MOTIVATIONS FOR VENTURING INTO ICT-BASED BUSINESSES AMONGST MALAYSIAN BUMIPUTERA (INDIGENOUS) ENTREPRENEURS

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ABSTRACT: The investigation of main reasons why individuals chose to be an entrepreneur has been recognized as one of the most important aspects in the creation of a business venture and consequently has become a central question of entrepreneurship research. The intent of this qualitative study is to extend our understanding on reasons why Malaysian Bumiputera (Indigenous) entrepreneurs chose to venture into ICT-based businesses. Based on an inductive qualitative approach, fifteen Malaysian Bumiputera ICT-based entrepreneurs had been interviewed. Interviews uncovered five reasons that drove them to venture into the ICT industry: having related ICT knowledge, perceived available opportunities in the ICT industry, passionate in the ICT industry, having ICT-related work experiences and the desire for creating new offerings (innovation).

Keywords: Bumiputera (Indigenous) entrepreneurship; business creation; self-employment; and Information technology.

INTRODUCTION

Why individuals choose to become entrepreneurs has been recognized as one of the most important aspects in the creation of a business venture (Chlostia et al. 2010; Shane, Locke & Collins 2003). Not surprisingly, a number of studies have been conducted to investigate entrepreneurial motivations, specifically regarding its role in a firm’s success and business growth (Amit et al. 2001; Benzing, Chu & Kara 2009; Buttner & Moore 1997) and its impact on individual career choices (Carter et al. 2003; Douglas & Shepherd 2002). Although such research provides a basis for understanding entrepreneurial motivations, focus has not specifically been directed towards the emerging field of Indigenous entrepreneurship (Dana 2007), particularly in the technology-based industry. This has created a gap in the general entrepreneurship studies, and an interesting research theme for further exploration in the Indigenous entrepreneurship field.

This study is intended to fill this gap by examining Indigenous entrepreneurs’ involvement in the Information Communication Technology (ICT) industry, specifically in developing countries where this sector is normally dominated by non-Indigenous entrepreneurs and foreign Multinational Corporations (MNCs). This study seeks to uncover the main motivations behind the choice of Malaysian Bumiputera (Indigenous) entrepreneurs to venture into ICT-based businesses. From the perspective of the Malaysian entrepreneurship environment, the number of Bumiputera involved in business in general, is not encouraging, despite many efforts taken by the Malaysian government to
The involvement of the Bumiputera community in the ICT industry shows a similar trend; specifically, only 315 out of 2520 Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) status companies\(^1\) were owned by Bumiputera as of 31\(^{st}\) December 2009 (MDeC 2010b).

The objective of this paper is to answer the following research question: What are the main reasons why Malaysian Bumiputera entrepreneurs venture into ICT-based businesses? We sought to explore and better understand why some Bumiputera entrepreneurs are willing to take risks and venture into ICT-based businesses. Additionally, we wanted to identify whether these entrepreneurs were motivated by opportunities available in the ICT industry or were being pushed to venture into this business due to an unfavourable job market. To address the research question, we first provide an overview of entrepreneurial motivations within the Malaysian ICT Industry. This paper then outlines the methodology adopted for the study and discusses the results. The final section will provide a conclusion and recommendations for future research.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Entrepreneurial Motivations**

Fundamentally, people differ in terms of their willingness and capacity to venture into business, due to the fact that the decision to venture into business is normally influenced by human motivations (van Gelderen, Thurik & Bosma 2005), present surroundings and deep thought processes (Krueger, Reilly & Carsrud 2000). The creation of a new venture is an intentional process that requires efforts and time from entrepreneurs, especially in conducting and sustaining business (Farmer, Yao & Kung-Mcintyre 2011). These motivations determine why some individuals decide to venture into business and others do not (Shane, Locke & Collins 2003).

Looking more closely into different individual motives for venturing into a business, one of the common distinctions is between ‘pull’ and ‘push’ motivations (Shinnar & Young 2008; van Gelderen, Thurik & Bosma 2005). Entrepreneurs who are driven by pull motives, such as success achievement and economic gain, adopt opportunistic strategies and are thus regarded as opportunistic entrepreneurs.

