in his turn, explains that, because his company works with real technical issues, his degree in Engineering may have helped the company, since his customers are also engineers. According to him, formal education in this field makes it easier to talk technical and it helps to sell more, although it did not influence his decision to become an entrepreneur.

Professional aspects: ENT6 says that she never thought of, or liked, being subordinated to anyone, so it was 'a natural condition' to become an entrepreneur. ENT5 mentions that the idea of the company initially came as a natural and informal path, it came from need. ENT6, in its turn, explains that undertaking a business was 'instinctive' because he needed to work and the way to do so was having his own space. ENT7 concluded by saying that she needed money to pay for college, which forced her to make the decision to become an entrepreneur.

Personal aspects: ENT4 and ENT8 openly stated to be entrepreneurs because they were born into it. They also used expressions to say that they always had this entrepreneurial profile. ENT8 says that his first venture was in childhood, when he got a couple of parakeets, he started breeding them; he created his aviary and started selling the birds – it became a sustainable business afterward (it was understood as entrepreneurial attitude since childhood). ENT4 agrees with the other participants about "being" or "being born" an entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurs realized how determining aspects were important for them to become entrepreneurs throughout the whole focus group. According to them, aspects such as family partnerships, encouragement from another family member to start a business, encouragement from parents and kin to undertake a business, having an entrepreneur in the family, and growing up seeing someone close running a business, were factors influencing their choice for becoming entrepreneurs. But, when it comes to aspects of the place of birth and/or raising, the focus group pointed out the high indices of unemployment in the region, which has an impact on the decision to become an entrepreneur. As for formal education aspects, the speech of entrepreneurs highlighted aspects such as university incubators, how universities are too theoretical and little practical, and how universities do not provide the necessary support for entrepreneurship, networking inside the university, assisting customers in their same business field and courses focused on support institutions such as SEBRAE. When they were asked about sociodemographic aspects, entrepreneurs talked only about the mobility issue. The speech by entrepreneurs about prior professional activities highlighted the importance of acting for some time in the same field to further open a business. Finally,

entrepreneurs talked about faith aspects since they have it as important at hard moments and at times of emotional distress.

Conceptual model

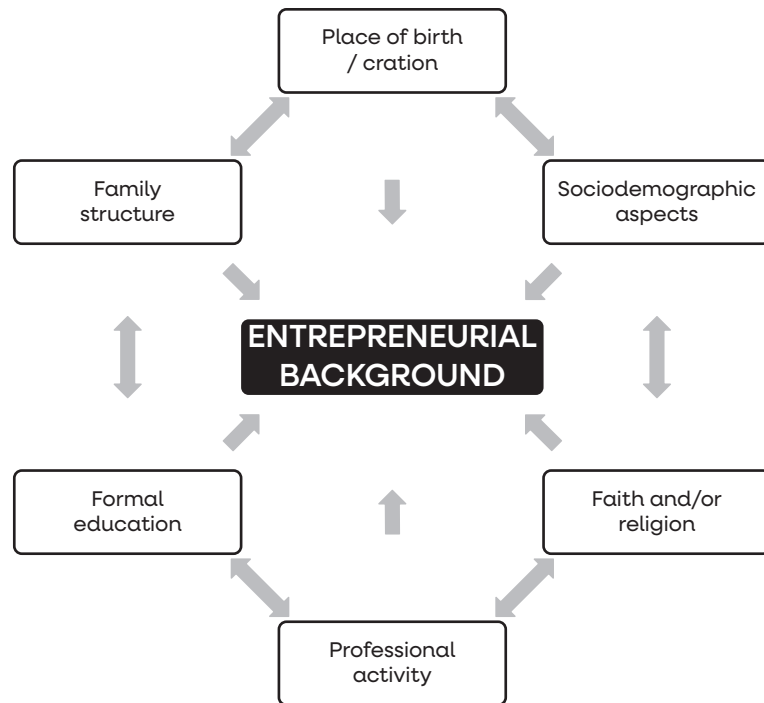
It was possible to propose a research conceptual model based on the three research stages performed in this research. According to the results, entrepreneurs' background is formed by:

- a) **Family aspects:** family structure, how a person was raised; the fact of having an entrepreneur in the family; and encouragement and discouragement to become an entrepreneur;
- b) **Place of birth and/or raising:** Local culture – if it is prone or not to entrepreneurship; job opportunities in the region (unemployment rates); and legal aspects such as entrepreneurship barriers and facilitating elements;
- c) **formation aspects:** entrepreneurial encouragement since child education, at initial school grades, at elementary school and at high school; technical school, higher education, *lato* and *stricto sensu* graduation; and entrepreneurial education programs;
- d) **Sociodemographic aspects:** mobility and gender;
- e) **Professional activity aspects:** to have worked before becoming an entrepreneur; experience with a given activity to get expertise in it; and negative experience with bosses; and, finally,
- f) **Faith and/or religious aspects:** professing a religion, believe in the advisory and help from God to become an entrepreneur.

