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## 7. THEME: PATHS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP & KEY COMPETENCES

### FROM A STUDENT OF STARTUP BUSINESS TO A STARTUP EMPLOYEE OR ENTREPRENEUR

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper aims at understanding of the incidents, relationships and processes that has lead students engaged in study programs focusing on start-up/entrepreneurship activity in technology business to become employees and entrepreneurs in the aforementioned industry. Via qualitative approach based on career history and projections (career narratives) written by the respondents this study aims at shedding light on the process of grasping the entrepreneurial or employment opportunity and thus give ideas of pedagogical and professional arrangements that may foster the development of practices leading to employment and entrepreneurship in the business type in scope.

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

BBC, 2013 internet newsfeed: *“Brian Morgan, professor of entrepreneurship at Cardiff Metropolitan University, says that while inherited genetic factor play an important role in creating successful entrepreneurs, most still need to be taught other vital skills. In general, about 40% of entrepreneurial skills can be thought of as 'in the DNA'. But 60% of the competencies required to create a successful and sustainable business - such as technical and financial expertise - have to be acquired.”* (BBC, 2013)

Nascent ventures – new firms started small and based on entrepreneurial effort have been globally recognized globally as the key engine of wealth and employment creation. Numerous university programs and courses aim at betterment of conditions for entrepreneurial activity among their students. Reflecting the quote above their mission is to identify potential students for entrepreneurship and add to their skills to perform in entrepreneurial context. There is also an ample array of research looking at the efficiency of such programs in what comes to the amount of new businesses created and improvement in e.g. entrepreneurial thinking and mindset

Parallel to the overall interest in entrepreneurship and its education, *startup* has become a common word across nations, regions, cities and universities in them. In comparison to any new enterprise, a startup operates in an environment of utmost uncertainty, but also in an environment where there is a potential for rapid growth and internationalization due to scalability. As Aulet and Murray (2012) pointed out: “Not all jobs are created equal... Unfortunately, many small businesses employ the founder and spouse or just a handful of workers. These companies create jobs, but typically provide lower-than-average wages and benefits. Contrast these companies with the innovation-driven enterprises who seek to address global markets – offering goods and services based on substantial innovation linked to an understanding of a specific market.”

The Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the Regions titled “Implementing the Community Lisbon Program: Fostering entrepreneurial mind-sets through education and learning” (COM, 2006) declares that entrepreneurship is a key competence for growth, employment and personal fulfilment and that the education systems can greatly contribute to successfully addressing the entrepreneurial challenge within the EU.

Entrepreneurship is not only a need of society to individuals, it also makes an echo with many life goals addressed by the Y-Z –generations currently in university education or soon joining it. According to Eisner (2005) the Generation Y is the so far most technically literate, educated, and ethnically diverse generation in history, and It tends to want intellectual challenge, needs to succeed, seeks those who will further its professional development, strives to make a difference, and measures its own success. Meeting personal goals is likely to matter to Generation Y, as is performing meaningful work that betters the world and working with committed co-workers with shared values. So the need for educational setups and processes to support growth-oriented entrepreneurship is coming from different stakeholders. If universities can develop a soil where both birth on nascent entrepreneurs - startup creation - as well as employability of students as employees to startups can flourish, the impact to the economic and employment

development is. This paper partly wants to find out the potential common characteristics between start-up entrepreneur and employee career paths. Some earlier studies (e.g. Brenner et al., 1991) have seen organizational employment and entrepreneurship as opposing choices.

This paper studies the career narratives (short career histories and projections) written by students who have participated Supercoach® Entrepreneurial Training (SET) and/or High Tech Management programs in the International Business-program of JAMK University of Applied Sciences in Jyväskylä, Finland, and ended up to be working - at the time of narrative writing - working in technology-based start-up companies as employees or entrepreneurs.

The key objective of this research was to study processes through which an individual grasps the employment or (/and) entrepreneurial opportunity in a start-up context. Key research questions were:

- what are the factors (internal and external to university education) affecting the aforementioned career choices, and what factors have been the key drivers leading the respondents to the career path they are on?
- how do the respondents project their future career in their narrative, how is the employment/entrepreneurship path likely to continue?

