

# **ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS FACTOR ATTRIBUTIONS: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF ESTONIAN, GUATEMALAN, AND ROMANIAN CULTURES**

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## ***Abstract***

*This paper reports the results of an initial exploratory investigation into culturally endorsed entrepreneurial prototypes. The study is part of the international research program “Entrepreneurship Work in Organizations Requiring Leadership Development” (E-WORLD). Focus group results in Estonia, Guatemala, and Romania are analyzed in order to identify implicit beliefs about successful entrepreneurs in these countries. There are common perceived features of entrepreneurs in the three countries: self-confidence, risk tolerance, communication skills and adaptability, creativity and self-motivation. Cultural differences are evident in entrepreneurial attributions related to optimism and future orientation. Research results can be used as an input for entrepreneurship training programs.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

There is growing interest to understand entrepreneurship as an economic and social development facilitator of different regions and countries (Álvarez, Urbano, & Amorós, 2014; Marcotte, 2014). Ács, Autio, and Szerb, (2014) stress the need to develop national systems of entrepreneurship that assume understanding specific drivers of entrepreneurship in countries that have different institutional and cultural contexts. One such existing national system is likely the cultural and social institution of a nation. Socially shared beliefs regarding entrepreneurial success factors may serve as a driver or inhibitor of entrepreneurship in specific cultural and social contexts. An understanding of country specific perceptions of entrepreneurial success factors may facilitate the development and alignment of entrepreneurial support systems to the cultural context of a specific country. In a globalized economy, cross-border

entrepreneurship initiatives and international joint ventures assume understanding the nature of entrepreneurship and related success factor attributions across cultures. This understanding will likely facilitate the economic and social development of developing and transition economy nations. This study is an initial investigation into the socially shared cultural ideas regarding entrepreneurship in three such countries.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2012 report, entrepreneurship is any attempt at new business or new venture creation, such as self-employment, a new business organisation, or the expansion of an existing business either by an individual or team of individuals (Xavier, Kelley, Kew, Herrington, & Vorderwülbecke, 2013, p. 12). Many researchers are calling for a humanistic, qualitative approach to entrepreneurial research, intent on theory building and new knowledge generation rather than replication (Fillis, 2007). In one attempt to build additional theory, Aaltio (2013) has stressed the need to focus on entrepreneurial identity construction as a departure point for successful entrepreneurship development. Aaltio argues that the Estonian entrepreneurial identity needs researched in the context of the Estonian transition economy and cultural context. The present study adds to this line of research by investigating cultural perceptions of entrepreneurship, which can be used to shape and develop entrepreneurial identity in a specific cultural context.

Given the above discussion, we argue that entrepreneurial identity is to some degree culturally determined and specific, in that within a specific culture there exists a culturally determined entrepreneurial prototype that determines how members of that society view entrepreneurs. Therefore, a first step in investigating this prototype will be to identify the perceptions regarding the attributes of entrepreneurs in a culture. While perceptions and attitudes regarding such characteristics have been identified (Rauch & Frese, 2007), little research exists that investigates how these perceptions vary across cultures due to cultural differences (Mueller & Thomas, 2000). We use attributional and implicit approaches to examine these cultural perceptions. While a few previous studies have used an attributional perspective to study entrepreneurship (Rogoff, Lee, & Suh, 2004; Shaver, Gartner, Crosby, Bakalarova, & Gatewood, 2001), little research exists that has used this perspective to examine cultural entrepreneurial prototypes. Using this perspective, an attempt is made to culturally profile entrepreneurial success perceptions using qualitative research methodology.

This study examines perceptions of entrepreneurial attributes across three very different countries: Estonia, Guatemala, and Romania. The paper reports initial results of a broader international research program: "Entrepreneurship Work in Organizations Requiring Leadership Development" (E-World). All authors have participated in developing the E-World research program. Three of co-authors have conducted the E-World research activities in the countries included in this study. A common feature of these countries is the process of radical socio-

economic and political change these countries have experienced during the past few decades. Romania is a relatively large country that deposed dictatorship in 1989 in a dramatic way but has since this time experienced difficulties in developing an advanced market economy and supportive environment for entrepreneurship. Estonia is a small country that regained independence in 1991 after disintegration of the Soviet command economy. Estonia has followed liberal economic policies that enhanced rapid economic transition to the market economy. Guatemala emerged from a long-lasting civil war in 1996. The study seeks to identify specific entrepreneurial success factor attributions and their relation to cultural dynamics in these countries in order to contribute to entrepreneurship theory in developing and transition economies.

In the next section, a theoretical framework based on attribution theory and an implicit approach to entrepreneurship is presented to explain how culture impacts perceptions of entrepreneurial traits and characteristics. Second, a brief discussion of the current state of entrepreneurship in the three countries is presented. Third, discussion is provided regarding the qualitative methodology employed to examine the entrepreneurial prototypes along with focus group research results. Implications of the results are discussed. The following research question guides this study: What is the content of the culturally implicit entrepreneurial prototype in each of the three countries of Estonia, Guatemala, and Romania?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Culture and Entrepreneurship**

Hofstede (1993, p. 89) defines culture as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another. Culture is not directly observable, but manifests itself in verbal statements and behaviors. The shared values of a culture influence the speech and behaviors of individuals and affect perceptions of legitimacy and acceptability in a culture (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995). Hofstede has identified several cultural dimensions around which shared values may be developed: individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, and short-term vs. long-term orientation (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). These dimensions have a strong effect on how individuals in a culture think and behave.

