

# **Triggers and Barriers Affecting Entrepreneurial Intentionality: The Case of Western Australian Nascent Entrepreneurs\***

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This paper sheds light on the process leading to new enterprise formation while identifying the triggers and barriers to business start-ups. A new approach was used to conduct the study as the analysis focused on the pre-decision stage, i.e. the intention and characteristics of nascent entrepreneurs.

Several triggers - possibly a combination of triggers - appeared to be at the root of start-ups. These triggers were the level of creativity, the need for autonomy, the achievement of social status, the response to a market opportunity, and the drive for money. In addition to these "usual" triggers, the research also highlighted one intriguing trigger: the will to invest savings in a business venture which will provide the investor with a job and the satisfaction of being rewarded on merits. It was suggested that this trigger matches the profile of mid-career professionals - some of whom were made redundant - who wanted to become self-employed.

The good news which came out of this research was that nascent entrepreneurs did not perceive any barriers which would significantly impede their start-up. This implies that they did not face any hurdle at all (otherwise all those who had the intention to start a business would have succeeded). In relation to those who did not proceed with starting up of their own business, three underlying barriers were identified: the lack of resources (knowledge, finance, and premises); compliance costs (high taxes and fees, finding suitable labour, compliance with government regulation); and, the disillusion associated with the hard reality of "going into business" (risks greater than initially expected, task more difficult than expected, uncertainty of the future, fear of failure).

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## **Abstract**

This paper sheds light on the process leading to new enterprise formation while identifying the triggers and barriers to business start-ups. A new approach was used to conduct the study as the analysis focused on the pre-decision stage, i.e. the intention and characteristics of nascent entrepreneurs. In addition to the “usual” triggers to start-up, the research highlighted a more intriguing one: the will to invest savings in a business venture which will provide the investor with a job and the satisfaction of being rewarded on merits. It was suggested that this trigger matched the profile of mid-career professionals who wanted to become self-employed. Underlying barriers related to the lack of resources, compliance costs, and the hard reality of “going into business”.

## **Introduction**

More than ever the driving force in the modern economy remains entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs are meeting our economic needs through the creation of thousands of new businesses each year. While larger corporations have instituted “downsizing” or “outsourcing” programs, job creation and economic growth have become the domain of the new ventures and the entrepreneurs who create them. If small businesses are to make the uttermost contribution to the economy, it is therefore incumbent on policy makers, trainers and business advisers to pay attention to the factors impeding and fostering their start-up.

This paper attempts precisely to identify the triggers and barriers to small ventures formation. In doing so, it focuses -in contrast to numerous past studies- on the person who has the intention to start a business, i.e. the nascent entrepreneur. We will therefore look at what the entrepreneur does to indicate this intention (intention indicators), as well as the triggers and barriers affecting the intention to set up a business venture.

As considerable research has already been undertaken about the start-up process, the first section of the report presents a review of the literature and a theoretical framework of start-up. In section 2, the methodology used to carry out the project is presented. The intention

indicators displayed by nascent entrepreneurs are outlined in section 3. The triggers are discussed in section 4, and the barriers are detailed in section 5.

## **Review of the literature**

### **Definition of a business start-up**

The definition of a new firm or new enterprise is an ambiguous issue. Mason (1983) identifies four aspects which should be considered when defining a new firm:

- *Start-up date.* The definition of the start-up date is arbitrary. Approaches in the literature have included the date the company registers; the date the first sales occur; and, the date the first employee is hired. Obviously, a firm can “start-up” before any of these events take place.
- *Changes in activity.* If a company starts as a service firm and then switches to manufacturing, is it a new firm?
- *Independence.* Independence usually means the firm has no obvious parent. Under this definition, new franchises are not new firms.
- *Newness.* The term is related to the “changes in activity” aspect listed above. Is the company new if the owner bought an existing business and changed some of its activities?

Katz & Gartner (1988) addressed some of these difficulties in relation to definition with a compromise. They suggest four indicators showing that an organisation is in the process of coming into existence: (1) the intention to create an organisation (distinct goals); (2) the resources to create an organisation; (3) the development of an organisational boundary (e.g. registration); and, (4) the exchange of resources across the boundary (e.g. sales). When studying organisation creation, they suggest using at least one of these properties as a sampling frame.