In this research paper the next chapter 2 focuses on relevant prior-art research and literature to provide a framework for the study. Chapter 3 describes the methodological choices of the research and the implementation of the empirical data collection and analysis. The main results of the data analysis are provided in the chapter 4, after which the conclusions are drawn in chapter 5. The final chapter 6 discusses in a reflective mode the research and the generalizability of its results and points out the directions in which additional research would be needed and welcomed.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW - RELATION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EMPLOYABILITY

This research focuses on the individual learning and development process as self-interpreted by a number of individuals who have a) participated in an entrepreneurship-oriented educational program AND b) been employed of self-employed (founded or joined as a co-entrepreneur) to a technology-based startup company. To say it shortly, the individuals whose career path narratives have been studied, have obviously possessed and/or developed entrepreneurial and employability characteristics.

Entrepreneurial programs in universities are wide-spread and consequently there is an ample array of targets and effectiveness measurements for such programs. As Kolvereid and Moen (1997) summarize, there has been 2 major streams in entrepreneurship research: One relying on psychological career theory focusing on the personality traits that are favorable for an entrepreneur-to-be but also relatively static and difficult to alter (e.g. Holland, 1985; and one seeing the career choice and development more as a dynamic process affected by the environment (information and people) of an individual (e.g. Prediger and Vansickle, 1992) and thus suggesting that modifying the educational context to entrepreneurial one can affect to the growth and success to entrepreneurship and individual entrepreneurs. Dyer (1994) attempted to bridge the two research traditions, and added to the concept of entrepreneurial growth the impact of role models faced in entrepreneurship education programs, that can have an effect on attractiveness of entrepreneurship as a career option.

Entrepreneurial *traits* targeted and measured across programs vary across studies. A typical example is the research of Gürol and Atsan (2006) where entrepreneurial characteristics amongst university students were assessed. The six traits assessed were: 1) need for achievement 2) locus of control 3) risk taking propensity 4) tolerance for ambiguity 5) innovativeness and 6) self-confidence.

Another theoretical construct that is seen to relate to identification and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunity is that of entrepreneurial *mindset*. Work of Yoder and Klein (2011;2013) points out that if the sole measurement of success of entrepreneurial education is the rate of business creation by the learners, the program it will imply a different educational program than when the key target of program design is the cultivation of an entrepreneurial mindset. The latter option may not yield immediate venture creation, but may produce entrepreneurial activity later on and also be utilized inside the frame of established company as an employee, often referred as *intrapreneurship*. Intrapreneurship can be described e.g. as Antoncic and Hisrich (2001: "I. is entrepreneurship within an existing organization. It refers to a process that goes on inside an existing firm, regardless of its size, and leads not only to new business ventures but also to other innovative activities and orientations such as development of new products, services, technologies, administrative techniques, strategies, and competitive postures."

Yoder and Klein have in their work also created solutions to assess the achieved outcomes in the mindset creation. In their work (on the KEEN program = Kern Enterprise Education Network) they had 7 different Mindset Learning outcomes whereas in a UIIN (University-Industry Interaction Network) workshop lead by Dr Paul Coyle in June 2015 there were 6 subsets of entrepreneurial mindset. See Table 1 for the comparison.

Table 1. Comparative look at the constituents of an entrepreneurial mindset

<b>The constituents of Entrepreneurial Mindset (order not of importance) for a student to possess</b>		
	<b>KEEN program (Yoder&amp;Klein, 2011)</b>	<b>UIIN Berlin workshop (Coyle, 2015)</b>
1.	Effectively collaborate in a team setting	Seeing and creating opportunities
2.	Apply critical and critical thinking to ambiguous problems	Turning ideas into action
3.	Construct and effectively communicate a customer-appropriate value proposition	Leading the way
4.	Persist through and learn from failure	Using resources smartly
5.	Effectively manage projects through commercialization or (/and?) final delivery process	Managing risk
6.	Demonstrate voluntary social responsibility	Collaborating to create shared value
7.	Relate personal liberties and free enterprise to entrepreneurship	