Hofstede's research on cultural effects and differences has largely been supported by the GLOBE Project (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). The GLOBE Project has found evidence that leadership prototypes are culturally determined. Using Hofstede's (1980) cultural framework, GLOBE has found that individuals across countries have different perceptions and attitudes towards leadership based on their culture's rating on these dimensions. The dimensions likely impact how individuals in a culture perceive the entrepreneur as well.

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) researchers (Xavier et al., 2013) have found evidence of a cultural impact on actual entrepreneurial motivation and risk taking behaviors. In societies where equality of income is the cultural norm, individuals tend to have lower motivation to exploit entrepreneurship opportunities and to incur the risks often associated with the early stages of entrepreneurship.

Researchers have long considered the impact of culture on opportunity recognition and exploitation (Huisman, 1985; Weber, 1904) and other entrepreneurial characteristics and behaviors. Research indicates that certain cultural factors (i.e., performance orientation, individualism) may lead to the development of a cultural personality which fosters entrepreneurial behavior. McClelland (1961) predicted that cultures with high achievement orientations would exhibit higher levels of entrepreneurship, due to the likelihood that a greater number of individuals in that culture would possess high achievement values in their personal dispositions. Additional studies have reported relationships between culture, personality traits, and entrepreneurial behaviors (Baum, Olian, Erez, Schnell, Smith, Sims, Scully, & Smith 1993; Mueller & Thomas 2000; Shane, 1992; Shapero, 1975; Thomas & Mueller, 2000). Personality traits believed to have a cultural origin and relate to entrepreneurial behavior include innovativeness, internal locus of control, risk-taking and energy level. Therefore, some cultures may have greater entrepreneurial orientations than others. In these cultures, individuals who demonstrate these personality characteristics may be perceived as a good entrepreneur because they are a close fit with the entrepreneurial orientation characteristic of the culture.

Researchers have also noted that cultural dimensions serve to determine the degree to which a culture considers certain entrepreneurial behaviors as important, valuable, and desirable (Hayton, George, & Zahra, 2002). For example, in high individualistic cultures, entrepreneurs might be expected to aggressively pursue opportunities and act in their own best interest. In high uncertainty avoidance and high collectivistic cultures, they might be expected to be cautious, take few risks, and act in the interest of the collective. In high power distance countries, they may be considered to be individuals of privilege and be more autocratic in how they conduct business. Individuals who demonstrate entrepreneurial behaviors consistent with the expectations of society may be perceived as more legitimate entrepreneurs.

### **Attribution Theory: “Naive” Psychology**

The theoretical foundation for the current study can be found in attribution theory. Beginning with Heider’s (1958) writings, attribution theory has focused on people’s causal explanations for the behavior and events they encounter. Heider’s basic premise was that people act as “naive psychologists” as they strive to explain their own and others’ behavior and performance in order to understand and control their environments (Martinko, 1995). These explanations impact

expectations for future events, which in turn, shape subsequent behavior. Hence, attribution theory is concerned with the perceived causes of events and the consequences of such perceptions.

Heider (1958) identified four causes to which most people attribute success and failure: ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. Building on Heider's ideas, Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, Rest, and Rosenbaum (1971) identified two underlying attributional dimensions: locus of causality (internal versus external) and stability (stable versus unstable). By examining these dimensions in tandem, they created a 2 x 2 taxonomy for classifying attributions as internal and stable (e.g., ability), internal and unstable (e.g., effort), external and stable (e.g., task difficulty), and external and unstable (e.g., luck/chance). Additional attributional dimensions have since been proposed, including controllability, intentionality, and globality (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Weiner, 1986).

The construct of explanatory style (Peterson & Seligman, 1984; Seligman, 1990; Sweeney, Anderson, & Bailey, 1986), also known as attributional style (Anderson, 1983), can be defined as a predisposition to make certain kinds of attributions for success or failure. Individuals with "pessimistic" explanatory styles tend to attribute failure to personal (internal), permanent (stable), and pervasive (global) causes, and success to impersonal (external), temporary (unstable) and specific causes. Persons with "optimistic" styles favor the exact opposite pattern of attributions. There is consensus among researchers that a majority of new enterprises likely fail for attributional reasons, although in reality, the share of failures in the population of enterprises also depends on other factors such as industries and markets (Saraswathy, Menon, & Kuechle, 2013). For example, pessimistic individuals may be so afraid of failure that they fail to take advantages of opportunities needed to achieve and maintain success.

Pessimistic individuals are especially vulnerable to learned helplessness, which occurs when a person exposed to repeated punishment or failure, becomes passive and remains so even after environmental changes make success possible (Abramson et al., 1978; Martinko & Gardner, 1982). Their susceptibility stems from their tendency to attribute failure to internal, stable and global causes, such as lack of ability. Such attributions are aversive, elicit negative affect (e.g., depression, anxiety), and undermine self-efficacy. In this state, people tend to become helpless as they lose hope and quit trying; these motivational deficits in turn lead to poor performance on future tasks. Hence, a self-defeating pattern of attributions, affect, self-efficacy expectations, effort, performance and subsequent attributions is formed (Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1993; Seligman, 1990).

It is likely that explanatory styles and attributions are somewhat culturally determined. Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions may explain why individuals in certain cultures are more or less optimistic or pessimistic in their views on

entrepreneurship and why they attribute certain characteristics or factors regarding success to entrepreneurs. Hofstede's newest cultural dimension of indulgence vs. restraint (The Hofstede Center, 2015), likely explains why individuals in some cultures may possess optimistic or pessimistic attitudes regarding entrepreneurship. Both Estonia and Romania score low on this dimension, meaning that the cultures of these countries are more restrained. Individuals in restrained cultures exhibit higher levels of cynicism and pessimism, believing that behaviors are restrained by social values and norms. Therefore, they may have more of an external locus of control and be more likely to attribute entrepreneurial success to luck or fate rather than one's ability and motivation. Likewise, power distance may also explain explanatory style and entrepreneurial attributions. In countries with high power distance (i.e., Guatemala and Romania), individuals may explain entrepreneurial success in terms of social status and connection, believing that only those individuals of certain social classes with proper connections have the opportunity to be a successful entrepreneur. In these cultures, individuals of lower classes may have more pessimistic explanatory styles of successful entrepreneurship. On the other hand, cultures high in individualism, low in power distance and uncertainty avoidance, will likely consist of individuals who possess an internal locus of control and attribute entrepreneurial success to person factors such as ability, personality traits, motivation, and hard work. In these cultures, we would expect individuals to possess a more optimistic explanatory style.