Consequently, franchise businesses were not included in the scope of the study because of obvious independence problems in the franchiser-franchisee relationship. However, owners who bought an existing business and changed some of its activities were included in the research. This study considered that a new business has effectively started if the first sales have occurred.

### **Previous research on start-ups**

A number of researchers have attempted to identify relevant outcomes linked to organisation formation. In the early empirical research this interest was very much focused on the psychological characteristics of business founders, although the research was not closely linked to contemporary developments in psychology. A trait approach was often adopted, and almost endless lists of entrepreneurial traits were suggested (Hornaday, 1982).

For example, such factors as need for achievement (McClelland, 1961), risk taking propensity (Brockhaus, 1980), locus of control (Brockhaus, 1982), tolerance of ambiguity (Schere, 1982), and desire for personal control (Greenberger & Sexton, 1988) have been identified and examined as possible traits associated with entrepreneurial behaviour.

This approach eventually reached a dead end as it could only partially answer the question: "What makes people found new firms?" It has been convincingly argued that personal background characteristics have a more reliable influence on the decision to found one's own firm than psychological traits (Reynolds, 1991; Stanworth, Blythe & Stanworth, 1991). Discussion has also addressed numerous other background factors linked to the personality, for example, previous employment (Storey, 1982; Ronstadt, 1988); family background (Scott & Twomey, 1988; Matthews & Moser, 1995); gender (Buttner & Rosen, 1989; Kolvereid, Shane, & Westhead, 1993); education (Storey, 1982); ethnic membership (Aldrich, 1980); and religion (Weber, 1930).

A response to the limited success of the trait approach has been to view enterprise creation in context. One way of doing this is to apply a more aggregate level of analysis and to look for regional or national level variables that can explain variations in the rate of new enterprise formation (Aldrich, 1990). This approach has been relatively successful and fairly strong relationships have been established. In her literature review, Specht (1993) distinguishes five main contextual factors affecting organisation formation and these include social, economic, political, infrastructure development and market emergence factors.

Within the social environment, the impact of networks (Marett, 1980; Gartner, 1985; Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Johannisson, 1988) and the support of sociopolitical elites, along with the cultural acceptance (Gartner, 1985; Bull & Winter, 1991), are of particular importance. The economic environment studies focus on capital availability (Cross, 1981; Storey, 1982; Gartner, 1985), aggregate economic indicators (Walton, 1977), economic recessions (Delacroix & Carroll, 1983; Gould & Keeble, 1984; Shutt & Whittington, 1987), and unemployment (Pennings, 1982; Gould & Keeble, 1984). The political environment concerns mainly the support of public or semi-public agencies (Delacroix & Carroll, 1983; Gartner, 1985; Young & Francis, 1989; Walker & Greenstreet, 1990).

Infrastructure development encompasses numerous variables such as the education system (Gartner, 1985; Romanelli, 1989; Bull & Winter, 1991), nature of local labour market (Pennings, 1982; Gartner, 1985; Mason, 1989), incubator organisations (Gartner, 1985; Young & Francis, 1989), information accessibility (Romanelli, 1989), and availability of premises (Cross, 1981; Storey, 1982; Gould & Keeble, 1984; Mason, 1989). Finally, market emergence integrates both concepts of niche emergence (Boeker, 1988; Delacroix & Solt, 1988), and technological innovation (Cross, 1981; Gould & Keeble, 1984; Mason, 1989).

# Methodology

Virtually all the above mentioned studies focused on owner/managers of new businesses, not on persons who were in the process of starting a new business. These studies did not address Learned's (1992) observation that not all of those attempting to form an organisation will succeed. In order to get a comprehensive picture of entrepreneurship, it is not sufficient to approach only those who have fulfilled their objectives. Therefore, there is still a need for a desegregate level of analysis which can shed light on the process leading to new enterprise formation.