As can be seen mindset-labelled issues can in fact relate closely to personality traits (Yoder&Klein nr 4., Coyle nr 3.), values (Y&K nr 6., nr 7.) as well as to cognitive (Y&K nr 2., Coyle nr 1) and “hard” business skills (Y&K nr. 3, nr.5., Coyle nr. 2., nr. 4.). It is also fair to assume that many of the issues listed in these 2 approaches would also work in a corporate employment setting i.e. as mindset of an employee in a modern firm.

E.g. Kirby (2004) has in his research stated that successful entrepreneurs possess a set of personal *skills*, attributes and behavior and that these go beyond the purely commercial dimensions, they can be called meta-skills that do not have an effect to solely to the entrepreneurial but also overall activity of an individual. These multipole skills can be utilized in the specific phases of entrepreneurship, that is seen more as a process than as a one-off decision to take and should be understood and studied as a cognitive and evolving process (Eckhardt & Shane 2003). There has been a long and wide supply of growth stage theories to explain the growth of firms and linking the growth of the

entrepreneur(s) in them (e.g. Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Greiner, 1972 and recently Marmer et al, 2011). There also has been criticism to the stage-based approach by Levie and Liechtenstein (2010), who propose that growth of entrepreneurial firms and entrepreneurs do not follow pre-determined paths but instead the evolution should be seen as movement between different dynamic states, since entrepreneurial firms can and they do anticipate, co-create and affect the environment they operate in and arrange their resources in a new way when new opportunities arise. This skill of opportunity identification and exploitation is often cited in recent research, ignited by Shane & Venkataram in 2000.

Employability – in its turn – is a wide concept, essence of which is whether or not graduating students have the characteristics that are of demand when organizations are recruiting new human resources.

Studies of employer needs have repeatedly stressed the priority which they give to “personal transferable skills” (Dearing Committee, 1997). They are looking for graduates not only with specific skills and knowledge, but with the ability to be proactive, to see and respond to problems. More employers now are also searching for graduates who are balanced; having good academic achievement and possessing ‘soft skills’ such as communication skills, problem solving skills, interpersonal skills and ability to be flexible. These ‘soft skills’ (also known as ‘employability skills’) are foundation skills that apply across the board, no matter what job the employee is performing (Lawrence, 2002). The need for employees with multi skills is much higher in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Lange et al. 2000). Unlike smaller businesses, larger organizations have traditionally seen to have more hierarchical structures that allow the employees to have fixed jobs (e.g. Burns, 1984). Thus, the employees can to certain extent specialize in a specific area. But the scenario is different in smaller organizations that are flatter in structure and less hierarchical. Thus, the employees are required to be all-rounder and to be able to perform multi tasks. The skills that Brewer (2013) in her report published by ILO identified as crucial for the new job market may be summarized in the following points: flexibility/adaptability; effective communications skills; problem solving; creativity; interpersonal skills; teamwork.

Startup firms possess a challenging field to employability. As the classical definition of start-ups by Ries (2011) “a startup is any organization aiming at creation of new product or service in conditions of extreme uncertainty” and Blank (2010) “a startup is a temporary organization looking for a scalable and repeatable business model” point out, in a start-up firm the amount and quality of resources needed varies a lot during the start and growth phases of the company. This naturally stresses capabilities like multitasking, flexibility etc., as organization and jobs in it do not settle down.

The two concepts, entrepreneurship and employability should not be seen as opposite ends of one's position in the world or work. According to Judd et al. (2015), entrepreneurship offers an alternative means through which graduates can obtain employment. Also working with entrepreneurs can academia in developing employability to entrepreneurial firms, since engaging students with enterprises offers educators to "activate a feedback loop" in order to understand what is occurring within the marketplace and alter curriculum accordingly (ibid.).

