

## Taxonomy of entrepreneurial firms: entrepreneurial orientation versus corporate entrepreneurship

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### Keywords

Entrepreneurial orientation, corporate entrepreneurship, actual entrepreneurial, forced entrepreneurial, latent entrepreneurial, and non-entrepreneurial.

### Abstract

*With attention to insufficiencies of existing measurements and recommendations to design a more comprehensive construct to gauge the Firm Level Entrepreneurship (FLE), this paper presents a fourfold taxonomy model of entrepreneurial firms. By comparing the degree of Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) that shows the tendency of firms to engage in entrepreneurial activities and their actual engagement in entrepreneurship, which determines by Corporate Entrepreneurship (CE), the model, divides the firms into four categories; Non Entrepreneurial (NE), Forced Entrepreneurial (FE), Latent Entrepreneurial (LE), and Actual Entrepreneurial (AE).*

*Main characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of each kind are explored, and they are compared based on their goals to start the business, vision, reactions to competitors, perceived environment, risk taking, implementing of innovation, renewing the organizational structure, and obstacles to entrepreneurial actions.*

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### Introduction

Entrepreneurship as a major advantage of Small and Medium size Enterprises (SMEs) is recognized as the fuel for economic engine, and it extremely influence the economic growth (Henderson and Weiler 2010). In the entrepreneurship literature, many researchers have focused on the people and their entrepreneurial activities that are known as the individual entrepreneurship. The FLE is a partly new context, which concerns with entrepreneurial phenomena in organizations, recently has found more popularity. Based on the wide accepted definition of entrepreneurship as the process of exploration and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities (Shane and Venkataraman 2000) the FLE is defined as "How, and with what effects organizations discover, evaluate, and exploit opportunities to create future goods and services" (Kreizer, 2005).

Unfortunately, an immense contradiction exists about the precise elements of an entrepreneurial act that leads to abundant labels of entrepreneurial phenomena in organizations (Covin and Miles 1999). Strategic posture (Covin and Slevin, 1989), corporate entrepreneurship (Barringer and Bluedorn, 1999), entrepreneurial orientation (Naman and Slevin, 1993, Lumpkin and Dess, 1996), entrepreneurial management (Stevenson and Jarillo, 1990) and intrapreneurship (Pinchot, 1986) are the most well-known expressions among others. However, these labels are used interchangeably, but they may point out to different or sometimes contrary dimensions of the FLE.

Owing to the ambiguity of the nature of entrepreneurial phenomena in the firm level, emerging a general understanding or a comprehensive theory about the effect of corporate entrepreneurship on competitive advantage (Covin and Miles 1999) and other strategic variables

has failed. Therefore, researchers have argued that existing conceptualizations of the FLE need to be reassessed (Brown, Davidson and Wiklund, 2001; Covin and Milles, 1999) and exploring different conceptualizations of the FLE is necessary (Zahra, Jennings, and Kuratko 1999).

Researchers recommended synthesizing the existent constructs and measurements of the FLE because of their complementarities (Antoncic and Hisrich 2001; Lyon, Lumpkin, and Dess 2000). To integrate the existent measurements, being aware of differentiation between entrepreneurship orientation and entrepreneurial actions is crucial. While some constructs have used of orientation indicators to determine the entrepreneurship intensity in organizations (Covin and Slevin 1989; Lumpkin and Dess 1996) others emphasized on the entrepreneurial actions (Guth and Ginsberg 1990; Zahra 1993a). Orientation is not a perfect indicator to gauge the entrepreneurial actions in the firm level and actual strategic choices and moves include innovation, venturing and strategic renewal show the actual entrepreneurial intensity (Zahra et al. 1999).

Neither orientation nor strategic choices and moves can design a whole picture of the FLE. In fact, the former only shows the tendency of firms to being entrepreneurial while the latter presents their actual entrepreneurial actions. Studies that use of one of these constructs, just examine the impact of entrepreneurial orientation or entrepreneurial activities rather than the whole degree of the FLE (Antoncic and Hisrich 2001). Therefore, future studies should distinguish the entrepreneurial orientation and entrepreneurial actions (Zahra 1991; 1993b) and apply integrated constructs to provide a more comprehensive insight of entrepreneurial phenomena in the firm level. This paper tries to develop an integrative model to categorize companies based on their entrepreneurial orientation and actions.