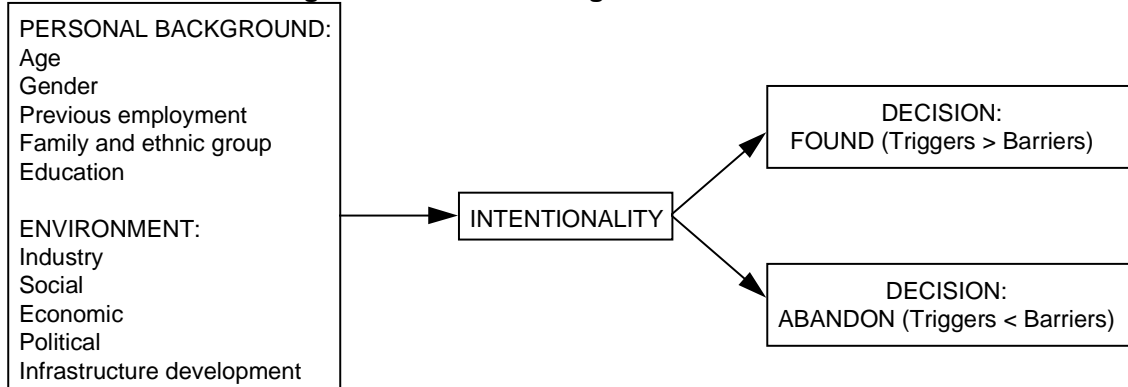
In this perspective, the analysis should focus on the pre-decision stage, i.e. interest, entrepreneurial career preference, and characteristics of nascent entrepreneurs (Bird, 1988; Krueger, 1993; Boyd & Vozikis, 1994). Given that the decision to found a firm can be regarded as a reasoned or planned behaviour, the relationship between intentionality and actual behaviour should be fairly strong (Ajzen, 1991).

The unit of analysis of this research focuses on the start-up process and more specifically on the actor at the core of this process: **the person who has the intention to start a business, i.e. entrepreneurial intentionality**. Intentionality is defined by Bird (1989: 8) as "... a conscious state of mind that directs attention (and therefore experience and action) toward a specific object (goal) or pathway to achieve it (means)". This concept goes beyond the one of entrepreneurial propensity: Individuals with the intention to start a business not only have a propensity to start, but in addition, adopt a rational behaviour to reach their goal. They have therefore already taken some steps (e.g. gathered some information; established a business plan; saved some money) toward this goal.

Figure 1 presents a schematic overview of the start-up process and focuses on the assumption that the triggers and barriers influence the intention, and ultimately the decision, to launch the business (triggers prevail over barriers) or to give up the idea (barriers prevail over triggers). As there is a time lag in the start-up process, both those who effectively founded a new venture and those who abandoned the idea needed be approached to gather the information on barriers and triggers. For the purpose of policy decisions aimed at stimulating new enterprise formation, it is as useful to learn why individuals failed to implement their intentions (the barriers to start-up), as to study only those who carried them out (the triggers).

A total of 93 entrepreneurs were interviewed. Among them were 48 "starters", i.e. entrepreneurs who effectively launched a business venture over the last two years; and 45 "non-starters", i.e. potential entrepreneurs who abandoned the idea to launch their business - at least for the moment. Different SMEs services providers such as the Small Business Development Corporation, the Business Enterprise Centres, and the Women's Economic Development Organisation assisted in the random selection of entrepreneurs. The Dun & Bradstreet data base of new businesses was also used to identify the starters.

**Figure 1: A model of organisation formation**



Data were collected with a semi-structured interview integrating closed questions (to gather demographic information and facilitate cross-case analysis) as well as open-ended questions (to gain a wider and more dynamic perspective). The interview provided in-depth information, through a “360° scanning” of the entrepreneur personality and his/her perception of the environment.

## Intention indicators

The focus of analysis in this study is entrepreneurial intentionality. We have clearly established that, in order to gain an insight into the barriers and triggers to start-up, it is vital to integrate in the research the nascent entrepreneurs who failed to set up their own business venture along with the successful ones.

With an expression of intention (“I am going to try to start a business”), the entrepreneur begins the process of founding the business. Intention implies action. Several indicators can reflect entrepreneurial intentionality, this conscious state of mind which directs attention toward the goal of establishing the new organisation. Table1 shows the actions taken by starters and non-starters in our sample.

Although some differences appeared among the actions taken, it is important to notice at this stage that non-starters and starters took some similar steps to launch their business. As there are almost the same number of starters (48) and non-starters (45) in the sample, it should be noticed that in general they both:

- Gathered some information on business start-up from various organisations (e.g. Small Business Development Corporation or Business Enterprise Centre), their family, or their friends.
- Prepared a business plan.
- Looked for facilities or equipment.
- Were saving money to set up their business.