Judd et al also (ibid.) note that particular challenge emerged in the technology sector, is that "innovation is truly outpacing the amount of jobs that we have." Employers within this sector argue commonly that graduates do not have the relevant hard skills required to work within industry. They however propose that students can tackle this challenge via participation in work experience programs throughout their degree, to embed hard skills that employers are looking for.

To synthesize the concepts and views of earlier research, the framework of this study is made of following assumptions:

- the process in which individuals engage to entrepreneurial activity (as an entrepreneur or an employee in an entrepreneurial firm) is individual
- the process contains issues of personality, values, skills, motivation and opportunity
- environmental incidents and relations affect the process of entrepreneurial engagement
- the process of developing entrepreneurship preparedness and employability are at least partly sharing the same characteristics

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was performed from the paradigm of qualitative research approach. Qualitative approach was a natural choice taking account the complexity and presumed richness and variety of data to be gathered. It seemed an unrealistic target to describe the processes of entrepreneurial mindset creation and opportunity exploitation in variables that could be expressed in numerical measures. Also the interrelatedness of incidents and development phase seemed to demand a more open and holistic approach. As Black (1994) states: "Unlike quantitative research, it seeks to answer the "what" question, not the "how often" one. Thus, rather than adopting a simplified, reductionist view of the subject in order to measure and count the occurrence of states or events, qualitative methods take a holistic perspective which preserves the complexities of human



behaviour.” Also the practical viewpoint of having a relatively small number of potential respondents sharing the same educational background as well as entrepreneurial status supported leaning on qualitative research design and practices.

The form of the qualitative researcher was chosen to be that of narrative research. According to Nygren and Blom (2001) analysis of short reflective narratives provides a shortcut to understand deeper of both the narrative and the narrator. Narrative analysis is an approach that is well suited to the exploration of how people make sense of their experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). However, in addition to the interest in analyzing sense-making, narrative analysis also enables the researcher to study how people order and tell, or rather structure their experiences (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Nygren and Blom (ibid.) also admit there are downsides in narrative analysis as a method: The method using written narratives has potential risks of ‘over-interpretation’, and the loss of the ‘midwife’ effect that can appear in an oral interview – the opportunity for a discourse offering an opportunity to evolution of ideas during interviews is lost.

Magana (2002) summarized the key questions of a narrative-based research as follows: “What does this narrative or story reveal about the person and world from which it came? How can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it?” Magana (ibid.) also states that narrative studies are also influenced by phenomenology's emphasis on understanding lived experience and perceptions of experience. The central idea of narrative analysis is that stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings.

The narratives analyzed (6 altogether) in April-May of were collected from students that previous to their start-up employment or (in some cases: and) entrepreneurship have been engaged in one or two of the following learning settings at JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Jyväskylä Finland:

- Supercoach Entrepreneurial Training ®: An intensive 8-week entrepreneurial coaching program bringing together first-time knowledge/tech based entrepreneurs as case owners and business students as assistant coaches to them (assisting the course instructors in case coaching)
- High Tech Management – programme: A full-semester specialization module focusing on technology business and start-up activity in that field.

Previous research (Saukkonen, 2014; Saukkonen et al., 2016) has indicated that these collaborative learning set-ups have fostered students’ networks, entrepreneurial skills

(measured via self-efficacy) and networks, adding to their entrepreneurial opportunities more than other individual stand-alone courses in the same institution.

The narratives were 500 to 800 words in length, and the type of the narrative can be seen as semi-structured, as the researcher gave some key viewpoints to be considered (see Appendix 1) when writing the narrative. As Polkinghorne (2011) coined, a narrative is an individual cognitive process that gives meaning to temporal events by identifying them as parts of a continuum. To have the same focus the researcher decided to use the pre-planned questions so that individual narratives would be more comparable and recognition of patterns more likely. Some respondents clearly structured their narrative based on the researcher-originated structure, whereas some formatted their narrative more to a free-format text.