## **Firm Level Entrepreneurship**

Researchers rendered several constructs to measure the density of entrepreneurship in existing firms (Covin and Slevin 1989; Lumpkin and Dess 1996; Miller 1983; Simsek, Veiga, and Lubatkin 2007; Zahra 1993a). Among these measurements, EO and CE have found more popularity and are frequently implemented in empirical studies of the FLE.

### **Entrepreneurial Orientation**

EO is the most widely accepted construct in the FLE literature (Runyan et al. 2011; Wales, Gupta, and Mousa 2011) that has attracted much attention theoretically and empirically (Covin, Green, and Slevin 2006). EO is labeled by different phrases include entrepreneurial orientation, intensity, style, posture, proclivity, and propensity (Covin and Wales 2011). Khandwalla (1977) was the first who tried to measure the overall tendency of a firm to act in an entrepreneurial manner (Darroch, Miles, and Buisson 2005). EO points out to the processes, practices, and decision-making styles of firms (Lumpkin and Dess 1996) and characterizes it as entrepreneurial versus conservative (Morris, Webb, and Franklin 2011). This construct is comprised by three distinctive dimensions include innovativeness, Proactiveness and risk taking (Covin and Slevin 1989; Miller and Friesen 1982; Wiklund 1999).

Innovativeness implies to the willingness to engage in creativity and experimentation (Rauch et al. 2009), try new products or services (Lumpkin and Dess 1996), support unknown ideas and foster creative processes (Walter, Auer, and Ritter 2006), and having the capacity to introduce modern processes and products (Damanpour, 1991; Hurley et al., 1998). Proactiveness is also a tendency based indicator. It refers to the tendency to anticipate and act on future wants and needs (Lumpkin and Dess 1996) to act aggressively towards rivals in the pursuit of favorable business opportunities (Hansen et al. 2011). Indeed, Proactiveness is an opportunity-seeking, forward-looking perspective that leads to the introduction of new products and services ahead of the competitors (Rauch et al. 2009). Risk taking adverts to the willingness to commit more resources to projects that have uncertain outcomes or unusually high profits and

losses (Hansen et al. 2011) and their cost of failure may be lofty (Miller and Friesen 1982).

The underlying, implicit assumption is that the EO is a behavioral orientation (Morris et al. 2011) toward entrepreneurial activity (Covin and Wales 2011). In fact, EO measures general tendency toward entrepreneurship (Antoncic and Hisrich 2001; Knight 1997; Miller 1983) (Antoncic and Hisrich 2001) and represents the policies, practices and strategy making processes that provide a basis for entrepreneurial decisions and actions (Lumpkin and Dess 1996; Rauch et al. 2009).

### **Corporate Entrepreneurship**

CE was presented by Guth and Ginsberg (1990), developed and operationalized by Zahra (1991; 1993a) and applied by others Simsek et al. (2007) to gauge the degree of entrepreneurship in the firm level. This construct implies to the process of organizational renewal that broadly has two dimensions; innovation and venturing, and strategic renewal (Zahra 1993a). Indeed, CE measures the engagement of the venturing, innovation, and self-renewal activities (Antoncic and Hisrich 2001). Thus, this construct has three distinctive dimensions that may or may not be interrelated (Sharma and Chrisman 1999).

Innovation points out to create and commercialize products and technologies, providing financial and human resources for innovative projects, and maintaining an appropriate infrastructure for innovation (Zahra 1995). It can be a new product or service, a modern production process, or an unused structure or administrative system (Hult, Hurley, and Knight 2004). Venturing refers to build and develop a new business in current or new industries (Zahra 1995) and within or outside the corporate organization (Sharma and Chrisman 1999). Renewal means revitalizing a firm through innovation and changing its competitive profile (Zahra 1995), building or acquiring new capability and creative use of them to increase shareholders' value (Zahra 1996), and creation of new wealth through new combinations of resources (Guth and Ginsberg 1990). Hence, Strategic renewal refers to the entrepreneurial attempts that lead to immense modifications in organizational strategy and structure, and in most cases will involve some sort of innovation (Sharma and Chrisman 1999). Strategic renewal may modify the resource pattern to achieve a better overall performance (Stopford and Baden Fuller 1994) and may include actions like redefining a business competitive strategy, making major changes in marketing or distribution, redirecting product development, and reshaping operations (Guth and Ginsberg 1990).

This construct has focused on the utilization of innovation, strategic renewal, and internal and external corporate venturing (Sharma and Chrisman 1999) as representatives of entrepreneurial actions in organizations. Consequently, in contrast with EO that determined the tendency of the firm to being entrepreneurial, CE will gauge actual entrepreneurial actions.