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\(^1\) The Malaysia MSC status is awarded to both local and foreign companies that develops or uses multimedia technologies to produce or enhance products and services, and possess a strong value contribution towards the development of the MSC Malaysia.
(Carsrud & Brännback 2011). The opportunistic strategies employed by these entrepreneurs are characterised by a detailed scanning of environmental opportunities, specifically in order to recognise and exploit those opportunities (Hiemstra, Kooy & Frese 2006). In Schumpeter’s (1936) seminal work, he proposes that the main reasons why an individual ventures into business is in order to achieve economic gains, particularly to maximise one’s wealth and obtain job security. Nevertheless, recent trends have shown that the motives of venturing into business are not only due to economic reasons; some entrepreneurs are driven by survival-oriented motivations such as avoiding poverty and starvation (Carsrud & Brännback 2011) as a result of limited job or business opportunities (Hessels, van Gelderen & Thurik 2008; Morris et al. 2006). These entrepreneurs are regarded as necessity entrepreneurs (Reynolds et al. 2005) as the decision to venture into business is seen as a way to escape undesirable or depressing situations (Dubini 1989; Hessels, van Gelderen & Thurik 2008) rather than to exploit opportunities available in the market. From the perspective of social entrepreneurship, welfare and social gains can also be considered as main reasons why an individual ventures into business. This is because starting a business is a way of contributing to the welfare of relatives and community members (Dubini 1989).

**Malaysian Bumiputera (Indigenous) Entrepreneurship**

From a global perspective, Indigenous peoples are regarded as amongst the most disadvantaged segments of a population in their national societies (Frederick & Foley 2006; World Bank 2005) and are commonly seen as a lesser economic status and lower education status regardless of where they are located (de Bruine & Mataira 2003; Peredo & Anderson 2006). Entrepreneurship is one of the effective socioeconomic tools that could eradicate disadvantaged situations amongst Indigenous peoples (Foley 2003). Historically, participation of the Bumiputera community in Malaysian economic activities is less encouraging. Popenoe’s (1970) seminal work on Malay entrepreneurship in West Malaysia contended that Malay-owned firms were less able to survive in business as compared to enterprises owned by Malaysian ethnic-Chinese. This scenario is still occurring even after 40 years after the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced by the Malaysian government, businesses were required to have at least 30 percent Bumiputera corporate equity, particularly in the ICT industry. The Tenth Malaysian Plan (10MP, 2011-2015) revealed that Bumiputera corporate equity ownership was
just 21.9 percent (Economic Planning Unit 2010), which is far below the targeted 30 percent as outlined in the NEP.

**Malaysian ICT Industry**

The Malaysian government’s aspiration to achieve its *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020) plan to become a high-income economy by 2020 has resulted in increased national development agendas, specifically through the development of Bumiputera entrepreneurial activities in the country. In realising this vision, the ICT industry has been identified as pertinent to the country’s economic growth (Beal & Abdullah 2002). The National IT Agenda (NITA) launched in December 1996 by the National IT Council (NITC), aims to provide the fundamental framework for the utilisation of ICT towards the development of the country into an information and knowledge-based society by 2020 (Beal & Abdullah 2002; Economic Planning Unit 2001). A key initiative undertaken by the Malaysian government through this agenda is the creation of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) that was designed to promote multimedia products and services by bringing together the legislative framework and a next-generation telecommunications infrastructure. In addition, the establishment of the Malaysia’s Multimedia Development Corporation (known as MDec), a government-owned corporation, aims to facilitate the development and promotion of MSC Malaysia (MDeC 2010b). As a result of these initiatives, the Malaysian government has introduced several regulations and policies in order to strengthen the country’s position in the ICT field. For instance, the 1998 Communications and Multimedia Act was introduced to provide a regulatory framework to cater for the convergence of the telecommunications, broadcasting and computing industries and a raft of policies were introduced through government agencies such as the National Broadband Policy (NBP) in 2004 (MCMC 2006) and the National Strategic ICT Roadmap for Malaysia in 2007 (MOSTI 2007).

