

Entrepreneurial Passion in Entrepreneurship Education

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ABSTRACT

By interviewing alumni about their experiences of entrepreneurship education and post-graduation careers, this study explored how students can harness entrepreneurial passion in a venture creation programme. The findings emphasise the importance of learning ‘soft skills’ in entrepreneurship education, as well as experiencing the ‘necessary evil’ of failure, and learning from failure in a safe environment. Most importantly, the chapter illustrates the connection between safety, action, emotion and passion in a VCP. Lastly, this study highlights that harnessing obsessive passion into a sustainable form is an important although difficult task. Passion changes over time and VCP students harness this passion to achieve ‘sustainable obsessive and harmonious passion.’ This study contributes to the literature on the development of entrepreneurial universities by focusing on the students and their entrepreneurial passion.

Keywords: Venture Creation Programme, Alumni, Safety, Action, Emotion, Passion, Harnessing, Location

INTRODUCTION

Managers at entrepreneurial universities strive to increase entrepreneurship in and around the university (Forliano et al., 2021; Klofsten et al., 2019). Since entrepreneurial universities offer education, research and transfer of knowledge, they are considered key access agents in entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems (Guerrero et al., 2016). Previous research on entrepreneurial universities has tended to focus on university missions, ecosystems and the creation of technology-based companies from the university managers’ or employees’ point of view. While students are regarded as a potential resource for commercialization and, therefore, are also stakeholders, their involvement and engagement tend to be neglected in the entrepreneurial university literature (Lahikainen, Peltonen, Hietanen and Oikkonen, 2021). However, one of the key strategic challenges of becoming an entrepreneurial university is to develop entrepreneurial teaching and learning (Klofsten et al., 2019) which foster an entrepreneurial mindset and entrepreneurial skills on an individual level. This requires an understanding of entrepreneurial stamina. Entrepreneurial passion is considered a central component of motivation and success in understanding entrepreneurial behaviour, and this includes factors such as drive, tenacity, persistence, initiative and venture-related objects (Cardon et al., 2012; Smilor, 1997). Entrepreneurship, both in theory and in practice, emphasises entrepreneurs’ willingness to take initiative, tolerate risk and uncertainty, persist in the face of challenge, live at the edge of chaos and act both daringly and energetically (e.g., Stacey, 2002; Holland and Shepherd, 2013). Entrepreneurs are believed to possess an above-average likelihood of outperforming any resistance they may face (Brännback et al., 2006). Accordingly, scholars increasingly refer to the psychological concept of ‘passion’ to explain the mobilisation of the high levels of energy and persistence associated with new ventures (Korber and McNaughton, 2017; Cardon et al., 2009). Cardon et al. (2009, p. 517) conceptualised entrepreneurial passion as ‘consciously accessible, intense positive feelings experienced by engagement in entrepreneurial activities associated with roles that are meaningful and salient to the self-identity of the entrepreneur.’ Previous studies report the positive effects of passion on venture growth as well as the indirect, positive effects that result from setting challenging goals (Drnovsek et al., 2016). Evidence also exists for entrepreneurial passion’s significant impact on opportunity identification and entrepreneurial behaviour (Bao et al., 2017), and it has been argued that entrepreneurial passion

enhances firm performance by virtue of the entrepreneur's perseverance in striving for long-term goals (Mueller et al., 2017). On that basis, this chapter addresses the following research question: *how may students harness entrepreneurial passion in a venture creation programme?* The study presents reflections from alumni regarding the entrepreneurial passion they developed and harnessed through their education, and contributes to further understanding of 'soft skills' (Fayolle, 2013) as well as bridging a gap in the existing knowledge on entrepreneurial competencies' development (Lackeus, 2015).

A distinction can be drawn between *harmonious* and *obsessive* passion; while the former refers to the positive feelings and well-being associated with entrepreneurial activities, the latter refers to the drive needed for one to persist, even at the expense of other life aspects (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2015). Fisher et al. (2018) report that, while harmonious passion contributes both directly and indirectly to perceptions of entrepreneurial success, obsessive passion underpins sustained entrepreneurial commitment, thus again contributing to success. Since obsessive passion is connected to potential problems in terms of health and quality of life but is nevertheless necessary for succeeding in entrepreneurship, it has been argued that both students and faculty must acknowledge harmonious and obsessive entrepreneurial passion as well as determine how these concepts can be managed (Fisher et al., 2018). This chapter explores the development of students' entrepreneurial passion in the context of a venture creation programme (VCP). As such, a VCP is a highly relevant part of the entrepreneurial university context for studying entrepreneurial passion, since VCPs represent an extreme case of experiential entrepreneurship education (Ollila and Williams Middleton, 2011). A VCP's objective is to equip students with the ability to think, act and decide, as well as deal with novelty, uncertainty and change (Fayolle, 2013). A VCP may be considered an entrepreneurial education on steroids. Lackeus and Williams Middleton (2015, p. 50) define a VCP as 'entrepreneurship education programmes which utilize the on-going creation of a real-life venture as the primary learning vessel (thus involving venture creation as part of the formal curriculum), including intention to incorporate.'

This chapter contributes to the literature stream on the drivers of entrepreneurial passion. This literature stream 'uncover[s] those factors that stimulate passion so we can gain some insight into how this motivational force might emerge and develop' (Murnieks et al., 2014, p. 1584). Some of the few studies that focus on these drivers suggest that entrepreneurial action promotes passion (Cardon et al., 2012), that entrepreneurial passion is an outcome of entrepreneurial effort (Gielnik et al., 2015) and entrepreneurship training (Gielnik et al., 2017), and that entrepreneurial identity fuels passion (Murnieks et al., 2014). Lastly, this chapter provides practical implications for faculty and managers in higher education aiming to develop entrepreneurial universities (Forliano et al., 2021; Klofsten et al., 2019).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Venture creation programmes

A VCP is a context in which students may learn to harness their passion. VCPs emphasise action-based learning—wherein the action is guided by authentic problems—combined with collaborative learning and a reflective practice component. One of a VCP's intentions involves enhancing the likelihood that students identify and capture the right opportunity at the right time for the right reason, even under uncertain and unforeseeable conditions. This enhancement requires a pedagogical approach that goes beyond understanding and talking, and in addition uses, applies and acts; in other words, it requires practice (Neck and Greene, 2011). As such, a VCP departs from traditional educational pedagogy in that it highlights behaviourist epistemology and embraces an experience-based pedagogy based on a constructivist paradigm. An experience-based pedagogy is learner-centred – in contrast to teacher-centred - in that it promotes personal experience as the primary source of learning in different ways, such as through simulations, live cases and real-life experiences (Hägg, 2017).