We argue that cultural dimensions affect explanatory styles and attributions made of entrepreneurs in a culture. These attributions and explanatory style determine the entrepreneurial prototype dominant in a culture.

### **An Implicit Approach to Entrepreneurship**

Working from an attributional perspective, this study takes a cognitive categorization or implicit approach (Lord & Maher, 1991; Offerman, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994) to the study of entrepreneurship. Much like implicit approaches to leadership (i.e., GLOBE Project), we propose that individuals possess a cognitive category or schema for entrepreneurship in the memory system. Individuals possess assumptions and attitudes regarding factors important for successful entrepreneurship. The factors likely include the traits, characteristics, and behaviours believed important for good entrepreneurship. These factors will constitute the prototype, or the best representation of the cognitive category. An implicit approach to entrepreneurship seeks to identify the content of this category or the prototype that individuals hold of the entrepreneur.

The GLOBE Project (House et al., 2004) has supported the existence of culturally endorsed leadership prototypes across cultures. We propose that it is likely that cultures possess endorsed entrepreneurial prototypes as well based on differences on Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions. If this is the case, it becomes important to identify the culturally endorsed prototype of a country so

that entrepreneurs operating in a country can be taught to match the endorsed prototype of that culture. To the degree that an entrepreneur matches the endorsed prototype, it is more likely that good entrepreneurship will be attributed to them.

## **THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CONTEXT OF ESTONIA, GUATEMALA AND ROMANIA**

### **Estonia**

Estonia is a country that has followed liberal economic policy more than many other new member countries of the European Union. Two decades ago, Estonian authorities embraced a privatization process and encouraged foreign investments. Estonia experienced a rapid development of market economy institutions in 1990s compared to other East European countries. The current challenge is to develop entrepreneurship that will be competitive both inside the European Union and globally.

The growth of entrepreneurship and a supportive business environment are important for meeting the challenges of Estonia's small open economy. The Estonian Entrepreneurship Growth Strategy 2014-2020 was approved in September 2013 by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications. The main goal of this strategy is to increase the productivity of Estonian entrepreneurs to a level equivalent to 80 percent of the respective average of the European Union. As a result, the population of Estonia should become more business-minded and enterprised, becoming more ambitious. Enterprises will hopefully become more efficient at producing products with high added value and offer innovative services, being actively involved in exports. Hopefully, Estonia will become a more highly valued business environment. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, 2013).

The first GEM survey was conducted in Estonia in 2012. The share of early-stage entrepreneurs that have been in business less than 3.5 years in the total adult population was at that time 14%. The Estonian percentage of early-stage entrepreneurs in 2012 was highest in Europe (Xavier et al. 2013). GEM data in Estonia in 2012 and 2013 have indicated a positive assessment of opportunities to start business but at the same time high fear of failure (Arro et al., 2013; Venesaar et al., 2014). This high fear of failure may reflect the high uncertainty avoidance and restrained nature of the Estonian culture. In 2013, the GEM study indicated that Estonia had a high early-stage male entrepreneurship rate of 17% of adult male population, compared to 14% in Guatemala and 12% in Romania (Amorós and Bosma, 2014). Among Estonian early-stage entrepreneurs, 50.1% were improvement-driven and opportunity-focused, compared to 44.2% in Guatemala and 31.6% in Romania. If necessity-driven entrepreneurs start a business as the result of a limited supply of jobs, improvement-driven and

opportunity-focused entrepreneurs tend to be motivated by new business opportunities in order to improve their status.

### **Guatemala**

Guatemala is a small country located in the northern part of Central America. It suffered from a 36-year-long civil war that ended only about two decades ago. Enterprises in Guatemala are of two types: legally registered corporations and those who are not registered (i.e., belong to the hidden economy).

Since the 1990's, a strong effort has been made to enable people to understand the importance of entrepreneurship and this has been done in association with Guatemalan universities, institutions, and associations. In 2006, a free trade agreement saw the emergence of new rules for commerce and transformation of regional institutions. This has resulted in a new breed of entrepreneurs, who are profiting from the opportunities of globalization. These entrepreneurs are young, very well educated (mostly in American and European universities), and most are from middle or upper class families.

According to GEM, the share of early-stage entrepreneurs in Guatemala was 12.3% in 2013. This percentage is lower than in other Latin America countries such as Chile (24.3%), Colombia (23.7%), and Peru (23.4%), and a bit lower than in Estonia (13.1%). Guatemala, however, had slightly higher share of female early-stage entrepreneurs: 11% of the adult female population, compared to 9% in Estonia and 8% in Romania. At the same time, GEM respondents in Guatemala were quite optimistic about their entrepreneurship capabilities. Sixty-eight percent perceived that they have sufficient capabilities for starting a business, compared to 45.9% in Romania and only 40% in Estonia. Fear of failure appeared as an obstacle to starting a new business among 33.3% of Guatemala respondents, while in Estonia this percentage was 38.8% and in 37.3% Romania (Amorós and Bosma, 2014). Guatemala is a high uncertainty avoidance and power distance culture. Therefore, although a majority of individuals may have confidence in their own ability to start a business, they may perceive that many factors necessary for success are situationally determined and lie beyond their ability to control.