Due to these efforts from the Malaysian government, the Malaysian ICT industry is showing high growth rates and is emerging as a strong contributor to the country’s employment and economic growth (Hamzah & Mat Isa 2010). This sector will continue to be a key focus for Malaysia and is expected to gain greater momentum driven by the convergence of industries due to digitalisation. As reported in the Tenth Malaysian Plan (2011-2015), the ICT sector accounted for 9.8% of GDP in 2009. This is expected to increase to 10.2% by 2015 (Economic Planning Unit 2010). The total
number of jobs created by the MSC Malaysia initiative showed an increase of 31% from 2005 to 2009, in which a total of 99,590 jobs were created in 2009 (MDeC 2010b). From a global perspective, Malaysia was recently placed 28th amongst 138 countries in the Networked Readiness Index and the only non-high-income country to feature in the top 30 (WEF 2010).

In order to increase Bumiputera participation in the ICT sector, the Malaysian government through MDeC has initiated the Bumiputera ICT Technopreneur Development Programme (BITE) in November 2005 (MDeC 2010a). This unit aims to ensure that Bumiputera entities account for 30 percent of MSC Malaysia Status companies by 2010. Since its establishment, BITE has undertaken several initiatives such as the Technopreneur Academy Programme (TAP) that aims to train both potential and existing Bumiputera ICT-based entrepreneurs. Additionally, the Bumiputera Creative Multimedia and Content Initiative (BCi2) was launched to boost Bumiputera participation in the creative and multimedia sectors (MDeC 2010a). Despite the initiatives undertaken by this unit, based on the 2009 MSC Malaysia Annual Industry Report, the number of MSC-status owned by Bumiputera entrepreneurs was only 12.5 percent (MDeC 2010b). Therefore, this study seeks to uncover the main reasons why some Bumiputera entrepreneurs are willing to take risks and venture into ICT-based businesses that are predominantly dominated by Malaysian non-Indigenous entrepreneurs.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study employed an inductive case study approach in order to understand what motivated Bumiputera entrepreneurs to venture into ICT-based businesses, specifically by shedding light on how and why the Bumiputera entrepreneurs took to risk to venture into ICT-based businesses (Yin 2009). Within the typology of the case study approach, we chose to employ a multi-case study approach. Thus, fifteen technology-based firms owned by Indigenous entrepreneurs were interviewed for this qualitative study. The initial data for this study was obtained from the online business directories from both the SME Corporation Malaysia and the MDeC. 125 invitation emails were sent to entrepreneurs who were owners / founders of ICT-based businesses. Of these, 42 emails bounced back and only eight entrepreneurs responded with five agreeing to participate in this study. In order to increase the number of participants, we decided to employ a snowball sampling technique where individual informants suggested other entrepreneurs as potential participants (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran
2001). This technique helped to identify another eight participants through commendations from other entrepreneur participants and key informants (such as government officers and academics). Another two respondents were identified by the researchers from attending a Technopreneur Academy Programme organised by the MDeC.

A semi-structured one hour interview with a founding entrepreneur from each firm was conducted. All interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and Malay. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed and coded manually. The researchers employed the eight-steps proposed by Tesch (1990) for coding the transcripts. Upon the completion of the coding process, categorical themes were generated. Content analysis was used to process and analyse the original text of company documents and the transcripts of interviews conducted. Table 1 provides information about the entrepreneurs, such as the participants’ academic background, prior work experience, and family business background. We replace the entrepreneurs’ name by ICT1 up to ICT15 for confidentiality.

Insert Table 1 here

ANALYSIS

In the following section all data provided by the respondents is analysed. The content analysis uncovered the participants’ background as well as the reasons why they decided to venture into ICT-based businesses.