A VCP builds its pedagogical platform upon a *relational view* of knowledge (Scarborough, 1998), distinguished as an emergent property rather than a structure to be stored or transferred as a physical commodity. A VCP works on the premise that knowledge is actively developed via interactions between students and other stakeholders (e.g., Lackeus and Williams Middleton, 2015). As a first implication, knowledge is not an entity that can be passively downloaded, transmitted or shared as such (Hislop, 2009); thus, knowledge can only be superficially taught (and learned) through orthodox lectures and presentations. A second implication is that students must actively reach out and avoid becoming passive recipients of curricular entities to gain knowledge (Dewey, 1938). Students must take action should they wish to become genuine co-creators of their education, and ownership must be genuinely felt and acted upon (Haneberg et al., 2018). In such an activity-driven education, students themselves activate experts (alumni, mentors, and advisors) as ‘tools’ for their personal development. With reference to pedagogy and VCP, Lackeus and Middleton (2015) describe the relationship between the two as one that abandons the mere learning *about* venture creation and moves onto the aspect of learning *for* venture creation. From this, a third implication may be drawn concerning the social context’s significance for the student’s (institutional) learning and knowledge purposes. In a processual epistemic view, *knowing* is a social phenomenon at its core that comes into existence and also spreads and thrives in exchanges between vested parties. In this sense, it may be apt to talk about the milieu of student-driven education in terms of ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1998) and ‘professional learning communities’ (Fullan, 2005). As a student invests in a learning community, he/she receives something from it, and as such, learning (and knowing) emerges at what can be metaphorically described as an ‘edge of chaos’ phenomenon (Stacey, 2002).

Entrepreneurial passion

The core elements of passion are *specific activity, love or liking, meaning and value, motivation, persistence, identity and duality* (Curran et al., 2015). Vallerand (2015) suggests an individual’s passion can be captured through one’s self-reported passion for and importance of an activity; a passion-driven activity is always internalised as part of an individual’s identity (Fisher et al., 2018). Cardon et al. (2009) refer to the role identities of the ‘inventor’, ‘founder’ and ‘developer’ because an entrepreneur is usually more passionate about one of these roles than the other roles; as such, one’s level of passion and mobilisation will vary over time as the venture develops. This research focus was extended through an inductive study conducted by Cardon et al. (2017a) that identified six major sources of entrepreneurial passion: a passion for growth, passion for people, passion for the product or service, passion for inventing, passion for competition and passion for a social cause. The distinction between harmonious and obsessive passion is important in order to understand the duality of entrepreneurial passion (Vallerand, 2015). Harmonious passion drives one’s decision to engage in an activity, while obsessive passion compels one to continue that engagement (Fisher et al., 2018). While entrepreneurs who are driven by harmonious passion tend to develop and maintain favourable relationships with others, obsessive passion tends to pose negative consequences for those relationships (Vallerand, 2012). Obsessive passion may lead to exhaustion, which impairs creativity and perseverance (Murnieks et al., 2020). However, harmonious passion alone will not sufficiently sustain the entrepreneur’s commitment to the venture in difficult times; for this reason, entrepreneurs tend to exhibit relatively high levels of obsessive passion, although the counterpart remains marginally dominant. Fisher et al. (2018, p. 32) argue that obsessive passion ‘...is a necessary but not sufficient, and perhaps problematic, type of passion in entrepreneurship. The deleterious effects of obsessive passion may be normalized or mitigated by the presence of both harmonious passion and resilience’. Stroe et al. (2018) argue that one’s first experiences as an entrepreneur determine whether one’s entrepreneurial passion is predominantly harmonious or obsessive. If a nascent entrepreneur experiences time pressures and challenging goals, he/she tends to invest significant time and effort into the venture that consequently nurtures the development of his/her obsessive passion.

While most of the entrepreneurial passion literature focuses on the individual level, Cardon et al. (2017b, p. 286) address team entrepreneurial passion as ‘the level of shared feelings for a collective team identity that is high in identity centrality for the new venture team’. Affective events that strengthen individual passion also reinforce team entrepreneurial passion, which equally influences individual passion through affective contagion; this concept also extends to larger groups. Bhansing et

al. (2017, p. 9) conceptualise localised passion as ‘an accumulation of the passion of individuals centralized in one location that can be noticed as “something in the air”’, thus entailing two dimensions: a ‘passion atmosphere’ or the particular ‘feel’ of a place, and ‘passion in others’ or an appreciation of other nearby entrepreneurs’ passion. The idea of localised passion is inspired by economic geography studies and may be an important factor for VCPs, which often include an incubator. Bhansing et al. (2017) demonstrate that localised passion positively affects inspiration and is mediated by the passion for work.

Cardon et al. (2009) distinguish passion from episodic affect, which is often a short-term, involuntary response to an external event. Entrepreneurship promotion activities are sometimes understood as orchestration of affect with the purpose of directing the behaviors and energies of university members towards entrepreneurship and venture creation (Katila, Kuismin, Laine and Valtonen, 2021). Although emotions are not consistent, feelings and thoughts are reciprocal; therefore, Grichnik et al. (2010) argue that emotions influence opportunity evaluation and opportunity exploitation. Similar findings were reached by Welpel et al. (2012), who argue that future studies must differentiate emotions based on their valence, motivational tone and underlying appraisals. Emotions were previously studied in entrepreneurship education because ‘an educational intervention’s capacity to make the students “fall in love” with an entrepreneurial career is vital if the goal is to increase entrepreneurial behaviour’ (Lackeus, 2014, pp. 376–377). Based on a study of emotional events among students, Lackeus (2014) argues that, if students feel valuable to the outside world, they develop an aptitude that eventually leads firstly to entrepreneurial passion and secondly to the development of their entrepreneurial identities. Thus, passion and emotion differ from stable, cognitive biases (e.g., optimism and risk propensity) that have already been proven to influence entrepreneurial behaviour.