### **Romania**

Balkan people enjoy the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the Three Empires (Roman, Byzantine and Turkish). Entrepreneurship in Romania is influenced by several background factors: the Romanians' old cultural traditions as part of Balkans, half-century of imported communism, and the transition from a centrally planned economy to free-market system. Romania joined the European Union in 2007, three years later than Estonia.

The 2013 GEM research indicated a low percentage of early-stage entrepreneurs: 10.1% of the Romanian adult population. At the same time, 72.6% of Romanian



GEM respondents expressed the opinion that successful entrepreneurs in their country have high status. This percentage is slightly bit higher than in Guatemala (71.5%), but substantially higher than in Estonia (58.6%). In Romania, 61.3% of respondents indicated the importance of high media attention to successful entrepreneurs, compared to 55.1% in Guatemala and only 40.7% in Estonia (Amorós and Bosma, 2014).

This evidence indicates that in Romania, and to some extent in Guatemala, the status of entrepreneurs is treated as more of a social privilege than in Estonia. This reflects the high power distance culture of these countries. However, while the share of entrepreneurs with university degrees in Estonia is quite high (46.5%), according to the Population and Housing Census (Estonian Statistics, 2013), the Estonian population in general is more pessimistic about possessing capabilities to start a successful business than the populations of Guatemala and Romania. Again, this may be explained by the highly restrained nature of the Estonian culture.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Ethnographic Inquiry**

The major methodology used for this study was ethnography. Ethnography is an attempt to describe and understand a culture. More specifically, it is an attempt to understand a culture from the native point of view. Ethnography is useful for identifying culture bound or culture specific theories and the manner in which individuals within a specific culture perceive phenomena, encode information, and assign meaning to those phenomena (Spradley, 1980). Because implicit cultural prototypes involve tacit knowledge and are the result of the construction and assignment of culture specific information and meaning, ethnography is an appropriate method for identifying and understanding the structure and meaning given to the concept of entrepreneurship within a specific culture, or the implicit cultural entrepreneurial prototype. The use of multiple methods employs the concepts of crystallization and triangulation (Tracy, 2010) and prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) are important for establishing the credibility criterion in qualitative research. If various methods and sources of information lead to the same conclusions, it is believed those conclusions are likely more credible. Guba and Lincoln (1989) equate this with establishing the internal validity of a study in quantitative research. Focus group discussions and unstructured interviews were used in the EWORLD Project to identify tacit knowledge that most often is based on personal experience, perceptions, and value systems. However, personal background, including entrepreneurship experience and/or entrepreneurial intentions of participants were also taken into consideration in an attempt to create a diverse composition of focus groups in three countries.

The aim was to identify the content of the entrepreneurial prototype in each of the three countries. Specific methods employed and sample characteristics are discussed below for each individual country. In each country, data were gathered by academics at leading universities within their respective country. The academics used practical means for generating subject participation in the research, where meaningful cooperation could be established for joint knowledge creation. Therefore, the methods of data collection and samples employed differed somewhat across the three countries in this study.

### **Procedure**

Focus groups were conducted in Estonia, Guatemala, and Romania to examine perceptions and attributions made of entrepreneurs in each country. These countries provide for an excellent comparison because they are very different in terms of cultural factors such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, risk aversion, and egalitarianism.

At the start of the focus groups, participants were informed that they were participating in a cross-cultural research project. Participants were also informed that the purpose of the focus group was to understand the meaning of the term *successful entrepreneur* in different cultures and to gather information concerning the characteristics of successful entrepreneurs in their own countries. Participants were informed that this was the beginning step in the research project and that the information obtained would help increase the understanding of entrepreneurship within their country. Focus groups consisted of entrepreneurs, employees of entrepreneurial ventures, entrepreneurship support organizations, businessmen, and students that were involved in entrepreneurship and/or management studies. Results of focus groups were presented to focus group participants during follow-up sessions for further discussions that resulted in consensus concerning the essential features of the entrepreneurial prototype of the country from the focus group perspective. These steps were conducted to increase the credibility of research results. Individual interviews were conducted with focus group members whose statements during the focus groups needed additional explanations in order to correct possible misunderstandings.

Focus group data were subjected to taxonomic analysis (Krueger, 1998) to identify the attributions made of entrepreneurs in each country. Krueger defines a taxonomy as a set of categories organized on the basis of relationships. A taxonomy shows the relationships between things that together comprise a cultural domain. See the results of the taxonomic analyses for each country in Tables 1-3. Once a cultural domain of interest has been identified, such as the domain of “perceptions of the entrepreneur” in this study, the task becomes one of searching the data to identify perceived characteristics, traits, and behaviors, and grouping them into subsets based on similarity. This method of analysis allows for the organization of the data into groups and categories in order to

make sense of it, and to describe and understand the perceptions individuals in that specific culture hold of the entrepreneur.

Once the focus group and interview data had been collected by collaborators in each of the three countries, the data were sent to other EWORLD investigators who subjected the material to additional taxonomic analysis. Then, the taxonomies were sent back to researchers in the three countries who had collected the data to determine whether they believed the results were accurate in that they were valid reflections of participants' views and also were consistent with what they themselves, as experts, believed to be true regarding perceptions of the entrepreneur in their specific country. In this manner, consensus among the various sources was sought and evidence of the validity of the taxonomies provided. This procedure employs the practice of triangulation suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Tracy (2010) as important for establishing the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative results. The procedure helped to organize the data and enabled dependability and confirmability of the research process by offering a reflective framework for interpretative judgements of researchers.