The narratives were analyzed by searching for keywords pointing to the key concepts identified from previous research. Since the sample was small in number of respondents, the aim was not to calculate the frequency of similar statements appearing in the data, but rather look at the spectrum of optional routes and potential cause-effect linkages to start-up entrepreneurship/employment to be potentially subjected to quantitative research in the future.

#### 4 RESULTS

The analysis of the narratives showed that yet the road from a student to start-up entrepreneur and employee is individual for every person, a pattern emerging from the research data suggests that entrepreneurship and employment of this kind can be better understood via a lens that seen entrepreneurship as an evolutionary process. The general evolutionary process includes different stages that students join at different points and with different intensity – and proceed at different pace to next stages.

Levie and Lichtenstein (2010) commented after studying a multitude of staged models companies: Stages of development include different things for different cases, and rather than a step-by-step model, evolutionary development is of constant moving between different dynamic states – sometimes even moving “backwards” in sequential path due to trial-error based learning, pivoting or new opportunity recognition.

Matching the finding of Levie and Lichtenstein to the view of Churchill and Lewis (1983) that development of a new venture cannot and should not be separated from the development of its owners/managers, it can be assumed that the development of a student into a start-up entrepreneur and/or employee follows the same type of evolutionary path – with movements to many directions.

The stages identified in this research were (summary of key incidents/processes per stage and appeal factors in Table 2):

1. Pre-study: Exposure to and consideration of entrepreneurial opportunities before joining University
2. Standard Studies: Getting exposed to entrepreneurial thinking and principle via coursework
3. Project work: Performing real-life assignments to companies (or own business initiative)
4. Active start-up work: Full-time and effort work as start-up entrepreneur or employee
5. Senior Expertise: Spreading knowledge, investing time and money to new initiatives

It should be noted that individuals pass the stages in very different timescales, and some may have various stages on going with different business initiatives. Crucial point for the “birth” of new start-up entrepreneur/employer seems to be the Project Work-stage, where the match of values, personalities and capabilities all get tested in real-life environment. That is also the stage in which all 3 of the key issues areas of Networking, Trying, Learning (see Table 4, later) come together.

In table 2 the key issues (incidents and activities relevant to the topic) per stage identified are placed into the staged framework, also a figure in parenthesis is added to inform how many of the 6 respondents referred to the issue in their narrative.

Table 2. The staged model of students' entrepreneurial career development

Pre-Study Stage	"Standard-Studies" Stage	Project work - Stage	Active start-up working Stage	Senior Expertise Stage
<b>Typical Incidents and activities in the given Stage</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observations of own personality vs. work (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic knowledge of e-ship (6)</li> <li>Network creation with peers (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working on assignments by firm (5)</li> <li>Working on incubation of own idea (1)</li> <li>Networking outside peer group (6)</li> <li>Opportunity recognition (5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full member of venture core team (4), full-time work (2)</li> <li>Implementing ideas, growing the business (6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board memberships (2)</li> <li>Mentoring new entrepreneurs (3)</li> <li>Investing (2)</li> <li>Consulting (1)</li> <li>Expertise function at corp.level (3)</li> </ul>
<b>Appealing factors to Entrepreneurship for the Stage</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual decision-making (1)</li> <li>Interdependency (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunity to work with like-minded people (3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interest to the business in question (6)</li> <li>Personality match (5)</li> <li>Self-awareness of efficacy in entrepreneurial tasks (4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growth (6)</li> <li>Being part of a team (5)</li> <li>Ability to have an impact (6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sharing knowledge (5)</li> <li>Using gathered knowledge in new cases (4)</li> <li>Encouraging others (3)</li> </ul>

In the following table (Table 3) the author has collected the statements from the narratives in order to show how respondents formulated their own interpretation of their personal development.

Table 3. Chosen excerpts from the narratives highlighting issues linkable to identified stages.