Entrepreneurial passion in venture creation programmes

This chapter investigates how students may harness entrepreneurial passion in a VCP. Previous literature on VCPs reveals that action-based learning is an important component of these programmes (Lackeus and Middleton, 2015); when action occurs within a VCP’s frames, it is accompanied by the provision of tools, fellow students (Fullan, 2005), and access to actors that may provide additional resources and advice. Emotional events in VCPs may lead one to develop an entrepreneurial passion (Lackeus, 2014) and may influence action, such as opportunity evaluation (Welpel et al., 2012). Simultaneously, entrepreneurial passion influences action by increasing an entrepreneur’s perseverance when striving towards long-term goals (Mueller et al., 2017). Curran et al. (2015) argue that specific activities are core elements of entrepreneurial passion. Furthermore, although entrepreneurial passion is internalised in one’s identity, it is nevertheless connected to emotion because harmonious passion refers to positive feelings (Vallerand, 2015). Based on previous entrepreneurial passion studies, and our knowledge of the VCP-context, we propose the theoretical framework illustrated in Figure 1. In this framework, the starting point is action, which relates to emotion and obsessive and harmonious passion. The VCP location at an entrepreneurial university represents the localised passion, and the empirical study focuses on how the VCP enables students to harness entrepreneurial passion.

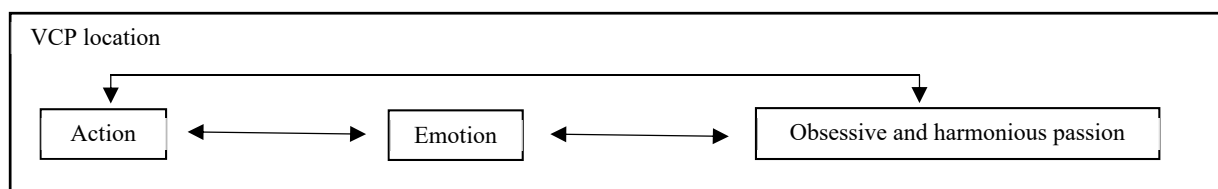


Figure 1. Theoretical framework: How action, emotion, and passion exist and influence one another inside the VCP location.

METHODOLOGY

This study explores how students learn to harness passion through the learning community in a Norwegian VCP. The chapter leans on semi-structured interviews with individual alumni who reflect upon the role passion has played in their lives during their days as VCP students and throughout their professional careers. This approach aims to facilitate an in-depth, nuanced understanding of a complex issue in its natural context (Crowe et al., 2011) as well as understand and explain the phenomenon of harnessing passion in a VCP (Koivu and Hinze, 2017).

Context

The context for this study is a two-year VCP, established in 2003. This VCP is chosen as it represents a cornerstone in the entrepreneurial ecosystem at an entrepreneurial university. During the first semester, students find, create and test potential business ideas through feasibility studies. Five months later, they form interdisciplinary teams, choose one business idea they have tested and begin building their ventures—a project that continues throughout their next three semesters. Academic lectures, practices, and assignments rely on new venture development, and the VCP offers resources and an infrastructure that may help students establish and grow their ventures, including a shared office community. This support facilitates comprehensive interactions between entrepreneurs across graduate classes as well as between those entrepreneurs and alumni, industry representatives and research partners.

Data sampling and data collection

Using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2005), a total of 31 participants were targeted from each graduating class between 2005 and 2017. Including participants from all graduating classes was important for understanding passion's role in the VCP regardless of the graduating class or decade. Sampling preserved the ratio of female and male members in the total VCP alumni group (20/80) and targeted alumni working both in start-ups and in established organisations to illustrate their experienced nuances as well as those occurring in their daily lives. The list of participants can be found in Appendix 1. The interviews were conducted in line with Tjora (2017). An interview guide was used to structure the interviews, and this included questions on the chosen VCP, the alumni's educational experiences and career changes from their graduation until the present day. The interview guide included questions such as: 'What kind of knowledge and skills did you learn from your entrepreneurship education? What did you like and dislike most about your work? How did you stay motivated through tough times? How much have you worked over the years in various work? How have you handled any larger challenges to find balance?' The average interview lasted for 35 minutes. A research assistant transcribed the interviews, resulting in a total of 254 pages of transcripts.

Data analysis

Data analysis was initiated by our curiosity regarding the term 'entrepreneurial energy' due to our observations of this term's use in the chosen VCP's environment. This was the starting point of an abductive process of developing a useful research question. Following Bryman's (2008) account of iterative, qualitative research design, the several iterations here led to a more specific research question and a narrower focus on the collected data. The development of the research question aligned with the view that qualitative questions 'evolve', and in line with Agee (2009), the first iterations were tentative and exploratory, thus serving as a tool for articulating the primary focus of the study. Ongoing inquiry through data collection, a literature review and analysis led to the development of a new research question (Agee, 2009). We deductively analysed the data with the obsessive, harmonious and localised passion concepts, followed by a thematic structure inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006). We re-read the transcripts and highlighted important paragraphs and phrases we interpreted as direct or indirect responses to the research question to identify cues of respondents' development of harnessed passion. We also looked for the presence of entrepreneurial identities due to their link to passion (Murnieks et al., 2014). Using NVivo 11 Pro, we labelled the highlights according to their relationships with the theoretical framework. After several iterations, we classified our first-level codes as (1) cues of harmonious passion, (2) cues of obsessive passion, and (3) cues of localised passion. By deep-diving

into each first-level code, we revealed various related cues that were listed as second-level codes. The first- and second-level codes are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. First- and second-level codes

First-level codes	Cues of harmonious passion	Cues of obsessive passion	Cues of localised passion
Second-level codes	Emotion	Balance	Environment
	Motivation	Drive	Network
	Curiosity	Friends and family	Team value
	Identity	Time pressure	Learning from others
	Impatience	Learning to try	Learning by doing
		Flexibility	Personal development
		Productivity	Becoming certain

FINDINGS

All interviewed alumni provided rich descriptions of their memories from being enrolled in the VCP, and a table of quotes illustrating the most important findings can be found in Appendix 2. This section presents data that describe the harmonious passion, obsessive passion and localised passion, where the alumni present the VCP and the entrepreneurial university as a safe environment for personal and professional development.