The issue of the validity and transferability of results is an important consideration at this point. Demonstrating validity of results in ethnographical or qualitative research is somewhat different from the demonstration of validity in quantitative research that closely follows more traditional, standard scientific methods. In experimental research employing scientific methodology, the internal and external validity of a study is often evidenced by controlling for confounding or intervening variables and the representativeness of the sample which that makes generalizability of the results more likely. However, in qualitative research such as ethnography, the goal is not to identify and control such confounding variables nor is it to generalize results directly to the greater population of a country. Transferability of results is, however, possible to groups that have similar entrepreneurship experiences as the focus group participants in this research.

## **RESEARCH PROCESS AND EMPIRICAL RESULTS BY COUNTRIES**

### **Attributions of Successful Entrepreneurs in Estonia**

In Estonia a two-stage procedure was applied for conducting focus group discussions. First, participants spent 20 minutes completing individual work sheets by compiling a list of at least 5 personality features that characterize successful entrepreneurs in Estonia. Participants were also asked two other questions to describe the behavior and other possible success factors of entrepreneurs currently operating in Estonia.

After this stage, participants were asked to compare successful entrepreneurs in Estonia in the 1990s and at present. This comparison was discussed in 4-5

member focus groups. After 30 minutes, the groups presented their conclusions. Facilitators asked questions to clarify the conclusions of the group. The Estonian sample consisted of 12 doctoral students from the Estonian Business School (EBS), 32 EBS bachelor students majoring in entrepreneurship, and 16 master students from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre majoring in arts administration. Separate focus group sessions were conducted with these categories of participants.

Table 1 presents the results of the taxonomic analysis of the Estonian focus group data and the resulting Estonian implicit entrepreneurial prototype.

**TABLE 1**  
**Estonian Entrepreneurial Prototype**

Estonian Prototype	Sometimes greedy	
	Risk taker	
	Honest	
	Autocratic	
	Interpersonal	Communicative
		cooperative and team-oriented
		concern for others, empathetic
		Charismatic
		able to motivate others
	Change oriented	innovative and creative
		Flexible
		open to new ideas and information
	Highly motivated	results oriented
		Workaholic
		Determined
		ambitious: strong will-power
		strong drive to execute plans and ideas
	Emotionally strong	independent: strong trust in own knowledge and ability
		positive view of self, self-confident
		overall positive affect, positive view of situations

The following characteristics of successful entrepreneurs in Estonia at present were especially noted in the focus groups.

***Courage to Take Risks.*** Risks were seen both as financial risks and as risks that are linked to being the first to start an entrepreneurial venture in a new field.

***Openness to New Information.*** When explaining this characteristic at the second stage in the focus group, several respondents noted the open nature of Estonian economy and the need to use international business information. It was also noted that myriad communication skills are necessary to be successful including effective interpersonal relations, and the ability to utilize the internet for communication purposes.

***Flexibility.*** Arguments to support this feature were based on the rapid changes in the Estonian economy and on the need to move quickly in order to take advantage of new opportunities if the business landscape changed.

***Creativity.*** Focus group discussions gave the impression that creativity was often stressed as a value on abstract level, without reference on specific new product or technology development experiences.

***Determination.*** The entrepreneur was seen as a self-confident person with a “firm hand” that follows his/her course of action and is determined to implement his/her decision even if there is opposition among employees or external obstacles.

***Balance Between Work and Family.*** Focus group members noted that current Estonian entrepreneurs are more concerned with work life issues and the balance between work and family as compared to earlier Estonian entrepreneurs.

Bachelor students majoring in entrepreneurship, 54% of whom already had some practical entrepreneurial experience, stressed self-confidence and communicative skills more often than other focus group members. Potentially conflicting personality characteristics such as egoism and empathy were noted by entrepreneurship students, whereas the students of arts administration mentioned trust and greediness. Successful entrepreneurs were not seen as ideal personalities that always present socially acceptable behaviors.

Such behavioral patterns as active involvement in networking, acquiring founding capital, selecting the right team, and following agreements were clearly described as ways to success by focus group participants that had entrepreneurial experience. Other students most often highlighted innovative behavior and the search for new knowledge.

During focus group discussions, without any special guidance, the participants moved from general personality traits to more specific descriptions of success factors that tend to reflect some behavioral patterns. These behaviors are linked

to features of the business environment; although, the majority of them are also enabled by personality characteristics.

In the 1990s, the courage to take risks was linked to short-term thinking that was sometimes inevitable as “windows of business opportunities” opened and closed rapidly in the changing legal environment and macroeconomic situation. A “shoot first and then ask questions later” approach was, however, interpreted as unsuitable for the present stage of market economy development and international competitiveness. Long-term vision and ability to link innovation and business sustainability were presented as essential risk management skills for 21<sup>st</sup> century. Vision and a long-term perspective are seen as the success factors in present entrepreneurs assuming a link between innovation and business sustainability. Teamwork was seen as an essential success factor for present and future success for Estonian entrepreneurs whereas successful entrepreneurs in 1990s were perceived as more individualistic.

#### **Attributions of Successful Entrepreneurs in Guatemala**

In Guatemala, a total of nine entrepreneurs took part in the focus group. All participants were male. The participants were from a variety of industries such as the manufacturing industry, business services, hotels and resorts, and the professional services sector. Participants noted that a large part of Guatemalan society has had a misconception of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship has been associated with privilege, oligarchy and impunity. However, since the 1990’s a strong effort to make people understand the importance of entrepreneurship has been developed in Guatemala by universities and entrepreneur associations. Table 2 presents the taxonomic analysis of the Guatemalan focus group data and the resulting Guatemalan implicit entrepreneurial prototype.