It is important to highlight that, according to the data mentioned in this work, the factors that constitute the entrepreneur's background do not only influence the emergence of the entrepreneur, but they influence each other as a two-way life. As the place of birth influences sociodemographic aspects and family structure, family structure will influence the place of birth of a new individual as well as socio-demographic aspects. In the same way, professional activity is influenced by the individual's training, a person's training is influenced by the professional experiences they have, and so on. So, the proposed model can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5.

Theoretical model



■ EMPIRICAL DISCUSSION OF THE MODEL

After concluding the conceptual model, we empirically tested it in a fourth confirmatory stage through in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs from different formations, age groups, and business sectors. Firstly, as for **family aspects**, entrepreneurs mentioned issues such as encouragement by the parents, having entrepreneurs in the family, education towards risk-taking, family culture favorable for entrepreneurship, having encouraging people in the family – such as partnerships, working with the parents, being a child and playing in the parents' shop, learning the parents' activity. These psychological strengths meet the findings by Lima et al. (2020); according to them, encouragement and resilience, as well as other psychological elements, are essential for entrepreneurs' success.

By acting as an employee, I would not have autonomy to make decisions. My father, grandparents, and uncles were also entrepreneurs [...]. When I was a child, we used to go to my grandparents' house, we would stay at the company. This boosted our will to open a business (ENT2).

Family always gives you your first job. Until you get ready to leave and open your own company. Thus, in my family, there was not even one person who had tried to undertake a business that had quit it later (ENT2).

Concerning the **place of birth and/or raising**, entrepreneurs' speech showed aspects such as networking, the structure of the education provided in the mother town, lack of job opportunities in the region (unemployment), city culture in accepting what is new, and entrepreneurial environment.

I didn't stay there because it did not match my dreams (ENT2).

[...] Even if in more recent moments the city is open up for entrepreneurship and to generate innovation, it is still a toxic environment, since it does not open doors for entrepreneurial actions (ENT10).

a quite complicated city for those who want to undertake a business, either because of legal or cultural issues (ENT11).

Entrepreneurs' speeches about **schooling aspects** and education issues highlighted differences between teaching in private and public universities, entrepreneurial education projects, search for graduation as support for a previously performed activity, and specific studies about business administration disciplines. These findings meet Marques et al. (2020), who concluded that the knowledge field, as well as prior experiences, determine the entrepreneurial activity and innovation level of college students. Besides, Garçon and Nassif (2020) went further by stating that Brazilian college students are quite open to entrepreneurship, mainly to social entrepreneurship.

[...] in the city I went to school there are two Law Schools, one is private, and the other one is public and federal. To have attended a private university was a differential because it has a view heading toward the market, rather than towards research. This university's profile is more entrepreneurial (ENT1).

When they were asked about **sociodemographic aspects**, it was possible to observe issues related especially to sex and mobility.

Changing cities may [...] have boosted me since I saw other realities where it seemed more common to run a business and to be successful [...] (ENT2).

It was easier starting a business in the Law field because I am a woman. [...] customers do not want to be assisted by a woman, they are even disrespectful, sometimes. But such a teasing worked as a boosting tool [...] (ENT1).

[...] I decided to run a business because I am a woman, I had kids and they demanded time and a flexible job, I got it by being my own boss (ENT11).

Subsequently, interviewees mentioned the following about **professional activities** before becoming an entrepreneur: the previous experience encouraged them to test their autonomy, networking, and limitations from lack

of growing opportunities in the company as a boosting tool that will make things different.

[...] courage to open a company came from the fact of having worked in two companies in the same sector, but in different cities... one worked one way and the other worked differently. When I moved out, I started my own business based on what I knew (ENT8).

Finally, entrepreneurs' speeches on **faith and/or religious aspects** expressed encouragement by spiritual leaders, the spiritual will to make the world a better place, faith that God has enlightened the decision about starting a business, and timing to open a company.

[...] it was God's hands because we found each other, we had a chat, and at the right time we took a decision. [...] it was the time when God made the decision. [...] it was God who made it happen (ENT7).

■ CONFIRMATION OF CONSTRUCTS IN THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL

All constructs proposed in the conceptual model were confirmed by the speeches of the interviewed entrepreneurs, be it through focus groups or one-on-one interviews. However, some outcomes previously observed in the literature and pointed out by experts did not find support in the empirical stage, so they could not be taken as entrepreneur-background components, such as (i) Child education, initial school grades, elementary school, and high school; (ii) *lato* and *stricto sensu* graduation; and (iii) negative experience with previous bosses.