Harmonious passion

In the interviews, the alumni described their emotions related to their education and their careers. As an important educational part of the VCP, the students form teams and create new ventures. Alumnus 1 claimed the action-based activities in the VCP's suited him well: 'it was more motivating, and it did not simply alter my CV, but perhaps my entire mindset. I felt I developed professionally and personally, becoming a person thinking that everything is possible.' The analysis showed that the alumni experienced positive emotions from learning entrepreneurship and acting entrepreneurially, both in their time at the VCP, during their careers and their current jobs. Alumna 8 used religious terms to explain her love for entrepreneurship as a 'salvation': '[I am a] member of the congregation, to use these terms.' Among many, Alumna 10 stated she genuinely loved to work, and that she connected her job to positive feelings: 'Oh, I think it is so much fun!' Cues such as motivation, curiosity and impatience were evident in the alumni descriptions, and some described an alluring sense of craziness from acting entrepreneurially during their education and post-graduation. Alumnus 1 explained how his love for work made him invest considerable time and energy in his activities: "Sometimes the challenge is that it is really fun to work. [There are so many] interesting tasks; you want to make a cool presentation, you want to go to that meeting abroad, you want to mingle with the investors. So, there are often interesting things taking a lot of time, and hard to turn down. That is [my] biggest challenge." Some alumni describe their entrepreneurial efforts as year-long journeys that started during their education or post-graduation. As an example, Alumnus 27 developed his entrepreneurial passion over the years: 'I have wanted this for a long time...I have worked on this topic voluntarily with [my spouse] since I graduated from the [VCP]'. Emotions and motivations were also identified when alumni talked about their salaries and incentives to perform well in their current and former work. One's love of work is not necessarily connected to the job's perks, which Alumnus 11 highlighted through his being accustomed to benefits rewarded for corporate work (e.g., a free car). He exemplified the value of harmonious passion through his choice to return to an entrepreneurial career: 'I have never had as poor a salary as today. Still, I have never had so much fun and been so satisfied [as I am now]'. Harmonious passion was also expressed as the joy of receiving support from others. Alumnus 1 described it like this: 'You get 'ups' every day, and it is almost trendy to be an entrepreneur in Norway, so you kind of get recognition in your social life. [As an entrepreneur], you lack the [posh] sandwiches and Prosecco, but you get the high fives.'

Obsessive passion

The analysis showed that some students in the VCP worked 'around the clock'. As a striking example, Alumnus 11 told about his three-month exchange programme in Boston, where he spent all his days at work: 'So I wish to go back just to see Boston because I have heard that it is a nice city. (...) I saw

nothing of the city, just worked. And it was very motivating in a way—painful and motivating.” For some alumni, their long work hours became a burden in their personal life. Some learned to create a work-life balance during their education, while others experienced a burn-out, or continued to have a high workload until after graduation. As an example, Alumna 31 viewed her workloads at the VCP as unsustainable for long periods, and she changed her approach to the workload while being enrolled in the education programme. She learned from other alumni that a start-up is a marathon, not a sprint. While the alumna managed her workload before it caused a serious strain on her life, Alumnus 28 experienced burnout while being enrolled in the VCP. This health challenge caused huge changes in his everyday life: ‘personal relationships and partnership fell through because [I] worked myself to death and only focused on one thing.’ After such a life-changing event, the alumnus altered his all-consuming relationship with work. The two former examples altered their mindset about work and their actual workloads during their participation in the VCP. Others explained that they changed their workloads post-graduation, and took into account the viability of their venture before they adjusted their work efforts. Alumnus 13 explained: ‘In the beginning, I [worked] on average a bit more than a hundred hours a week—and that [was] parallel to education. So, that was madness...it was a huge strain on my future wife for a while, but then we managed to gradually recover as the venture [became] more stable and solid...Today, I am very committed to [the notion] that work is work, and when you are home, you are home.’ Thus, the alumnus continued to have a high workload throughout his studies and set some personal boundaries to develop a work-life balance when the venture was developing from a fragile start-up to a more solid firm. Several alumni explain that they started to prioritise their health and ‘put family first’ post-graduation. While the previous examples have portrayed personal challenges related to a heavy workload, it is also possible to view the partly self-imposed heavy workload as a learning experience. Alumnus 13 saw the workload as an important means to achieve what he deemed the most valuable learning outcomes of the VCP, namely learning to handle insecurity and learning to access information: ‘To have a huge - huge - workload like we had through our education, it makes you efficient, easily capable of finding and capturing the information you need.’ Alumna 20 also saw the value of learning to deal with a massive workload: ‘You have learned to work. You work hard, you work a lot, and you get the understanding of the workload behind every start-up...you feel the pain. That is an important element. And you do so in a controlled and safe environment.’ As seen in this quotation, Alumna 20 reflect upon her exploration of obsessive passion in a ‘safe environment’. In the following section, we will look further into how the location of the education has influenced the alumni.