The following characteristics of successful entrepreneurs in Guatemala were noted.

***Motivated by Money and Success.*** Participants noted that by and large the Guatemalan entrepreneur is motivated by the riches and success of owning a thriving enterprise.

***Has Good Connections and Links.*** Focus group members noted that entrepreneurial success in Guatemala is largely based on political connections and family social status. It was also noted that the successful entrepreneur often has a sponsor or godfather (“Padrino”).

***Strong Character.*** The successful Guatemalan entrepreneur was described as primarily male, autocratic, rash, audacious, courageous, and brave.

**TABLE 2**  
**Guatemalan Entrepreneurial Prototype**

Guatemalan Prototype	Motivated by money and success			
	Has good connections and links	has a sponsor or Godfather, Padrino		
		economic links		
		entrepreneurial links		
		Political	government contracts	
			government connections	
			political links	
		Family	born into a good family	
			good social relationships	
			family links	
	Strong character	Leadership	male dominance	
			autocratic	
		sagacity		
		Rash		
		Audacious		
		Courageous		
		Brave		
		Visionary		
	Loyal			
	Workaholic			
	Determined and resolute			

**Visionary.** Several focus group members noted that successful Guatemalan entrepreneurs must possess a vision that is effectively communicated to the followers.

**Loyal.** Loyalty was expressed as an important success factor in terms of family and political relationships.

**Workaholic.** Focus group members noted that successful entrepreneurs worked numerous hours in order for their organizations to be successful.

**Determined and Resolute.** Focus group members reported that a new breed of entrepreneur in Guatemala is determined and resolute in exploiting the opportunities of globalization. Participants noted that these new Guatemalan

entrepreneurs are young, very well educated from mostly American and European universities and come from middle class families. These entrepreneurs desire to develop their own ventures instead of assuming a position within a family business.

### **Attributions of Successful Entrepreneurs in Romania**

Two focus groups (n=27) were held in Bucharest, Romania. Respondents in both groups were successful entrepreneurs running micro or small businesses in Romania or employees of micro or small businesses in Romania. Each focus group was asked to consider and discuss three issues designed to identify the personal characteristics of successful entrepreneurs. In each case, participants were asked to 1) provide general views on entrepreneurship in their country 2) think of a successful entrepreneur personally known to them and, while not revealing their identity in any way, to try to describe this person as fully as possible, 3) identify specific behaviors (internal and external to the organization) that the entrepreneur has engaged in and led to the success of their organizations.. Several descriptors of personal characteristics of successful entrepreneurs were identified by multiple participants (e.g. most participants thought that determination was a characteristic of a successful entrepreneur). Table 3 presents the results of the taxonomic analysis and the implicit prototype of the Romanian entrepreneur as described in the focus groups. A discussion of some of the more important characteristics is presented below.

***Determination and Resoluteness.*** As previously mentioned, the traits of determination and resoluteness were both mentioned by several Romanian entrepreneurs as important traits for a successful entrepreneur to possess. In relation to this characteristic, it was noted by several respondents that a long-term orientation was a key trait. Patience in regards to success, being a hard worker and ambitious and possessing perseverance were mentioned as essential characteristics. Other respondents noted that being disciplined and stress resilience were key traits.

***Creative and Open Thinking.*** Several of the Romanian entrepreneurs and workers noted that creative and original ideas were key success traits. Being open to new business opportunities and possessing the ability to identify niches in low competition markets were viewed by some participants as important entrepreneurial characteristics. Having a vision and possessing intuition were other traits mentioned in this category.

***Business Skills.*** Romanian focus group members noted leadership skills as an important prerequisite for success entrepreneurship. Likewise, respondents identified selling, negotiation, and conflict resolution skills as key traits for success. Finally, a successful entrepreneur in Romania was noted as being organized.



***People Orientation.*** The Romanian focus group respondents noted that valuing one's human resources was associated with successful entrepreneurship. Being client focused was cited as an important trait. In addition, sociability and effective communication skills were necessary characteristics for the Romanian entrepreneur.

***“Go-getter” Personality.*** Dynamism and initiative spirit were both adjectives used to describe the successful Romanian entrepreneur. These characteristics are contrary to those traits traditionally associated with the Romanian culture. It has been noted that Romanians in general may have difficulty embracing the new and can react slowly to the challenges of a dynamic environment (Belascu, Herciu, & Ogorean, 2007).

***Business Knowledge and Experience.*** Several of the entrepreneurs and their employees noted that it was important for the Romanian entrepreneur to possess extensive business experience as well as management expertise. Knowledge of the specific business area was a key trait for success. Additionally, several respondents reported that management and economics knowledge were important characteristics to possess.

***Strong Moral Character.*** Focus group members noted that self-confidence, courage, and honesty were key traits for success. Interestingly, Romanian literature suggests that because of the high level of collectivism and femininity in the Romanian culture, accepted high levels of corruption may exist in the organizational environment (Belascu, Herciu, & Ogorean, 2007).

***Other Key Traits.*** Other key success traits mentioned were adaptability, risk-taking behavior, and pragmatism. It was reported that most successful entrepreneurs enjoy their work and that good luck played a part in success.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Commonalities and Differences in Prototype Content**

The purpose of this study was to conduct an initial exploratory investigation into the implicit cultural entrepreneurship prototypes of three countries. An attribution theory perspective and qualitative research methodology were utilised to investigate the prototypes and contribute to entrepreneurial prototype theory development.