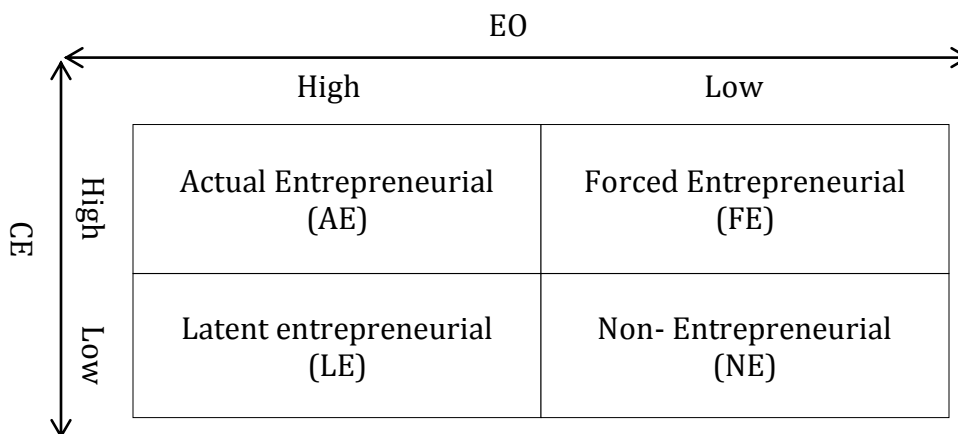
### **Integrating EO and CE**

As we discussed in previous section, EO and CE are two divergent constructs of the FLE that have focused on the different dimensions of entrepreneurial phenomena. While, EO pints out to the orientation of firms, especially top managers to take entrepreneurial actions, CE gauges the actual entrepreneurial actions as the representative of entrepreneurship. If the FLE studies use of one of these constructs, they will design a blind picture of the entrepreneurship phenomena in organizations. In fact, CE just measures the entrepreneurial actions and ignores the tendency of firms to being entrepreneurial and EO only reveals the tendency of the top managers to entrepreneurship. It seems that integrating of these two distinctive constructs of the FLE may utter a more comprehensive model that will determine the real entrepreneurship density at the organization level.

Because of the complementarities of EO and CE, and recommendations to use of combined

measurements of the FEL (Lyon et al. 2000), some studies tried to present integrated measurements (Antoncic and Hisrich 2001; Kreiser and Davis 2009). Those measurements have selected some special indicators of EO and CE and synthesizing them in a new construct. For instance, Kreiser and Davis (2009) chose the innovativeness and proactiveness from EO and strategic renewal from CE, and Antoncic and Hisrich (2001) combined the innovativeness and proactiveness with venturing and strategic renewal. The first problem of these constructs was the conflict of the nature. While EO indicators had focused on the tendency and attitudes of the top manager, CE indicators measured the entrepreneurial actions. Combining both indicators in a united measurement may reduce the preciseness because of their differential natures. These integrating constructs also had broken the most accepted measurements of the FLE and synthesizing them in the new constructs that found lower attention. To respect to the whole structure of EO and CE and to avoid of the conflict of nature, this paper is going to present an integrative model by comparing the degree of EO and CE for a given company.

Figure 1 shows the proposing model. This model will categorize firms by measuring the tendency to entrepreneurship (EO) and the actual entrepreneurial actions (CE).



**Figure 1:** categorizing the entrepreneurial firms

Based on the orientation to entrepreneurship and the actual entrepreneurial actions, firms are divided to four distinct groups; actual, forced, latent and non-entrepreneurial. The paper proceeds by exploring the distinctive characteristic of these groups empirically and theoretically.

However, these categorizes are unique in the FLE literature, but the individual entrepreneurship studies have some similar expressions. Probing the individual entrepreneurship literature regarding latent, nascent, forced and actual entrepreneurs, especially Global Entrepreneurship Monitoring (GEM) studies will help us to describe the model more precisely. Latent entrepreneurs are people who distinguish from others by their declared preference for self-employment (Blanchflower, Oswald, and Stutzer 2001; Grilo and Irigoyen 2006). They may or may not have an actual plan to become a self-employee (Grilo and Irigoyen 2006). Thus, this concept is usually refers to the early stage of the entrepreneurship process (Brixy, Sternberg, and Stüber 2012). Forced entrepreneurs are differentiated from actual entrepreneurs by their motivation. While forced entrepreneurs are influenced by push factors, actual entrepreneurs are pulled to run a business (Hughes 2006; Orhan and Scott 2001). In fact, the concepts of forced and actual entrepreneurs have pointed out to the “push” and “pull” motivates behind the decision to start a business (Hughes 2003; Moore and Mueller 2002). Forced entrepreneurs are pushed into entrepreneurship because there are no other ways to provide their cost of living (Bosma and Harding 2006). Push factors are some negative motives such as redundancy, unemployment, lack of work opportunities, job loss and job insecurity that forced people to start a business. Pull