Localised passion

The findings show that the context of being enrolled in a VCP in an entrepreneurial university is of great importance to the personal and professional development experienced by the alumni. Alumnus 27 stated: ‘The most important success factor is sort of the physical, human framework being made, in that school. Having two cohorts in the same room, helping each other, mentors working across, and so forth.’ Being a community of two cohorts has been mentioned by several alumni as an important aspect of learning entrepreneurial knowledge and skills and learning to deal with entrepreneurial passion. Alumna 23 gave credit to the elder cohort: ‘The class above us was always present, they never said no. Always present, backing us, answering our questions, sharing their experiences.’ The analysis also highlights safety as a particular feature of the VCP context. Alumna 20 explained it as a ‘supportive society’ where she felt safe. She remembered how a teacher took care of an issue with the inventor of her new venture idea, allowing her to focus on her tasks as a student entrepreneur. Thus, both fellow students and teachers were mentioned as important actors facilitating learning by doing, learning from others, and even learning from failure. Alumnus 1 described his learning experiences in the VCP as an emotional roller coaster ride that prepared him for real-life challenges following graduation: ‘it is the understanding that you will get a punch in the face, that you will experience deep valleys, that there is a thing called bloodshed, and the experience that entrepreneurship is no bed of roses. [...] but then you find some [positive aspects] and things to look forward to.’ His statement conveys that students do face challenges and experiences of failure as natural parts of learning in the VCP. Such learning experiences can lower barriers and prepare students for ‘the real world’ through practising challenging situations and expressing their feelings. The VCP is described as a community where the students dare to talk about their experiences of both success and failure. They are ‘willing to share experiences, willing to

share both successes and things going in a bad way. I think that is really good because it hinders you from being in a bubble where you think that if you fail, your life is over' (Alumnus 25). All in all, the findings depict an image of a community of engaged students who learn by doing and sharing their experiences to increase the overall learning outcome of everyone involved in the community. Supportive mentors and teachers also play an important role in facilitating this learning, as well as being located in one physical location at the campus, where the students can easily interact with each other, across teams and classes. Alumni often describe their learning experiences from the VCP in emotional terms. Furthermore, the alumni say they experience both personal and professional development through these learning processes. They describe the physical and social learning environment of the VCP as a space where they learned by doing while feeling safe when pursuing risky and challenging entrepreneurial actions.

DISCUSSION

Harmonious passion can manifest as a love for entrepreneurial activity, considerable energy investment in the activity, flexible execution of the activity, as well as self-description as an entrepreneur (Vallerand, 2015; Gielnik et al., 2017). The findings show that several alumni express a love for the entrepreneurial activities they have done and still do participate in. They highlight a sense of joy, motivation and satisfaction from their entrepreneurial experiences in the VCP and post-graduation. With regard to investment in entrepreneurial activities, several alumni have invested years of work to proceed in their entrepreneurial journeys, driven by their interests and joy. A flexible execution of their activities has been highlighted both in sections regarding harmonious and localised passion. Education in the VCP consists of both formal educational activities and informal learning between peers in the VCP location. The formal and informal educational activities were seen as a means of learning how to become an entrepreneur, developing both on a personal and professional level. This is recognisable from the work of Neck and Greene (2011), who describe the action-based entrepreneurial activity as the likelihood that students identify and capture the right opportunity. Furthermore, the alumni described that they, through the VCP, achieved learning outcomes that altered their mindset and emotions, for instance feeling that 'everything is possible'. Findings such as these provide empirical support for both Cardon et al.'s (2009) propositions regarding how role identity activities are linked to entrepreneurial passion as well as Fisher et al.'s (2018) suggestion that passion is internalised in one's entrepreneurial identity rather than a mere part of entrepreneurial activity. Our findings suggest that alumni continue to experience harmonious passion post-graduation, in both entrepreneurial and corporate careers.

Obsessive passion is a problematic concept. On the one hand, an entrepreneur requires a sufficient amount of obsessive passion to overcome obstacles during firm development (Fisher et al., 2018); while on the other, the entrepreneur must avoid exhaustion (Murnieks et al., 2020). Our findings show that the students in the VCP appeared to be both educated and burdened by obsessive passion. Working long hours was described as motivating and a means to develop efficient work routines and entrepreneurial skills. Thus, some of the alumni demonstrated that they have learned how to harness the experienced obsessive passion and thereby reached a more sustainable approach to such passion. The findings also showed that alumni altered their approach to workloads during the educational programme or after graduating, as they understood that such high workloads were unsustainable in a long career. They established principles to support their health and wellbeing, and put family first. Their statements align with Vallerand's (2015) view that passion may transform over time. However, several alumni also described heavy workloads as a contributing factor in developing a burn-out that impacted their personal and professional lives. It may be argued that obsessive passion remains a challenge for VCPs since students may become exhausted as they attempt to harness it.

Returning to Figure 1 in the theoretical framework, we argue that our findings confirm the suggested system's effectiveness in capturing how entrepreneurial passion is harnessed in a VCP. As illustrated in Figure 2, our results provide additional insight into how this harnessing occurs. The findings emphasize the importance of students experiencing safety in the VCP locations, pursuing their entrepreneurial actions, developing emotions felt towards their work, and harnessing obsessive and

harmonious passion. Localised passion is an important element of the milieu, as much of the learning happens between peers in an educational community located in a physical space at the entrepreneurial university. The physical location facilitates passion and safety by allowing students to engage with and learn from each other every day, and to observe and reflect upon each other's positive and negative entrepreneurial experiences. Through such day-to-day interaction, the students can develop close bonds resulting in a feeling of safety, a contagion of passion and a nurturing of 'soft skills' needed to develop a sustainable obsessive and harmonious passion. However, we argue that reaching sustainable obsessive and harmonious passion is particularly challenging because it is easy for one to become exhausted before the passion is harnessed. We also argue that emotional preparedness is an important emotional aspect because it lessens the obsession's dramatic impact. Our findings that add to the theoretical framework are illustrated in Figure 2.