Analysis of the focus group and interview data indicates some commonalities of content in the cultural prototypes of successful entrepreneurs across these countries: self-confidence, risk tolerance, communication skills, adaptability, creativity, and self-motivation. Given the cultural differences between these cultures, this is evidence that these traits and skills may be universal, considered important in most all cultures. Our general research results also stress the need

**TABLE 3**  
**Romanian Entrepreneurial Prototype**

Romanian Prototype	Determination and Resoluteness	Long-term orientation	Patience in regards to success	
			Hard worker, ambitious, perseverance	
			Discipline	
		Stress resilient		
	Creative and Open Thinking	Creative, original		
		Open to new business opportunities		
		Able to identify niches and low/no competition markets		
		Vision		
		Intuition		
	Business Skills	Leadership skills		
		Selling ability/negotiation skills		
		Conflict resolution skills		
		Organized		
	People Orientation	Client focus		
		Sociability, communication skills		
	"Go-Getter" Personality	Dynamism		
		Initiative spirit		
	Business Knowledge and Experience	Business experience/management experience		
		Knowledge of specific business area		
		Management and economics knowledge		
	Strong Moral Character	Self-confidence		
		Courage		
		Honest		
	Enjoys Their Work			
	Adaptable			
	Risk-Taking			
	Pragmatism			
	Good Luck			

for a supportive culture that would make the entrepreneurial career more valued and socially recognized as indicated in earlier research (Krueger et al., 2013).

There were also essential differences of perceptual content regarding entrepreneurial success factors across countries. Implicit beliefs concerning the attributions of successful entrepreneurs in Estonia, Guatemala, and Romania differed in important ways. Romanian entrepreneurs emphasised luck as a determinant of success whereas Estonian respondents noted both personal and internal attributions of success. They also paid more attention to long-term business thinking and developing their own capabilities. Estonians were eager to discuss differences between early entrepreneurs of the 1990s and entrepreneurs in the emerging knowledge-based economy of the first decade of the 21st century. They were more critical about their own skills than participants in Guatemala and Romania. This may reflect a more stable development of market economy institutions in Estonia and the present challenges of developing innovation-driven entrepreneurship.

Guatemalan and Romanian respondents expressed a more idealized image and higher social status of the entrepreneur than Estonian respondents, who emphasized difficulties in the nature of entrepreneurship in the transition economy. This observation corresponds to the comparison of entrepreneurship motivations of students in Iceland and Romania, where Romanian students focused on social status and their entrepreneurial visions and assumed risk regardless of the environmental conditions (Brancu et al., 2015). It can be also related to the research results of Hofstede & Minkov (2010) that demonstrated higher power distance both in Guatemala and Romania compared to Estonia. The risk readiness emphasis of the Romanian focus group members, however, indicates that entrepreneurs in this country are perceived as persons that deviate from the mainstream high uncertainty avoidance pattern of the culture in this country (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

Romanian respondents were most focused on personal characteristics of the entrepreneur with less emphasis placed on personal connections and the changing business environment. In terms of entrepreneurial motivations, the desire to afford a comfortable lifestyle was stressed by Estonian focus group members, who also stressed the optimization of work load in order to gain balance between work and family. At the same time they did not focus on family as the main basis of business ideas and resources for entrepreneurship, as did Guatemalan participants. Romanian respondents also linked the future orientation of their entrepreneurial prototype with the societal and cultural values of the broader community. Respondents in Guatemala stressed the role of family and family connections. This reflects the lower degree of individualism identified by Hofstede and Minkov (2010) in these two cultures.

Table 4 summarizes the results across the three countries.

The implicit prototype of the Estonian entrepreneur also differs somewhat from the Guatemalan and Romanian prototypes in regards to independence and

autonomy. The Estonian data indicates a high degree of perceived independence and autonomy on the part of the Estonian entrepreneur. This is in sharp contrast

**TABLE 4**  
**Features of the Country Entrepreneurial Prototypes**

Entrepreneurial characteristics	Estonia	Guatemala	Romania
Self-confidence	I	I	I
Risk tolerance	I	I	I
Good communicator	I	I	I
Adaptability	I	I	I
Creative	I	I	I
Self-motivator	I	I	I
Empathetic	I	NI	I
Team-oriented	I	NI	NI
Charismatic	I	NI	NI
Politically & socially connected	NI	I	NI
Visionary	I	I	I
Autocratic	I	I	NI
Pragmatic	NI	NI	I
Extrinsically motivated	NI	I	SI
Moral	SI	SI	I
Strong character	SI	I	NI
Business knowledge	SI	NI	I
Long-term orientation	SI	NI	I
Controls own destiny	I	SI	NI
I = Perceived as being important for entrepreneurial success SI = Perceived as being somewhat important for entrepreneurial success NI = Perceived as not being important for entrepreneurial success			

with the Guatemalan entrepreneur, who is reported to be loyal to family and political connections and who is to some degree under the supervision of the “padrino,” the sponsor and mentor. The Guatemalan entrepreneur is perceived to have opportunity as a result of family of birth and the privileges of family and political connections. Therefore, they may be less likely to be independent and autonomous as they have to operate within the boundaries of family relationships and political connections. This tendency of the Guatemalan entrepreneur to be less independent and autonomous is expected given the low individualism and highly collectivistic nature of the Guatemalan culture.

### **Implications for Research**

Prior research has investigated entrepreneurship from an implicit perspective (Rogoff et al., 2004; Shaver et al., 2001). However, few studies have examined general cultural entrepreneurial prototypes across cultures. This study adds to the entrepreneurship literature by taking a first step to address this important issue.