factors are positive incentives like independence, increased earnings and opportunities to carry out personal ideas that attract people to be entrepreneur (Hughes 2006; Kautonen and Palmroos 2009; Ritsilä and Tervo 2002).

### Methodology

Methodology points out to the way of doing research. Generally, the proper methodology is selected based on the purpose and design of the study. Qualitative and quantitative are two wide classifications of approaches and methods for doing a research (Lincoln and Guba 1994). While the quantitative approach addresses on the numbers, quantities and amounts and relies on statistical techniques to analyze data, qualitative research implies to reasoning and understanding a phenomenon and provides a deeper insight into the context.

Among different strategies for doing qualitative research, case studies are the most appropriate for doing explorative research (Yin 2002). Because the principal objective of this study is to explore and discover the distinctive characteristics of entrepreneurial firms, it seems that the case study is the best strategy to conduct it. Interviews are the essential component of the case studies, which provide useful data about current situation and historical paths (Yin 2002). The study was conducted among small business in the food industry of Iran. To select the targeted companies in each box of the model, primary interviews were carried out with experts who were familiar with the industry. 30 companies were determined, and EO and CE questionnaires were distributed. Fortunately, 18 questionnaires were returned. By analyzing the questionnaires, eight NEs, four FEs, five LEs and one AE were identified. Four companies were selected to be interviewed.

Categorizing, coding, comparing and reasoning techniques were used to analysis data. By comparing the selected companies in each fold, finding their principal characteristics and probing the literature; the main differences and substantial insights will be discussed.

### Results and Discussions

Table 1 shows the demographic information of the interviewed companies.

Index	Type of the firm	Business Context	Firm's Age	Number of Employees	CEO's Gender
1	Non-Entrepreneurial	Aviculture	3 years	6	Male
2	Forced Entrepreneurial	Aquaculture	5 years	23	Male
3	Latent entrepreneurial	Pizza production	3 years	11	Male
4	Actual entrepreneurial	Drinks, burgers and sausage	18 years	92	Male

**Table 1:** demographic information of the firms

Gender and age are two most popular variables in empirical studies that investigate the determinants of decision to be an entrepreneur (Reynolds et al. 2004). Table 1 does not provide enough comprehensive data to discuss the effect of the gender. All CEOs are male that may show the stronger preference of men to entrepreneurship as earlier empirical studies confirmed (Grilo and Irigoyen 2006). Prior researches in the individual entrepreneurship context found that the age has a negative impact on the preference, but it positively influences the likely of being an entrepreneur (Blanchflower et al. 2001; Grilo and Irigoyen 2006; Lin, Picot, and Compton 2000). Table 1 shows the lowest age for NE and LE while the longest belongs to the AE. These findings are consistent with foregone studies that focused on the effect of the age on becoming an actual entrepreneur. Though there is a need for deeper investigation, it seems that the age does not have a significant effect on the tendency of firms to entrepreneurship.

	NE	FE	LE	AE
<b>Goal of Establishment</b>	Prestige, Cost of Living	Cost of Living, Partial independence	Cost of Living, business interests	Personal Aspirations
<b>Vision of the firm</b>	Survival	Survival	Growth	Dominance
<b>Reaction to Competitors</b>	Interactive competition	Friendly Cooperation	Safe Competition	Fierce competition
<b>Perceived Environment</b>	Challenging	Indirect but Challenging	Challenging	Challenging
<b>Risk Tendency</b>	Risk averse	Risk hatred	Risk taking	Well-balanced risk
<b>Innovation Posture</b>	Hesitator	Bound	Fond	Implementer
<b>Organizational renewing</b>	Non	External	Silent	Internal
<b>Obstacle to entrepreneurial actions</b>	Unjustifiable ideas and absence of insurance	External constraints	Lack of financial resources	Lack of Innovative ideas

**Table 2:** Distinctive characteristics of the firms

The first row in Table 2 shows the partial similarity of the establishment goals among the NE, LE and FE firms. The AE stated a completely different goal for establishment. While others pointed out to the cost of living, AE mentioned the personal aspirations as the main drivers for starting its own business. These findings are in accordance with Carland et al. (1984) who found the family income as a principal characteristic that distinguishes entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs. There are also slight differences such as prestige, partial independence and business interests between NE, LE, and FE firms. LE implied to the business interests as a central motivation besides the cost of living that shows more similarity between LE and AE.