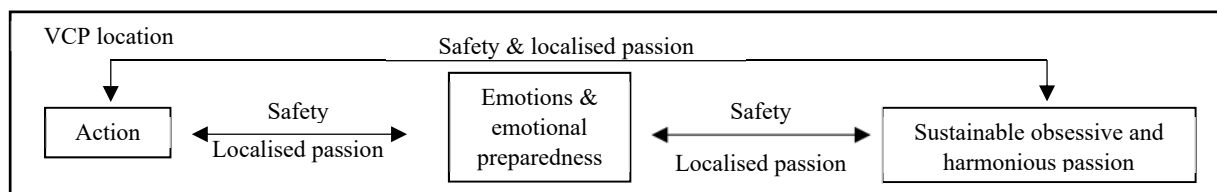


Figure 2. Theoretical framework and empirical findings

Context is an important condition for harnessing entrepreneurial passion in VCPs. As indicated by the theoretical framework, the context or location of the VCP may provide opportunities for students to experience the contagion (c.f. Cardon et al., 2017b) of entrepreneurial passion, the appreciation of other entrepreneurs' passion in that location (c.f. Bhansing et al., 2017), and the milieu of student-driven education (c.f. Lave and Wenger, 1998; Fullan, 2005). The context's importance was confirmed by the alumni, who presented it as a safe learning environment that allowed for trial and error, learning by doing and learning from others. The alumni had shared ups and downs with their peers and felt supported by mentors and teachers. The findings serve as valuable evidence that the 'soft skills' needed to handle failure, emotions and work/life balance (Fayolle, 2013) are a recurring topic of conversation in the VCP's hallways. Furthermore, it seems as though one's experience of safety is an important factor that mediates interrelationships within the system that harness entrepreneurial passion in VCPs. Safety promotes action by lowering the barriers to trying, and is seemingly connected to emotions because a safe environment facilitates students' emotional experiences and emotionally prepares them to face similar situations later on in life. Hence, it is unlikely that students will experience emotions that nurture an obsessive passion they cannot handle.

Limitations

This study can be characterised as a pragmatic choice, as the researchers had unusual access to and knowledge of this particular alumni group, including geographical proximity as well as shared personal and professional networks due to the interviewers' and authors' association with the VCP in question (faculty and alumni). This factor may have affected the response rate and data collection process; interviewees may have provided more information than they otherwise might or, conversely, limited their openness to avoid sharing sensitive information with a member of their network. Further, one can assume that it is easier to respond if you have experienced harmonious passion than the flipside of passion. Nevertheless, the connection between the researchers and the VCP implies years of advanced knowledge regarding the institution in question. Most questions in the interview guide were related to events that occurred when the alumni were students, thus rendering this study retrospective. As Flick (2015, p. 99) observed, considering 'the influence of present views on the perception and evaluation of earlier experiences' poses an issue; that is, some respondents had been alumni for thirteen years and reflected upon this fact during their interviews. No questions directly inquired about passion, yet respondents talked about these concepts without solicitation. Thereby, passion appears to be a 'key takeaway' that has remained important to these alumni many years after graduation.

CONCLUSION

By interviewing alumni about their experiences of entrepreneurship education and post-graduation careers, this study explored how students can harness entrepreneurial passion in a venture creation programme. The findings emphasise the importance of learning ‘soft skills’ in entrepreneurship education, as well as experiencing the ‘necessary evil’ of failure, and learning from failure in a safe environment. Most importantly, the chapter illustrates the connection between safety, action, emotion and passion in a VCP. Lastly, this study highlights that harnessing obsessive passion into a sustainable form is an important although difficult task. Passion changes over time and VCP students harness this passion to achieve ‘sustainable obsessive and harmonious passion.’

This study contributes to the literature on the development of entrepreneurial universities (Forliano et al., 2021; Klofsten et al., 2019) by focusing on the students and their entrepreneurial passion. Moreover, the chapter presents a highly intensive entrepreneurship education where the physical location at the entrepreneurial university, as well as the presence of multiple actors such as students, faculty and mentors, facilitate entrepreneurial learning and passion through co-working (Bhansing et al., 2017). The study contributes to the growing literature stream in which the psychological concept of ‘passion’ is utilised to explain the mobilisation of energy associated with new ventures (Korber and McNaughton, 2017; Cardon et al., 2009). This study additionally uncovers narratives concerning factors that stimulate entrepreneurial passion (Murnieks et al., 2014, p. 1584), such as entrepreneurial training (Gielnik et al., 2017). We also find that VCP faculty have a role in fostering students’ ‘feeling of valuable action’ (e.g., Lackeus, 2014) since nascent entrepreneurs’ first experience of passion (Stroe et al., 2018) influences their entrepreneurial passion throughout their careers.

Implications for the entrepreneurial university

The findings from this chapter imply that managers of entrepreneurial universities should be a bit cautious when orchestrating affects in order to direct the behaviors and energies of university members towards entrepreneurship and venture creation (c.f. Katila, Kuismin, Laine and Valtonen, 2021). Student entrepreneurs still need to harness their entrepreneurial passion. For university managers seeking to increase student engagement (c.f. Lahikainen, Peltonen, Hietanen and Oikkonen, 2021) this chapter suggests that the entrepreneurial university should facilitate nascent entrepreneurs’ perception of safety, for instance by ensuring the presence of experienced participants (mentors and faculty) and facilitate a safe community where nascent entrepreneurs can learn from one another. In order for students to become resources for new venture development in the entrepreneurial university (c.f. Klofsten et al., 2019), university managers need to create meeting- and co-working spaces accompanied with long term planning of monitored relevant activities so that an entrepreneurial ecosystem can develop. This also includes systems for interaction between current students, faculty and alumni.

Avenues for future research

This chapter demonstrates that passion is an important asset for nascent entrepreneurs in the longer term; as such, the scarce amount of research on this topic is surprising. Finding a suitable balance between harmonious and obsessive passion through entrepreneurship education requires further research. There is also a need to develop the concept of ‘sustainable harmonious and obsessive passion’, and the underlying components of ‘safety’. Future research could explore the students’ perceived safety and localised passion in other types of entrepreneurship education activities at entrepreneurial universities, such as in courses or extracurricular activities where students meet less often than in a VCP. Furthermore, future research should aim to pursue multiple VCP examples, compare VCPs from multiple universities and quantitatively test the system suggested in Figure 2.