Pre-Study Stage	"Standard Studies" Stage	Project work -Stage	Active start-up working Stage	Senior Expertise Stage
<b>Illustrative Excerpts from the Narratives by Stage</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I do not like taking orders from random people. I figured it when I was in school, in my first work place, and later in my working occasions. Therefore, when I was approximately 20 years old I realized that the only way I can get around this was to become a boss of my own."</li> <li>(my first entrepreneurial ideas came) After a few casual summer jobs I got my first proper job at the age of 17. Even then I could not see work as a channel to make money for other things in life. I was always ready to work long hours and take projects in another cities, hanging out with colleagues on my free time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"It was more of a coincidence and an opportunity that appeared. I was talking with the person (a peer) who just had founded his company and through the discussion got interested and eventually involved in the company"</li> <li>"I already had a plan to change the school after the first year. However, after the courses had started I had a chance to see what sort of potential I can develop with the entrepreneurship support I decided that it was the place to be. I was lucky to be coached by Incubator already in the second semester of studies."</li> <li>"Can't say I learned too much in there (in E-ship related courses) as it is rather hard to digest information if you have no idea about the context. Still, it gave me a spark and an idea of possibilities"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"In a way I chose the company because it was close to the values that I have and I have always wanted to do something meaningful, but on the other hand the company chose me maybe because I had asked for the opportunity but also demonstrated during the group work for the company that I am capable"</li> <li>"If I could not enjoy the job and the people, I could not do it only for the money. After all, it's the pursuit of happiness that drives us forward"</li> <li>"The experiences (of participating to real-life business activities) encouraged me to move forward"</li> <li>"The opportunity found me!"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"The great thing is that you are not a "robot" employee but instead a creative partner facing the challenges with your team"</li> <li>"Having the possibility to develop my own responsibilities and attend different trainings related to them was and is something that over the time was both interesting and rewarding for the work itself and self – development"</li> <li>"I notice that I usually find common language with people of all sorts of social status/ age/ occupation which allows me to establish large contact networks relatively fast. This allows me to connect the dots in the network"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I want to build, make an impact, and encourage others to do the same"</li> <li>If everything goes well with my current company we're going to make an exit in 4-5 years, which means everything is possible after that.</li> <li>"After 10 years, I shall open a small garage and will do nothing but play sports and restore European classic cars ☺"</li> <li>"I picture myself in a manager position in the next 5-10 years. I should be an expert in our field by then"</li> <li>"In the future I picture myself involved with Sales&amp;Marketing and business development of a SME/ start-up business. It would be great to have another chance of being part of a new start-up in the future as well."</li> </ul>

The last request (in the accompanying message to the narrative writers) was to summarize their key learnings from the study and professional path they have travelled so far to get to their present position. The key takeaways or lessons learned concentrated into 3 areas:

1. Networking – building relationships and getting tasks to perform
2. Trying – showing the skills and “tasting” real-life business, build-up of self-efficacy
3. Learning – ability to analyze the solutions or own work and with others.

Table 4. The key learnings from entrepreneurial/start-up careers – summary from the narratives

<b>Key Learnings from the "entrepreneurial career" experienced</b>	
The issue area to focus on	Illustrative excerpts from Narratives
1. Network	<p>"Nurture networks and relationships"</p> <p>"Let's just say that connections are very valuable and one should never burn bridges as one never know where the connections are needed in the future"</p> <p>"When I realize that one part of my connections is looking e.g. for a buyer, I do have a potential buyer in my other "pocket"."</p> <p>"Summa summarum - industry contacts and experience is the key"</p> <p>"Now the grande finale of my narrative: network, spar with people, talk about your ideas, and go for it!"</p>
2. Try	<p>"...you have to accept that learning is done by trial and error because no one has done it before."</p> <p>"I am still not sure if what I do is exactly what I want to be doing,so I constantly keep looking for new opportunities trying to understand for myself of what really brings me joy"</p> <p>" If you have an idea of being an entrepreneur during your studies, take it further. Plan a business of some kind, even if it would be something you'd never start</p>
3. Learn	<p>"Hunger for learning"</p> <p>"Personally have some niche and specialize in 1-2 areas or functions that will become your personal elevator pitch, yet be willing to wear many hats"</p> <p>"I think most of the key capabilities and lessons can be put in to use in basically any business"</p> <p>"Learning is a continuous process"</p> <p>"Still, in every project and job I've gone into I've learned tons of new things"</p>