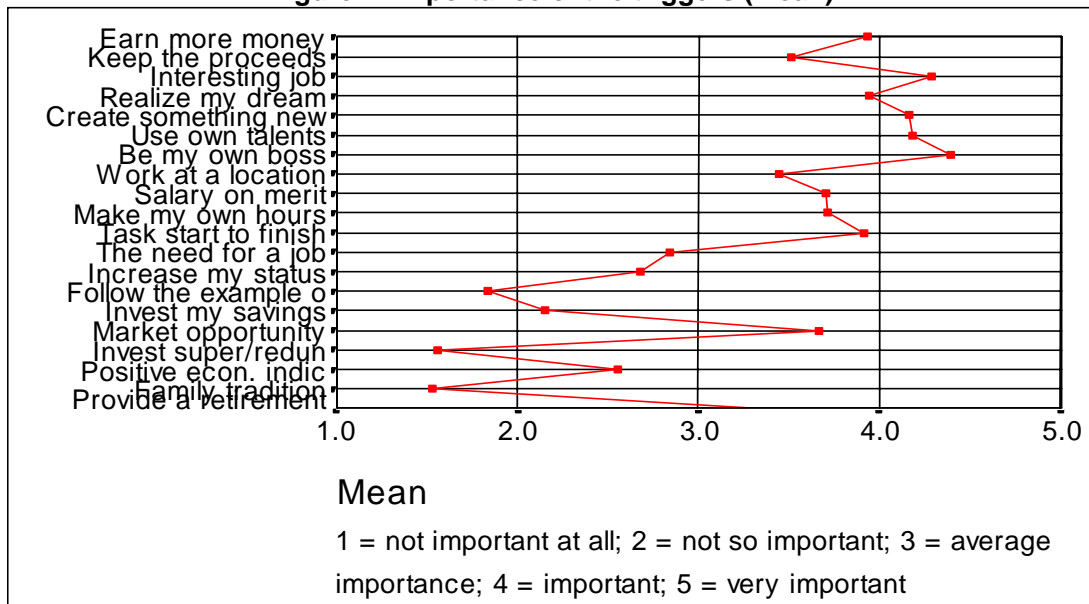
**Table 1: Intention indicators of starting a business**

<b>While you were in the process of examining your business launch you...</b>	<b>Non-starters N (%)</b>	<b>Starters N (%)</b>
Bought/rented facilities/equipment	12 (26.6)	34 (70.8)
Attended a course in business management	27 (60)	17 (35.4)
Developed models/prototypes	13 (28.8)	16 (33.3)
Organized a start-up team	10 (22.2)	23 (47.9)
Devoted full time to the project	7 (15.5)	28 (58.3)
Sought financial support	14 (31.1)	24 (50.0)
Invested my own money	21 (46.6)	38 (79.1)
Looked for facilities/equipment	32 (71.1)	35 (72.9)
Were saving money to start your business	17 (37.7)	22 (45.8)
Prepared a business plan	31 (68.8)	36 (75.0)
Gathered information (e.g. market, cost)	42 (93.3)	45 (93.7)
Applied for a licence/regsitration	10 (22.2)	31 (64.5)

## Triggers to business start-ups

A graph of the mean importance of the triggers listed in the questionnaire is offered as Figure 2. Notably there is a large spread for the means which are quite evenly distributed between ‘not important at all’ and ‘very important’.

**Figure 2: Importance of the triggers (mean)**



Further, a factor analysis was performed to identify underlying triggers among the list of items proposed. Factors were extracted with a principal components analysis, followed by a varimax rotation. The rotated factor matrix presented in Table 2 shows six main triggers to set up a business venture. Overall, the six factors explain 63.6 per cent of the variance - a

middling performance. The reliability of the factors was also tested, and Cronbach alpha coefficients range between .65 and .91 which is a meritorious level.