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APPENDIX 1

Sample

Code name	Male/Female	VCP period*	Career **
Alumni 1	M	2005-2009	Start-up
Alumni 2	F	2010-2014	Corporate
Alumni 3	M	2010-2014	Mix
Alumni 4	M	2010-2014	Mix
Alumni 5	M	2010-2014	Start-up
Alumni 6	M	2010-2014	Corporate
Alumni 7	M	2010-2014	Mix
Alumni 8	F	2010-2014	Start-up
Alumni 9	M	2010-2014	Start-up
Alumni 10	F	2010-2014	Start-up
Alumni 11	M	2005-2009	Mix
Alumni 12	M	2010-2014	Mix
Alumni 13	M	2010-2014	Start-up
Alumni 14	M	2010-2014	Mix
Alumni 15	M	2010-2014	Mix
Alumni 16	M	2005-2009	Corporate
Alumni 17	M	2010-2014	Mix
Alumni 18	M	2010-2014	Mix
Alumni 19	M	2010-2014	Corporate
Alumni 20	F	2005-2009	Mix
Alumni 21	M	2010-2014	Start-up
Alumni 22	M	2010-2014	Corporate
Alumni 23	F	2005-2009	Corporate
Alumni 24	M	2005-2009	Corporate
Alumni 25	M	2015-2017	Mix
Alumni 26	M	2010-2014	Start-up
Alumni 27	M	2010-2014	Mix
Alumni 28	M	2015-2017	Corporate
Alumni 29	M	2015-2017	Corporate
Alumni 30	F	2015-2017	Mix
Alumni 31	F	2015-2017	Corporate

* VCP Period refers to a time period in which the respondent graduated from the VCP. Due to anonymity, we have chosen not to list the actual years of graduation, and rather combine the years of graduation in three periods. The first period is from 2005-2009, the second from 2010-2014 and the final from 2015-2017. The groups are illustrated in different colours for clarity.

** Career refers to the career of the alumni after graduation from the VCP, as described by the alumni themselves. The careers are divided between working in a start-up, established corporation or a mix between startup and corporate work. The groups are illustrated in different colours for clarity.

APPENDIX 2

Data material

Alumni #	Quote	Category
Alumni 1	"Sometimes the challenge is that it is really fun to work – interesting tasks – you want to make a cool presentation, you want to go to that meeting abroad, you want to mingle with the investors. So there are often interesting things taking a lot of time, and hard to turn down. That is [my] biggest challenge."	Cues of harmonious passion
Alumni 10	"I have loved to work, and I love working with a strategy for instance. I love to work."	
Alumni 10	"Oh, I think it is so much fun!"	
Alumni 27	"I have wanted this for a long time. (...) I have worked on this topic voluntarily with [my spouse] since I graduated from the [VCP]."	
Alumni 11	I have a poor salary now, I have never had as poor a salary as today. Still, I have never had so much fun and been so satisfied [as I am now]."	
Alumni 27	"It is the craziness I like the most. I mean, the feeling that it is 'fucking idiot stupid crazy' to do this"	
Alumni 27	"I like that I don't [have a corporate job]. It is probably an important cornerstone, actually. And that makes it fun. I mean, I like that it is fun. I like that it is a bit crazy. And I like that it is mine"	
Alumni 1	"You get 'ups' every day, and it is almost trendy to be an entrepreneur in Norway, so you kind of get recognition in your social life. [As an entrepreneur] you lack the [posh] sandwiches and Prosecco, but you get the high fives."	
Alumni 20	"When you say that you come from the [VCP] you get street cred right away. So that is pretty good."	
Alumni 8	"I could have applied for a job in a consultancy firm, but [I] simply [experienced a] complete entrepreneurship salvation, [I am a] member of the congregation, to use these terms."	
Alumni 5	"a very exciting idea, absolutely something that someone will make a lot of money on one day, absolutely."	
Alumni 1	"We thought that we were 'the king of the world' (...) but it did not turn out that way. So it was a reality check, but I thought it was exciting."	The cues of obsessive passion and how to deal with it
Alumni 1	"We did not manage to solve the entrepreneurial problem. However, it did not destroy our motivation to start over."	
Alumni 1	"We have been very focused on work-life balance, and we kept it as reasonable as possible. (...) we do not believe in working 100-hour weeks because we believe we would burn out and lose people as we go."	
Alumni 4	"I am not a purely focused career guy. It is very important for me, or it is a highly prioritized goal for my spare time to have time to take care of my friends, to hang out with them, to have time with my girlfriend (...) I am very clear about this for myself, that I must have time for this, meanwhile, of course, prioritising my work highly as well."	
Alumni 5	"I was very close to facing the wall – I could feel it at the tip of my nose. But how I stayed motivated was simply to spend the little time left on the correct things. Getting a small space to breathe, exercising a tiny bit, taking care of my self. Knowing that this would get better (...) It would not last forever."	
Alumni 6	"There is one important principle I have had all [my career]. Once I start noticing stiffness in the neck, head and stuff like that, I know I have exercised too little. I have to tell my self to get out for a run, turn up the level of exercise attain to move my body. And I have realised to a greater and greater extent, and it has become a rule, that if I notice anything draining my energy, there is something	
Alumni 23	It is never so, neither in life nor in work, that all is fun. But you have to get through it. You have to look for the positive (...) see that there is a reason for actually doing this. You just have to deal with it."	
Alumni 11	"I find it very easy to motivate myself."	
Alumni 13	"In the beginning, I [worked] on average a bit more than a hundred hours a week—and that [was] parallel to education. So that was madness. (...) it was a huge strain on my future wife for a while, but then we managed to gradually recover as the venture [became] more stable and solid. (...) Today, I am very committed to [the notion] that work is work, and when you are home, you are home."	
Alumni 15	"The failure was inevitable. (...) We were lethargic and tired, it did not go well. So I do not think it is a given that you stay motivated."	