Thus, we present an instrument that enables entrepreneurs, consultants, recruiters, and entrepreneurial support agencies to map prior characteristics to the entrepreneurial activity. After the fourth stage of the research, which tested the proposed model empirically with 12 entrepreneurs, the result was a model divided into six axes: (a) Family aspects, (b) Place of birth and/or raising, (c) Aspects of formal education, (d) Sociodemographic aspects, (e) Aspects of professional activity and (f) Aspects of faith and/or religion.

■ FINAL REMARKS

Research findings and the herein proposed conceptual model somehow allowed identifying distinct groups of entrepreneurs based on their backgrounds, as highlighted below:

1. Entrepreneurs who are born in families whose parents, grandparents, and other family members were entrepreneurs believe in entrepreneurship as "following a legacy." According to them, it is natural to take this same path since they look back and find these outstanding individuals in their

stories. Many of these individuals also find faith in their starting point, be it from their relationship with God, with their religious leaders, or even with networking experienced in religious structures.

2. A second type of entrepreneur can be that of individuals who worked in their own old companies; be them happy and grateful employees, who point out to have learned their functions and those who have built their expertise in a previous scenario, but who are bold enough to take the right step and open their own company after losing their jobs, changing to another city, among other factors; in other words, they are the unhappy and disruptive employees that would like to run such a business differently – they are the ones who rebuild models, develop new management techniques and who get a new position in the same or similar markets – by developing the same business idea or even a different one.
3. Finally, there are the disruptive entrepreneurs who start or restart business structures through technology. These see gaps in the market that must be understood and fulfilled, and use new things that were not even imaged, so far – be them as full change or an adaptation. These entrepreneurs insert themselves or even create innovative business environments, they can be the ones who also seek techniques to enhance and develop their techniques in formal education or entrepreneurial education programs to develop their expertise.

The present study contributed scientifically to studies in Entrepreneurship, as it analyzes, through a reflective process, the historical and emotional context of the research participants. In this context, the beliefs and values of the participants were analyzed from the historical perspective constructed and rescued by the entrepreneurs, through their life stories, in a process that precedes the opening of their own companies. It also contributed to the literature by proposing an empirical model to identify the training of entrepreneurs. Finally, as a management contribution, it optimized the use of functionalities listed, tested, and confirmed in the conceptual model. They can be used as a tool for organizations that support entrepreneurship, as well as for incubator evaluators and junior companies, as they can help them in their training and even in selection processes. Besides, as a general contribution, it can be used in public policies focused on encouraging entrepreneurship, as well as help private institutions for entrepreneurship support.

Among the limitations of the study is how the experts and entrepreneurs were selected, as they were selected based on proximity and recommendations from the entrepreneurs themselves. A second limitation arises when considering specialist professionals those with scientific publications and postgraduate degrees in Entrepreneurship. In this context, the specialty is in scientific publication and training and not in the entrepreneurial trajectory. In this context, other experts on the subject may not have been included in this research. Finally, a third limitation of the research lies in the absence of elements that the literature points out as inherent to entrepreneurship such as access to resources, market conditions, economic environment, mentoring networks, and legal aspects. Although the literature indicates that these elements represent the context in which entrepreneurship emerges, the proposed model seeks to understand the entrepreneurs' view of the elements that affected their decision to undertake, and they cited the elements of

the model. In this context, the need to expand the literature cited at the beginning of the text is justified.

New studies could focus on discussing each construct proposed in the model, based on a larger number of entrepreneurs, whether through qualitative studies, interviews, or even through quantitative research based on questionnaires to better understand the associations between the constructs of the model and other basic characteristics of Entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the research can be expanded globally, by interviewing researchers from different countries and cultures.



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▲ **APPENDIX**

Semi-structured script – Proposition stage

1. How do you think personal history or background influences on the choice for being an entrepreneur or on the way these individuals behave as one?
2. Overall, what is the background forming an entrepreneur?
3. What are the Family aspects likely influencing the constitution of an entrepreneur?
4. In your opinion, how does the place of birth or residence influence the formation of an entrepreneur?
5. How does schooling influence entrepreneurs' formation? (Try to explain based on grades).
6. How can demographic backgrounds such as age, sex, and ethnic origin influence entrepreneurs' formation?
7. How can cultural, philosophical, and religious backgrounds influence entrepreneurs' formation?
8. In your opinion, how do past labor experiences, such as position, time and performed activity, can influence the way entrepreneurs are formed?
9. How does meaning production by entrepreneurs about schooling and professional background interfere with the way these same entrepreneurs are formed?



NOTES

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