NE and FE have focused on remaining in the business as their critical vision. In fact, their main concern is to provide their cost of living, for as long as they can. These companies are true examples of Vesper's (1990) small-business owners who never intend to grow beyond a specified level. These companies do not have a real plan for growth because they have concentrated on the distinctive business goals and may work for a positive cash flow to remain in business (Runyan, Droge, and Swinney 2008). The interesting point is the different visions of LE and AE firms. While the former extremely had planned for growth, the latter declared, "being the first in the industry" as its own vision. It seems that the vision of the firms with high tendency to entrepreneurship will change by converting their preferences to successful entrepreneurial actions over time.

Reactions of the firms against competitors were very different, and they had applied varied strategies based on the conditions that surrounded them. The FE built a complete cooperation. This firm had a huge dependency on its monopolistic supplier who constrains the firm to sell its product at a given price. This supplier enforced all decisions to the FE. Other competitors of FE were also under ascendancy of the monopolistic supplier. Therefore, they had close cooperation to meet the expectations of the sovereign company. The NE had slightly different strategy and while it had focused on the interaction with competitors, sometimes applied more aggressive strategies but not enough intensive to suffer and provoke competitors. The LE moves based on the safe competition that means, desiring to challenge small competitors, who have lower competitive powers. The most aggressive competitive strategy was applied by the AE. This firm intensively challenged the competitors and tried to remind its superior.

Perhaps, the most notable finding of the study is the influence of the perceived environment. While empirical studies claimed that the perceived dynamism and hostility of the environment may improve the entrepreneurial orientation (Covin and Slevin 1989; Lumpkin and Dess 1996) or effective corporate entrepreneurship (Antoncic and Hisrich 2001), Table 2 shows that all cases perceived the environment as a challenging and turbulent context. This result corresponds with Miles, Arnold, and Thompson (2011) who found no effect between perceived environment and entrepreneurship in organizations.

Risk tendencies of the investigated firms are compatible with past empirical studies, which asserted that entrepreneurs may take more risks than non-entrepreneurs (Covin and Slevin 1989; Lumpkin and Dess 1996; Miller 1983). A noteworthy result is the different level of the risk tendency by each of the quadruple companies. FE hates of risks, and it even does not think to take risks. Absence of the autonomy and controlling everything by superior supplier who dictates everything beside the cooperation strategy may be the principal drivers of this behavior. NF has a less intensive sense about risk. It tries to avoid of taking risk, but in some cases it takes small risky decisions. While AE takes well-balance and moderate risks, LE tolerates more and sometimes gambling risks. This is in contrast with this idea that the degree of uncertainty about the outcomes increases the gap between nascent and actual entrepreneurs (Stam, Audretsch, and Meijaard 2005). The best explanation for taking more risks by LE firms is the accumulating experience. More experience of the actual entrepreneurial firm enables it to have a better analysis of risks and rewards and takes well-balanced risks.

FE is forced by external superior supplier to be innovative. The supplier imposes new technology and production processes to enhance the productivity of FE. Consequently, there is a mutual relationship between forced entrepreneurial firm and its superior supplier, which finally leads to better performance for both. NE hesitates of innovation and prefers standard procedures and well-experienced technologies. LE has an extreme desire to use of new technologies and sometimes take the huge risks to access modern technologies and conduct unknown ideas. In spite of this intensive desire, latent entrepreneurial firm is not very successful for implementing innovation because of the lack of resources. AE has a lower desire to apply new technologies, but actually, it runs more innovation. In fact, the actual entrepreneurial firm accesses to enough resources and appropriate experience beside its desire to implement innovations. Therefore, it implements more innovation in spite of its lower tendency. These findings coincide with empirical researches that state entrepreneurs are more innovative than non-entrepreneurs (Carland et al. 1984; Miller 1983).