Demographics

As shown in Table 1, most of the respondents were aged less than 30-years old (accounting for 11 participants). In terms of gender distribution, only two participants were female. The education background of the participants was fairly remarkable. All participants interviewed for this study have a bachelor degree in various fields of study. Amongst them, there were only five participants (ICT2, ICT4, ICT5, ICT7 and ICT12) that were master degree holders. In terms of the field of studies undertaken by the participants, more than half of the respondents were enrolled in the field of IT-related courses. The average duration of work experience possessed by the participants was five years. However, eight participants had less than three years of work experience.

Entrepreneurial Motivations
This section explores the main reasons that have driven interviewed Bumiputra entrepreneurs to venture into the ICT industry. As illustrated in Table 2, five main reasons for choosing the ICT industry as their field of business have been identified through the participants: having related ICT knowledge, perceived available opportunities in the ICT industry, being passionate for the ICT industry, having ICT-related work experience and the desire for creating new offerings (innovation).

Reason 1: Having related ICT knowledge

The most striking result emerging from the interviews was that over half of the participants felt that having related ICT knowledge led them to form an ICT-based company. The decision to embark into a particular field of business may be based on the available knowledge in the field, and this was evidenced by a quote from one participant: “We’re doing business based on the knowledge that we have. We never do business based on what we don’t know. You would only open a tailor shop if you know how to sew” (ICT2). In similar vein, one respondent stated that the decision to venture into the ICT industry was because his knowledge and expertise is more related to the ICT-related domain (ICT7). From this study, two participants suggested that the creation and generation of ICT knowledge might also be derived from their ICT-related education background (ICT12 and ICT13). This was demonstrated in the following quote: “When I did my Master degree, I majored in IT entrepreneurship. So, from that point in time, I gained an interest to venture into the ICT field. In fact, before completing my master degree, I had set up a company with my partners” (ICT5).

Additionally, one participant stated: “…by having relevant ICT technical know-how, I felt it was much easier in handling and controlling my business operations as I’m well-versed in understanding the nature of business in the ICT field” (ICT15). Participant ICT10 who graduated in the ICT field mentioned that the idea to venture into ICT-based business was generated when she attended an Al-Quran learning class and wondering if she could create a product which was similar to those products that taught users how to learn English by using ICT applications and structured modules.

Reason 2: Perceived available opportunities in the ICT industry

The perceived available opportunities in the ICT industry were the second factor that was cited by participants in this case study. Six entrepreneurs mentioned this was a factor that drove them to
venture into the ICT industry (ICT4, ICT6, ICT9, ICT10, ICT11, and ICT14). In regard to the perceived available opportunities in the Malaysian ICT industry, one participant mentioned: “…you wouldn’t think that somebody who did law wants to go into the ICT industry because we’re not technical. But, I thought ICT was a good industry to go into because the Malaysian government is currently focusing on developing the ICT industry” (ICT14).

Further, Participant ICT4 stated that the ICT industry covers a large area, and indeed, there many ICT-based businesses that could be chosen by entrepreneurs in the ICT industry such as animation, design, networking and software development. Nevertheless, the exploitation of the available business opportunities in the ICT industry should be thoroughly filtered by entrepreneurs in order to be able to fulfill the real specifications needed by the end user or customer (ICT11) and may also be used as a platform for entrepreneurs to demonstrate their abilities to develop their own products (ICT6).

**Reason 3: Passion for the ICT industry**

The third reason that motivates entrepreneurs to venture into the ICT industry was their passion or interest in the ICT field. This reason was identified by five respondents where their interest in the ICT field drove them to venture into an ICT-related business (ICT3, ICT4, ICT5, ICT8, and ICT12). One respondent mentioned: “The main reason I ventured into an ICT business was because of interest…I have passion in the IT field” (ICT5). Additionally, having an in-depth interest in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and having worked as a GIS consultant in a town planning company, Participant ICT12 set a vision to open her own consultancy company, specialising in GIS applications. She stated: “I have a big vision. I must have my own consultancy company and at least to become an IT consultant, specifically in GIS application” (ICT12). Indeed, this passion drove her to continue her master degree in ICT entrepreneurship and venture into an ICT-based business.