**Table 2: Rotated factor matrix of the triggers**

Variable	Factor 1 Invest	Factor 2 Creativity	Factor 3 Autonomy	Factor 4 Status	Factor 5 Mkt Opport.	Factor 6 Money
The need for a job	.71					
Invest my personal savings	.65					
Receive a salary based on merit	.65					
Invest super/redundan. package	.61					
Take advantage of my talents		.83				
Have an interesting job		.74				
Create something		.72				
Realise my dream		.54				
Work at a location of my choice			.79			
Make my own hours			.78			
Be my own boss			.71			
Follow the example of a person				.82		
Increase my status/prestige				.59		
Maintain a family tradition				.59		
Take advantage of a mkt opport.					.86	
Positive economic indicators					.75	
Keep a large part of the proceeds						.88
Earn more money						.74
Eigenvalue	4.50	2.42	1.79	1.58	1.33	1.07
Percent of variance explained	22.5	12.1	9.0	7.9	6.7	5.4
Cumulative percent	22.5	34.6	43.6	51.5	58.2	63.6
Cronbach alpha	.69	.77	.68	.65	.91	.66

Only loadings > .5 are shown

The first factor, *Invest*, encompasses the following motives to start a business: “The need for a job”; “To invest my personal savings”; “To receive a salary based on merit”; and “To invest my superannuation/redundancy package”. The typical profile of entrepreneurs who would put forward such motives appears to be mid-career professionals who have some savings and who want to be rewarded according to their effort. The combination of both the impression that their merits are recognised/rewarded and that they have money to walk away with, constitutes a powerful trigger for these people to set up their own business venture. In relation to some of these professionals who were made redundant, “The need for a job” together with the opportunity “To invest a superannuation or redundancy package” also correlated with this factor.

The second factor, *Creativity*, has been intimately associated with entrepreneurship in the literature. This factor encompasses variables such as “To take advantage of my own talents”; “To have an interesting job”; “To create something new”; and “To realise my dream”. Altogether these variables translate the desire and the ability to bring something new into existence. Potential entrepreneurs would like to take advantage of their own talents, or in other words do what they do best and what they like. Some, however, would like to have a more interesting job - which would enable them to create something and realise their dream at the same time.



Factor 3, *Autonomy*, reflects the willingness of independence of entrepreneurs, in that they want to work their own hours at a location of their choice. The desire to be one's own boss further reflects this autonomy. This factor has also been referred to during the interviews by such statements as: "I want to work with a person of my choice", or "I want to be free to start at 10 am or to take an afternoon off when it is convenient for me". The autonomy allows a greater flexibility.

Factor 4, *Status*, encompasses the following variables: "To follow the example of a person I admire"; "To increase my status/prestige"; and, "To maintain a family tradition". All these variables are external to the person. The launch of a business may be triggered by social forces, as shown by this factor; and these are either related to the current image (i.e. status or prestige of the entrepreneur) or to an historical image (i.e. to maintain a family tradition).

Factor 5, *Market Opportunity*, is a trigger resulting from the conjunction of two variables: an opportunity identified in the market place together with positive economic indicators. It should be noted, however, that the opportunity **itself** is not sufficient; because there also needs to be a conducive environment in order for the intention to set up a business enterprise to eventuate.

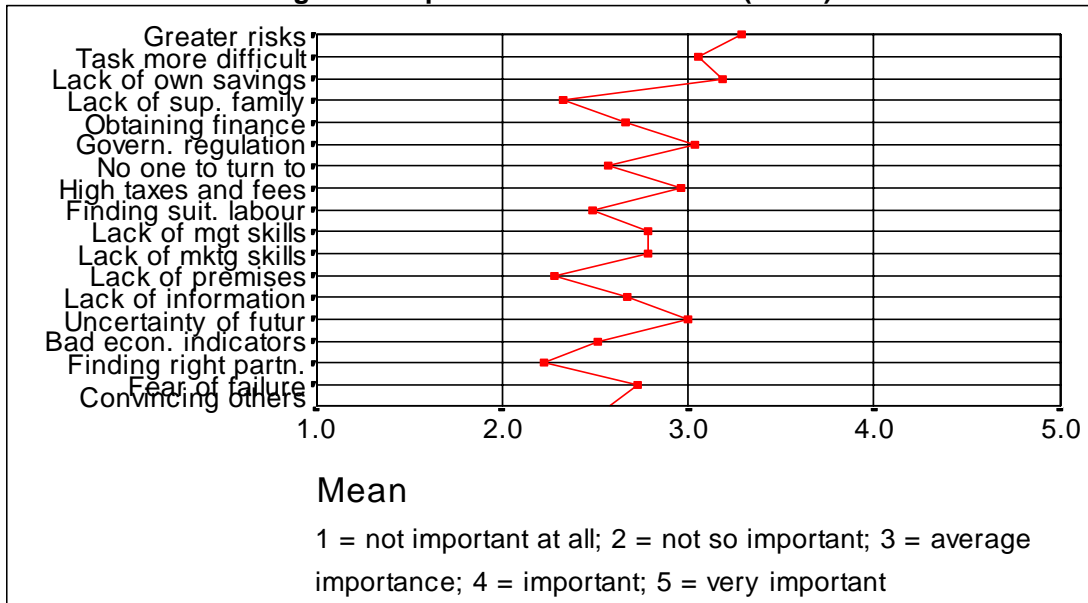
Factor 6, *Money*, underpins the financial drive often mentioned by entrepreneurs. Keeping a larger proportion of the proceeds and the desire to earn more money in turn are certainly reasons to start a business. However, it was not the most important factor in this study.