While, FE was forced to renew its organizational structure, plans and sometimes its labor by an external company, NE never thought about redesigning the structure, plans and strategies. LE has focused on the innovation and growth, and it was ready to take the high risks to implement new technologies, but it was completely silent regarding renewing the organizational structure. In fact, it thought that the existing structure, plans and strategies were partly enough to achieve current goals. AE that wants to be the number one and frightfully tried to prove its dominance in the industry employed an active strategy respecting to the organizational renewing. It redesigns its plans, strategies and organizational structure every year to exactly be corresponding with changes.

Prior empirical studies have found the lack of financial resources, administrative complexities and risk tolerance as the main obstacles to convert latent to be actual entrepreneurs. They also exerted that while the lack of financial resources may affect the actual entrepreneurial actions, the administrative complexity influences the preferences and tendencies to be an entrepreneur (Grilo and Irigoyen 2006). This is exactly what LE mentioned as its obstacle for implementing effective entrepreneurial actions. FE pointed out to a different balk that originates from external constraints. This confirms that the low degree of autonomy may reduce the faster or more effective entrepreneurial actions (George and MARINO 2011). AE implied to the lack of innovative ideas as the main block for improving its entrepreneurship. While AE alluded to the lack of ideas, NE noticed the unjustifiability of ideas besides the scarcity of proper insurance as

the blocks that may decelerate the entrepreneurship in organizations.

In summary, it seems that each kind of entrepreneurial firm shows different characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors, and they have designed distinctive paths, plans and strategies for their businesses. In general, entrepreneurial orientation and organizational resources significantly influence the overall entrepreneurial actions of organizations (Chen et al. 2007) and managers should properly manage entrepreneurial decisions and actions within their companies to enjoy from entrepreneurship in their organization (Covin et al. 2006).

## Conclusions

It seems that the fourfold model of the FLE based on the degree of EO, and CE is appropriately matched with the reality of firms. Each kind of the entrepreneurial firms revealed the different characteristics, attitudes and behaviors. However, in contrast with previous empirical studies, these firms did not show any differences respecting to perceived external environment but their goals to start the business, vision, reactions to competitors, risk tendency, innovation posture, renewing the organizational structure, and perceived obstacle to effective entrepreneurial actions were extremely dissimilar and sometimes contrary.

However, AE shows the highest degree of the implementation of innovation, the organizational renewing, and the competition, but it just takes the well-balanced risks that were lower than LE. NE and FE were very same in their goals to start the business and visions for the future of their enterprises. LE mentioned growth as its vision while AE pointed out to the dominance. The most interesting result was the perceived obstacles to effectively implement the entrepreneurship in the organizations. While NE implied to the internal and external factors such as unjustifiability of the ideas and the absence of proper insurance as its main obstacles, FE just pointed out to the external constraints, and LE mentioned the lack of financial resources, which is an internal obstacle.

## Research limitations and direction for further research

This research was an explorative case-based study that had conducted in the food industry of Iran. The first limitation of every case study research is its limitation to be generalized. Hence, future studies should apply the quantitative approaches like exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis and other techniques to refine and reorder the EO and CE dimensions to be more matched with the proposing model. They should also testify the validity of the model and refining measurements in a multicultural context. Another constraint is the country and industry-specific context, while this study was performed in the food industry of Iran, researchers have claimed that the country-specific effects are important both for latent and actual entrepreneurs (Grilo and Irigoyen 2006) or perhaps for forced and non-entrepreneurs. Therefore, future studies should conduct this study in different countries and among varied industries.

Past researches stated that the entrepreneurial preferences or actions may evolve over time (Hinz and Jungbauer-Gans 1999) and sometimes a forced entrepreneur may convert to a latent or actual one (Kautonen and Palmroos 2009). This fact demonstrates the time as a major component that ignores in these study. Future researchers can explore the dynamism of the entrepreneurial firms over time and design the path of entrepreneurial firms toward entrepreneurship by conducting longitudinal studies.

Researchers stated that the interactions between the boards of directors, absorptive capacity (Zahra, Filatotchev, and Wright 2009) Communication, formal controls, environmental scanning, and organizational support (Antoncic and Hisrich 2001) may have influenced the level of CE. Hornsby, Kuratko, and Zahra (2002) listed rewards, management support, resources



(including time), organizational structure, and risk-taking as the enablers of the entrepreneurship in organizations. Therefore, there is a need to explore these factors and enablers among suggesting quadruple entrepreneurial firms.

In the process of entrepreneurship, discovery and exploitation are different stages that may be affected by distinct factors (Davidsson and Honig 2003). There is an opportunity to study the influential factors of discovery and explorations among actual, latent, forced and non-entrepreneurial firms.

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