One potential area of future research might focus on factors other than cultural dimensions that directly impact or moderate the content of implicit entrepreneurial prototypes. In this study, the interaction between cultural factors, stages of institutional development, and the changing business environment is evident in the interpretations of business risk by focus group participants in the different countries. In the Romanian focus groups, entrepreneurial risks were discussed in the context of vision, intuition, and the ability to identify unique market niches. Long-term vision and the ability to link innovation and business sustainability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century versus more the opportunistic short-term entrepreneurship of the 1990s were presented as an essential risk management trend by Estonian focus group participants. Entrepreneurs at the earlier stage of transition towards the market economy were not seen as systematic risk takers but as over optimistic opportunity seekers. Differentiating entrepreneurial characteristics that correspond to the Schumpeterian (1928) innovative entrepreneur image versus opportunistic trader image developed by Kirzner (1978) may become an important issue when researching characteristics of entrepreneurs in the context of recovery from the global financial crises and international competitiveness. This may not only be relevant in new European Union member states, but also in emerging economies of Latin America. Attribution theory can serve as a foundation to investigate how economic transition and institutional development may directly impact or moderate the effects of cultural dimensions on entrepreneurial perceptions and expectations such as risk taking. Our study contributes to this research direction by offering a theoretical perspective to guide this research.

A second area of potential future research concerns how the implicit entrepreneurial prototype itself may interact with situational and personal disposition factors to affect actual individual behaviour. For example, research conducted by Seligman (1990) and Shaver et al. (2001) highlights the importance of positive attributions such as optimism for success. An individual may possess such optimism and perceive they are a good fit with the implicit prototype of a successful entrepreneur. However, as a result of repeated exposures to negative uncontrollable events, individuals may experience motivational (e.g., passive behaviour), cognitive (e.g., impaired judgement), and emotional deficits (e.g., depression, shame, anxiety, and hostility). Such deficits are most likely when the uncontrollable events are adverse and attributed by the individual to internal, stable, and global causes (e.g., lack of ability). Individuals may “learn to be helpless” in such situations and decide not to act to start an entrepreneurial venture. Personal dispositions may also operate in the same manner. It is

interesting that in the current study, members of the Estonian focus groups appeared to make positive attributions of successful entrepreneurs. The GEM research, however, indicates that the Estonian population in general is pessimistic about their own entrepreneurship capabilities. Given the prototype held of the successful entrepreneur, many Estonian individuals may lack self-efficacy for becoming what they perceive a good entrepreneur to be. Therefore, the prototype in interaction with this low self-efficacy may decrease motivation to start a business. In Guatemala, an individual may perceive they are not a good match with the culturally endorsed prototype of the entrepreneur because they are of the wrong social class and do not have the necessary connections to be successful. However, they may possess knowledge or skill that would enable them to take advantage of a new market opportunity, raising them to a higher class over time. In this case, although the individual may not fit the cultural prototype, they may be motivated to pursue the new business opportunity. Therefore, given certain situational and dispositional factors, individuals may not always act in accord with the culturally endorsed prototype. Attributional perspectives and qualitative methodology will enable researchers to explore these moderating factors and gain a better understanding as to how, why, and when individuals will or will not act in accordance with a prototype.

### **Implications for Practice**

The concept of legitimacy is receiving increased attention in the international management literature (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Hadjikhani, Lee, & Ghauri, 2008). Legitimacy concerns the degree to which individuals perceive that the actions of another are appropriate within a certain context. In this context, an individual will be perceived as a legitimate entrepreneur to the extent that they fit the culturally endorsed prototype, possessing the characteristics and engaging in the behaviours that the society believes are appropriate to good entrepreneurs. This has practical implications for both the acquisition and preparation of individuals to assume entrepreneurial ventures, especially in multinational organizations in an international context.

Some contents of a culturally endorsed prototype cannot be easily trained or developed within an individual. Such characteristics identified in this study are emotional stability in Estonia, courage in Guatemala, and adaptability and creativity in Romania. Since these traits are not easily trained, being more dispositional in nature, organizations will need to select for these characteristics when preparing individuals to fit a culturally endorsed prototype for a cross-cultural entrepreneurial venture.

Given that the results indicate differences in the implicit entrepreneurial prototypes across the cultures, another important practical implication of the present research is the opportunity to discuss these prototypes with trainees as the departure point for training programs, especially for cross-cultural training of entrepreneurial teams. The degree to which an entrepreneur fits the cultural

prototype may have consequences for the success of the entrepreneurial venture. Our research is important for informing the content of training and development programs for entrepreneurs that are ready to operate in different countries. Learning would need to focus on the acquisition of knowledge, behaviours, and characteristics that are relevant for matching the entrepreneurial prototype of that specific culture.

Fitting individuals to a culturally endorsed prototype through selection and training assumes knowledge of the prototype. It is at this point that our research is critical for these organizational activities. Greater knowledge of specific cultural prototypes will enable organizations to better prepare entrepreneurs for assignments in a country, making it more likely that the entrepreneur will be perceived as legitimate.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations exist that could affect the validity and generalizability of the results. First, it must be noted that the sample sizes in each country are small and the backgrounds of the focus group members is different and may not be representative of entrepreneurs in that country. Second, the process of data collection across the countries was not standardized. As discussed earlier, although a lack of standardization in the quantitative sense and small samples sizes are common in ethnographic research, it may still be wise to exercise caution in interpreting the results.

Applying different versions of the focus group approach can, however, be treated as opportunities to discover diverse insights for further research. The direct feedback and comments from actual entrepreneurs and their employees is valuable in that the data is direct, current, and rich. The qualitative nature of the current study provides insights that could not have been gained through more quantitative approaches. The Romanian focus group process enabled open discussion about primarily intrapersonal entrepreneurial characteristics. In Estonia, the comparison of different time frames for entrepreneurship helped to reveal beliefs, convictions, and assumptions concerning the changing nature of entrepreneurship in a transition economy. More standardized focus group procedures combined with questionnaires can be used during further research stages.

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