## **Barriers to business start-ups**

Figure 3 displays the mean importance of the barriers to launching the business as perceived by sample respondents. The variance of the means is much smaller than that of the triggers (see Figure 2).

Overall the barriers to establish a new business venture were perceived to be minimal in the study, in that, almost all barriers mentioned were ranked in the category "not so important" to "average importance". Only three barriers ("risks greater than initially expected", the "lack of own savings or assets", and 'a more difficult task than expected') appeared to be slightly more important than the average.

**Figure 3: Importance of the barriers (mean)**



A factor analysis was also performed for the barriers to small business start-up. Factors were extracted with a principal components analysis, followed by a varimax rotation. The rotated factor matrix presented in Table 3 highlights three barriers to set up a business venture.

**Table 3: Rotated factor matrix of the barriers**

Variable	Factor 1 Lack of Resources	Factor 2 Compliance Costs	Factor 3 Hard Reality
Lack of marketing skills	.83		
Lack of managerial/financial expertise	.78		
Lack of info on business start-up	.64		
Difficulty in obtaining finance	.64		
Lack of suitable premises	.60		
High taxes and fees		.75	
Finding suitable labour		.74	
Compliance with govern. regulation		.67	
No one to turn to in order to help me		.61	
Risks greater than initially expected			.80
Task was more difficult than expected			.77
Uncertainty of the future			.63
Fear of failure			.59
Eigenvalue	7.88	1.50	1.46
Percent of variance explained	43.8	8.4	8.1
Cumulative percent	43.8	52.2	60.3
Cronbach alpha	.84	.78	.79

Only loadings > .5 are shown

The first factor, *Lack of Resources*, encompasses different shortages perceived by “would-be entrepreneurs”. They often recognise themselves that they do not master the necessary skills in marketing, management, and finance. These personal deficiencies are

further worsened by a lack of information on business start-ups. Finance and suitable premises are two other types of resources which are also correlated to factor 1 and which constitute an additional barrier.

The second factor, *Compliance Costs*, encompasses the high taxes and fees, as well as the compliance, associated with government legislation. Interestingly enough, finding suitable labour is also correlated with this factor. This shows the difficulty finding qualified employees and, labour may also appear as an “administered price”, i.e. determined to a certain extent by legislation and the unions. All of these variables are linked to government regulations (legislation, taxes and fees) or policies (education and training to produce qualified and affordable employees). Also, they create hurdles for business start-ups and confusion for potential entrepreneurs, who appear to have the impression of being lost in this 'red tape' situation and have no one to turn to in order to help them.

The third factor, *Hard Reality*, indicates that setting up a business is often harder and with more risks than initially expected. It suggests that tasks appear more difficult and that risks are usually greater than expected when the time comes to launch the business. The future is perceived as very uncertain and, as a result, a certain fear of failure is also associated with this factor.

## **The Relative Importance of the Factors**

Following the factor analysis each of these nine dimensions were developed into derived variables comprising a composite mean of the original variables which were found to identify the factors. An examination of the overall importance of these nine factor variables to the respondents was then undertaken using *t*-tests of the differences between their mean scores.

Of interest was the finding that no significant differences (at the 5% level) could be found between the importance placed on these variables by the two sub-populations of starters versus non-starters. This finding suggests that these triggers and barriers are viewed with equal degrees of importance regardless of whether the individual proceeded to foundation of their business or not.

