

## The Entrepreneurial Motivations of Engineering Students: Case of a Small Island Developing State from the Caribbean

Cilla T. Benjamin

Department of Mechanical & Manufacturing Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, The University of the West Indies,  
St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies; E-mail: Cilla.Benjamin@sta.uwi.edu

(Received 22 June 2016; Revised 09 June 2017; Accepted 06 July 2017)

**Abstract:** *Studies on entrepreneurial motivations conducted in the Caribbean and globally, have considered factors such as parents' occupations, business ownership by parents or relatives, sex and ethnicity. This exploratory study focused on the entrepreneurial motivations of more than 200 engineering students and recent graduates in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), to gauge whether, among this group, some of these traditional factors are associated with higher order or 'pull' entrepreneurial motivations such as taking advantage of market opportunities, the need for control and independence, and desire for a challenge. A comprehensive self-reporting questionnaire tool was electronically distributed and results coded and analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 24 software. It was found that the respondents primarily displayed higher order 'pull' motivators for entrepreneurship with eighty-four percent (84%) identifying welcoming a challenge, controlling their future or taking advantage of opportunities as potential motivators. The study revealed no statistically significant correlation between entrepreneurial motivation of the respondents and ethnicity, sex, parents' occupation, or training. Age of first exposure to assisting in a business also had no significant impact on the entrepreneurial motivation of the engineering student or graduate. Birth order and actual experience running or managing a business were in fact, the only intrinsic characteristics discovered to have a statistically significant impact on the nature of the entrepreneurial motivation of the students and graduates. 'Middle born' and 'only' children crave independence. Fifty percent (50%) of middle born and 52% of 'only' children would start businesses to take more control of their lives. 'Last borns' expressed the highest order 'pull' motivations in that forty-five percent (45%) were most likely to become entrepreneurs to take advantage of an opportunity in the marketplace. Not surprisingly, 'first born' and 'only' children were the most motivated to follow family traditions for entrepreneurship. Further studies would be useful to establish a typology for engineering entrepreneurs from T&T and other small island developing states. This exploratory study, conducted in T&T, suggests that engineers may exhibit different entrepreneurial patterns to the rest of the population or to engineers in larger economies. Further exploration of this knowledge may be useful in supporting students and graduates of engineering programmes.*

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurial motivation, engineering students, Trinidad and Tobago, SIDS*