

Investigating the Dimensions of Perceived Attributions in Making Sense of Failure: An Exploratory Study of Lebanese Entrepreneurs

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Abstract : By challenging the anti-failure bias and contributing to the theoretical territory of the attribution theory, this thesis develops a comprehensive process for entrepreneurial learning from failure. The practical implication of the findings suggests assisting entrepreneurs (current, failing, and nascent) in effectively anticipating and reflecting upon failure. Additionally, the process is suggested to enhance the level of institutional and private (accelerators and financiers) support provided to entrepreneurs, the implications of which may improve future opportunities for entrepreneurial success. Henceforth, exploring learning from failure is argued to impact the potential survival of future ventures, subsequently revitalizing the economic contribution of entrepreneurship. This learning process can be enhanced with the cognitive development of causal ascriptions for failure, which eventually impacts learning outcomes. However, the mechanism with which entrepreneurs make sense of failure, reflect on the journey, and transform experience into knowledge is still under-researched. More specifically, the cognitive process of failure attribution is under-explored, majorly in the context of developing economies, calling for a more insightful understanding on how entrepreneurs ascribe failure. Responding to the call for more thorough research in such cultural contexts, this study expands the understanding of the dimensions of failure attributions as perceived by entrepreneurs and the impact of these dimensions on learning outcomes in the Lebanese context. The research adopted the exploratory interpretivism paradigm and collected data from interviews with industry experts first, followed by narratives of entrepreneurs using the qualitative multimethod approach. The holistic and categorical content analysis of narratives, preceded by the thematic analysis of interviews, unveiled how entrepreneurs ascribe failure by developing minor and major dimensions of each failure attribution. The findings have also revealed how each dimension impacts the learning from failure when accompanied by emotional resilience. The thesis concludes that exploring in-depth the dimensions of failure attributions significantly determines the level of learning generated. They are moving beyond the simple categorisation of ascriptions as primary internal or external unveiled how learning may occur with each attribution at the individual, venture, and ecosystem levels. This has further accentuated that a major internal attribution of failure combined with a minor external attribution generated the highest levels of transformative and double-loop learning, emphasizing the role of personal blame and responsibility on enhancing learning outcomes.

Keywords : attribution, entrepreneurship, reflection, sense-making, emotions, learning outcomes, failure, exit

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