A comparison of how the nine factors variables were ranked in terms of their relative importance to the entire sample found a hierarchy. Table 4 shows the results of this analysis.

**Table 4: Relative importance of the factors**

Factor variable	Mean	Std. Dev	t-value
	1=not important at all, 5=very important		
1. CREATIVITY (Trigger)	4.17	0.78	
2. AUTONOMY (Trigger)	3.89	0.85	2.98*
MONEY (Trigger)	3.77	0.89	
3. HARD REALITY (Barrier)	3.18	0.97	4.25*
MARKET OPPORTUNITY (Trigger)	3.16	1.06	
4. INVEST (Trigger)	2.75	0.83	3.40*
LACK OF RESOURCES (Barrier)	2.63	1.22	
COMPLIANCE COSTS (Barrier)	2.53	1.25	
5. STATUS (Trigger)	2.03	0.88	3.76*

\* indicates significant at the 5% level between the mean scores above and below the broken line.

As shown in Table 4 the most important factor was the “Trigger” CREATIVITY. This suggests that both starters and non-starters view the ability to use their talents, have an interesting job, create something or realise their dreams as the most important potential motivation to small business formation.

In second place were the two factors of AUTONOMY and MONEY. These two “Triggers” are somewhat related. The ability to be one’s own boss and have autonomy is only possible if financial success has been achieved.

Third place was shared by the “Barrier” factor HARD REALITY and the “Trigger” factor MARKET OPPORTUNITY. These two factors are likely to relate to each other in terms of a trade off of one for the other. The motivation to found a business in the light of a perceived market opportunity must be weighed against the risks and difficulties involved.

In equal fourth place were the “Trigger” factor INVEST and the “Barrier” factors LACK OF RESOURCES and COMPLIANCE COSTS. Once again this may indicate a trade off between these triggers and barriers. Having money to invest in a potential business to secure future wealth must be considered against the lack of resources (particularly finances) and the costs of establishment.

Finally, in last place was the “Trigger” factor STATUS. This suggests that the desire to emulate others or follow family traditions are not particularly strong motivations for nascent entrepreneurs in Western Australia.

## Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to shed light on the process leading to new enterprise formation while identifying the triggers and barriers to business start-ups. A great deal is known about the characteristics of owner-managers and the motives that urged them to set up a business venture. However, virtually all previous studies focused on owner-managers of

new businesses, not on persons who are in the process of starting a new business. In order to get a comprehensive picture of entrepreneurship (and of the triggers and barriers affecting start-ups), it is not sufficient to approach only those who have fulfilled their objectives. This study took a new approach in that it focused on people who had the intention to start a business.

Several triggers - possibly a combination of triggers - appeared to be at the root of start-ups. These triggers were the level of creativity, the need for autonomy, the achievement of social status, the response to a market opportunity, and the drive for money. In addition to these "usual" triggers, the research also highlighted one intriguing trigger: the will to invest savings in a business venture which will provide the investor with a job and the satisfaction of being rewarded on merits. It was suggested that this trigger matched the profile of mid-career professionals - some of whom were made redundant - who wanted to become self-employed. This constitutes an emerging trend in entrepreneurship. Business advisers along with training institutions should better target these professionals who want to redirect their career toward running their own business and provide them with an *ad hoc* turnaround strategy.

The good news which came out of this research was that nascent entrepreneurs did not perceive any barriers which would significantly impede their start-up. This implies that they did not face any hurdle at all (otherwise all those who had the intention to start a business would have succeeded). In relation to those who did not proceed with starting up of their own business, three underlying barriers were identified: the lack of resources (knowledge, finance, and premises); compliance costs (high taxes and fees, finding suitable labour, compliance with government regulation); and, the disillusion associated with the hard reality of "going into business" (risks greater than initially expected, task more difficult than expected, uncertainty of the future, fear of failure).

The remedy for these problems are known and include: a better education and training (to improve the lack of managerial and marketing skills), an improvement of the services provided to nascent entrepreneurs (to improve the lack of information on business start-up and address the difficulty in obtaining finance), and a reduction of 'red tape' and taxes (to curtail compliance costs). Last, but not least, nascent entrepreneurs themselves should be more self-confident and persevering when they face the hard reality of establishing their own business.

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