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results achieved, it seems obvious that pre-determination of becoming an entrepreneur or a start-up employee plays is not a prerequisite for formation of students ripe for working in new ventures. What seems fruitful practice for all parties is making student cohort to positively collide with the existing entrepreneurs and starting to work with or for them with real life tasks. This seems to be crucial to bonding of the two parties;

a student gets a realistic image what the business and people running it are and also the employers or co-entrepreneurs get a view of the efficacy and style of work of a student.

For entrepreneurship educators it seems important to recognize the stage in which individuals are in, and how they can best be supported to move on. The statements of the respondents have potential to be used as a hint of processes and actions that support the development process.

Since the sample of this survey was small, it does not allow to make any statistical generalization of the results. What can be stated, however, that entrepreneurship education and support set-ups that in one way or another support the 3 key issue areas identified: Network-Try-Learn are likely to offer the most fertile ground to build-up of an entrepreneurial mindset – that can be utilized both in an entrepreneur or employee roles in new ventured

## 6 DISCUSSION

There is multitude of scholarly papers discussing the criteria for qualitative (research) goodness including concepts such as catalytic validity (Lather, 1986) i.e. did the research accomplish its intention to catalyze a change , empathetic validity (Dadds, 2008) i.e. did the research act as a change agent for relationships between people, crystallization (Richardson, 2000b) i.e. can the results be illustrated creatively in a way that reflects deeper thinking, tacit knowledge (Altheide & Johnson, 1994) i.e. was the research able to offer a lens into knowledge that has been difficult to express and formulate, transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 i.e. how can the results of the research be applied in a different context, and so on. The concepts for qualitative excellence clearly illustrates the creative complexity of the qualitative methodological landscape. (Tracy, 2010). For an individual research paper as the one in hand the goodness analysis against abovementioned criteria would be limited to the potential of the research to act as described in the criteria. The results obtained make it reasonable to state that the research served at least for crystallization and tacit knowledge-dimensions. The catalytic validity and empathetic validity depend on the people and institution “altered” to the knowledge created, and can be assessed only after time.

One additional prerequisite to research quality is data saturation. Interviews are one method by which one’s study results reach data saturation. Bernard (2012) stated that the number of interviews needed for a qualitative study to reach data saturation was a number he could not quantify, but that the researcher takes what he can get. Moreover, interview questions should be structured to facilitate asking multiple participants the

same questions, otherwise one would not be able to achieve data saturation as it would be a constantly moving target (Guest et al., 2006).

In this research the role of qualitative interviews in the abovementioned quality considerations can be seen taken by the researcher's call for narratives (suggesting topics to be covered, equivalent to research questions) and narratives written in return (equivalent to answers to research questions). As Sandelowski (1991) points out, the reliability of an individual is not easy to prove nor deny, as they present in a positive case a "true fiction" i.e. they represent an interpretation of an individual on how things unfolded and what were the cause-effect connections behind them. Also this research assumed the narrative authors had no purposeful agenda behind their text. The differences in the narratives despite (the targeted) similar background and status of the respondents seems to prove the narratives do reflect individual and personal experience. On the other hand, by limiting the respondent pool to a narrow selection of people sharing the same status in terms of the research aims was done in order to improve the odds of finding some similarities, patterns that allow the researcher to propose a prism through which the processes involved in start-up entrepreneurship and employee career path can be understood. As presented in the results chapter (Chapter 4) the data obtained from narratives was saturated enough to allow sketching an evolutionary model to which the findings from respondents' narratives fit in.

The respondent sample consisted of individuals who had taken the opportunity to be employed or entrepreneurially self-employed in start-up companies, i.e. were positive examples from the point of view of the learning processes focusing on entrepreneurship and start-up business. The common patterns found in the 6 narratives studied gives ideas of the critical drivers and success factors leading to start-up entrepreneurship and employability, giving thus guidance to designers of entrepreneurship programs in- and outside academia.