Alumni 16	<p>“At [the VCP] you learn to [fail] because everyone does.”</p> <p>“What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.”</p>	
Alumni 19	<p>“When being enrolled at the [VCP], you get butchered. In one way or another, you have to deal with it, remake it into something constructive.”</p>	
Alumni 28	<p>“personal relationships and partnership fell through because [I] worked myself to death and only focused on one thing.”</p> <p>“Work at work, and be home when you are home”</p>	
Alumni 31	<p>“skiing, hanging out with friends, and being outdoors in fresh air”.</p>	
Alumni 31	<p>“If you want a startup, you will have to manage to stick to it for many years. You cannot work around the clock for one year, because it will take much more time, no matter how you do it. So you will need the energy to keep going for a long time.”</p> <p>“I think it will be very nice, simply being able to gain good health.”</p>	
Alumni 13	<p>“The most important part you get through such an education is to be comfortable with insecurity and to acquire the information you need. To have a huge, a huge workload like we had through our education, makes you efficient, easily capable of finding and capturing the information you need.”</p>	
Alumni 11	<p>“I lived for three months in Boston, and I really have not been to Boston. I worked around the clock, I think, that summer. So I wish to go back just to see Boston because I have heard that it is a nice city. (...) I saw nothing of the city, just worked. And it was very motivating in a way—painful and motivating.”</p>	
Alumni 11	<p>“No matter how good you are, it is only the effort that counts. Before [entering the VCP] I was quite good at school, actually. I surfed through my education until then. [The VCP] became a reality check, and from that moment on, only the person who works the most wins.”</p>	
Alumni 13	<p>“Now I am very focused on work being work, and home being home. (...) In the early phase, this was not the case. I worked around the clock. Today I try to disconnect more from mail and phone when being with my family. I think this is important”</p>	
Alumni 21	<p>“Startup first, and whatever needs to be done, it has to be done before everything else. However, in the past year, year and a half, I have said that: you know what? You have to be able to keep two goals in your head simultaneously. And I have had some goals to achieve a certain physical condition. So I have put startup first, then exercise, and then everything else. But startup first. And then you have to stick to it in the long run.”</p>	
Alumni 24	<p>“Principles are made to be broken. That is the most important principle. No, I mean, I put the children and family first, really. Breakfast at home with the children every morning, and mostly dinner at home with the children each afternoon. And then I try to squeeze in as much as possible in between everything else.”</p>	
Alumni 26	<p>“I really want to establish a morning routine where I jump out of bed six-thirty, get some breakfast, get to work and get going with the day. Put some exercise into [the schedule], and so forth. Trying to take some time off during the weekends. But it is slipping away (...) I do not have enough rules.”</p>	
Alumni 27	<p>“Nowadays, family trumps everything. Family time is family time. It is a principle”</p>	
Alumni 1	<p>“It is the understanding that you will get a punch in the face, that you will experience deep valleys, that there is a thing called bloodshed, and the experience that entrepreneurship is no bed of roses[.] I think that helps a lot, especially when it comes a punch in the face (...), but then you find some [positive aspects] and things to look forward to.”</p>	The safe environment of a VCP
Alumni 18	<p>“It was practical, trial and error, trying and failing. It has provided an extreme value, it has really changed my life. It has defined me as a person, how I perceive career life, and also my personal life. It has broken barriers.”</p>	
Alumni 14	<p>“The important part was just as much outside of the study as the actual study itself. And the interaction between the people in this study. So with regards to skills [I learned at the VCP], the mindset was perhaps the most important part. And by that, I mean to fail as much as possible, or try as much as possible”</p>	
Alumni 15	<p>“You are not punished hard if [your performance in the VCP] is poor, but you get a clear message that this is not good. I believe everyone attending the [VCP] or most of us, had the mindset to understand that we can get the feedback saying this is a piece of shit. So you have to 1) work hard, but 2) it is not dangerous to get the notion that things could be done better.”</p>	
Alumni 18	<p>“[I learned] through theory, through subjects, through reading. That is important. And then through trial and error, I mean through trying and failing. And I would say that when you attend the [VCP] you underestimate the theory, and think a lot about the trial and error, and that is good because I think that you need to kind of [practice this again and</p>	

	again]. (...) It has provided an extreme value, it has really changed my life. It has defined me as a person, how I perceive career life, and also my personal life. It has broken barriers.”	
Alumni 19	“Okay, I mean at last that people learn by doing things, learning by doing, getting thrown into something, that is an important success factor. (...) People get constructive criticism all the time at the [VCP] because it builds confidence, I think, and it prepares people for days where you will face these things all the time.”	
Alumni 20	“You have learned to work. You work hard, you work a lot. And you get the understanding of the workload behind every startup. (...) you feel the pain. That is an important element. And you do so in a controlled and safe environment.”	
Alumni 20	“supportive society” “[The faculty] are good. I think they have been great at taking care of the students.”	
Alumni 20	“a great community, working so closely together. We got to know each other very well. And we pushed each other to work harder.”	
Alumni 26	“It was very nice (...) to have the structure.”	
Alumni 23	“The class above us was always present, they never said no. Always present, backing us, answering our questions, sharing their experiences.”	
Alumni 1	“it was more motivating, and it did not simply alter my CV, but perhaps my entire mindset. I felt I developed professionally and personally, becoming a person thinking that everything is possible”.	
Alumni 27	“The most important success factor is sort of the physical, but kind of the human framework being made, in that school. With two classes in the same room, we helped each other, mentors working across, and so forth.”	
Alumni 3	‘I don’t think I make much use of formal knowledge (...) but I use, in a way, what to call it, intrinsic ... meaning things that were not in the lectures, but which you learned anyway’.	
Alumni 25	“Building each other to become great. Being willing to share experiences, being willing to share both successes and things going in a bad way. I think that is really good. Because it hinders you from being in a bubble where you think that if you fail, your life is over”.	
Alumni 23	“Managing to keep the positivity from the [VCP] means a lot, both personally and for the wholeness of the [VCP].”	Mirroring the process throughout careers
Alumni 8	“you just have to do stuff for a while and then you can achieve passion.”	
Alumni 2	“motivated me to work as I work now, with the obstacles that are [present], looking for other possibilities”.	
Alumni 10	‘(...) After I finished my study at [VCP name] I worked in nascent firms as part of a startup team, or I worked in organizations or established companies where I was [entrepreneurial], getting projects started. And I think it is important to mention because it describes our mentality, that [VCP] alumni typically become drivers of new, innovative models or new ways of thinking in terms of the existing as well as the new’.	