At the same time, this type of career paths represent a minority of the students that have passed the educational programs in scope. Even though the two entrepreneurial programs can be considered to be of a masterclass type (relatively small in size, high-intensity and high engagement) and offering the same opportunities of networking, skill demonstration by live projects etc. to all participants, majority of the students do not become entrepreneurs nor employees in start-up companies. This is a common phenomenon, the entrepreneurial intentions turn into actual implementation of a new business to a relatively low conversion rate. E.g. in Kolvereid's research in Norway in 1996 i.e. a long while before the current start-up boom and where the population was similar to this study, undergraduate students of business, approximately 43 % of students preferred entrepreneurship over organizational employment as a career choice, whereas

37 % would go for the employment path over entrepreneurship (and 20 % remained undecided). These levels of entrepreneurial intention were much also in studies in other societal contexts like US (Sandholz, 1990) and UK (Curran and Blackburn, 1989). Despite the high level of intentions and wishes, the actual share of graduates who start their own business typically varies between 1 to 10 % of total graduate population (Kolvereid & Moen, 1997). Research on the non-entrepreneurs' (=organizationally employed) subjective interpretations of their own different career paths would deepen the knowledge on the subject: are there dispelling factors in entrepreneurship and start-up environment, or are there some intervening factors and opportunities that attract people away from their stated intentions?

The research in hand is based on relatively rare basic assumption that (start-up) entrepreneurship and employment - via employability- are not opposite ends of a line, but rather have many similarities. As in many of the cases studied, employment or assigned project-type of work has led to employment and turned with time to co-entrepreneurship. This kind of evolutionary development of employee-to-entrepreneur path is still under-researched. It is important that since the basic nature of start-up business underlines the concepts of scalability and growth, it also in an inbuilt manner means that these companies to recruit and employ, in an environment that is largely different than working in an established companies, and thus requiring specific mindset and skills. Understandably the focus of start-up research has been in the crucial stakeholders, the entrepreneurs, but the role of start-up employees both in research and educational programs should gain more interest and weight.

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**APPENDIX 1:** The accompanying message and viewpoints posed to the respondents' consideration.

Hello IB HTM/L Pad alumni,

I am starting a research project:

FROM (TECH) START-UP BUSINESS STUDENT TO A NEW VENTURE ENTREPRENEUR AND EMPLOYEE

Career Narratives of Students in entrepreneurial programs – case: JAMK's LaunchPad and/Or Hi Tech Management-programs

To join as an informant – could you please write – MS Word or compatible - **a short narrative of your learning and career development that has taken you where you are and have been.** May be fun and rewarding also for yourself...

Narratives are always of personal nature, but at least consider following points to reflect:

- can you recall when did you have for the first time entrepreneurial (or joining a start-up as an employee) intentions, has it been a goal or just an opportunity that appeared
- can you pinpoint some key experiences, courses meetings and incidents that have lead you to the way in which you are now – both inside and outside formal studies
- what role have personal relations, role models etc. had to your development
- why do you think you are in the career track you are now – how did you choose the business to join or found, or did the company or the opportunity “choose you”, why and how?
- what is your prediction for the further career, in which kind of a role you picture yourself in next 5-10 years
- what are the key learnings you have gained as a start-up entrepreneur and/or employee and where can you utilize them the best in the future

**I would appreciate having your 1-2 page freeformat stories before 5<sup>th</sup> April.** Your answers will be treated anonymously. Send you narrative to: [juha.saukkonen@jamk.fi](mailto:juha.saukkonen@jamk.fi)

The usage of data will be two-fold:

- 1) I am hosting a workshop 21<sup>st</sup> April in Belgrad – focusing on employability to start-up and growth companies

- 2) I am working on the conference paper - roads to start-up e-ship and employment  
- for September 2016 - and hopefully later a journal article Spring 2017 as well.

Rgrds

Juha Saukkonen