Similarly, the creative and innovative nature of ICT-based business sparked an interest for one participant to take the risk by venturing into this industry (ICT4). According to this participant, operating a niche business that focuses only in ICT design and multimedia, he believes that this area would offer him an interesting job and be able to generate lucrative outcomes as this area is also demanded by many customers.
**Reason 4: Having ICT-related work experience**

The fourth factor that motivates entrepreneurs to venture into an ICT-based business was having ICT-related work experience. Five respondents mentioned that having related work experience in the ICT industry eventually drove them to venture into an ICT-based business (ICT1, ICT3, ICT7, ICT13, and ICT15). As remarked by one entrepreneur: “I had ten years work experience in the IT field and that’s the main reason I opened my own ICT Company. Therefore, the experience in the IT industry is tremendous such as managing an IT department and in terms of technical know-how” (ICT15).

Similarly, Participant ICT7 suggested that by having experience in the ICT field, he would not face any severe problems in venturing into this industry. This can be explained by the sufficient technical knowledge that he gained in conjunction with knowing key people in the industry. As proposed by Participant ICT1, work experience in the ICT industry provided an opportunity to build up his own business network, although, few customers were actually derived from his previous company. Additionally, due to the broad areas of the ICT industry, having been involved in the ICT business provided entrepreneurs with areas that they should focus on in developing their business. For example, Participant ICT13 stated that via his experience, he found that his core experience and expertise is in the creative industry and in order to become more competitive or being different from other ICT entrepreneurs, he decided to focus on mobile content applications.

**Reason 5: Desire for creating new offerings (innovation)**

The desire to provide new offerings or produce innovative products in the ICT industry also became a reason participants want to venture into business. Only three participants remarked that this was the reason that drove them to venture into an ICT-based business (ICT6, ICT9 and ICT10). The development of new offerings that are based on the advancement of ICT applications was identified by two participants; whereby Participant ICT9 stated that he intended to share his Mandarin knowledge with other people, specifically Malay native speakers, which has led to the use of ICT applications and transforming this into an innovative product that is known as Kwik Mandarin e-learning. Similarly, Participant ICT10 stated: “We currently live in the ICT age, and thus, I want to innovate new way of learning Al-Quran. Thus, we are developing a product based on an idea to teach Al-Quran with Computer-Aided Learning amongst kids”.


From another dimension, the desire to provide new offerings through new product development might also be driven from an entrepreneurs’ intention to develop their business reputation, specifically in building a good image amongst their customers (ICT6).

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In the absence of a detailed understanding of Indigenous technology entrepreneurship, this study sought to extend our knowledge of the reasons why Malaysian Indigenous entrepreneurs ventured into technology-based sectors, specifically in the ICT industry. The study unveiled five main reasons why Bumiputera entrepreneurs chose to venture into the ICT industry. First, the possession of related ICT-based knowledge has driven them to venture into business. Looking more closely at the relevance of ICT knowledge in driving entrepreneurs to venture into business, few entrepreneurs mentioned that the adoption of this knowledge and other knowledge areas has assisted them to venture into an ICT business as well as to develop a range of ICT-based product prototypes and provided the entrepreneurs insight into how to operate their business. The possession of ICT knowledge by the participants could be translated from their educational background.

The second reason uncovered from the analysis was the perceived available opportunities in the ICT industry. This could be explained by the inspiration and efforts of the Malaysian government to put greater emphasis in developing the ICT industry and become one of the ICT hubs in South East Asia and this eventually sparked several entrepreneurs’ to take up available opportunities in the ICT industry. The available support and assistance from the Malaysian government should be exploited by entrepreneurs in either starting or developing their own business. The establishment of several government agencies such as the MDeC that is responsible to direct and oversee Malaysia’s National ICT, and importantly, to help small start-up and developing firms in the industry via grant allocation and advisory support to create a new product development (MDeC 2010a).

Passion for the ICT industry emerged as the third reason mentioned by the participants. The participants’ passion or interest in the ICT field might emerge from an individual’s experience in learning or applying any ICT-based application or software. This is because the industrial exposure gained via academic background and work experience has generated one’s interest to take risks and venture into ICT-based businesses. The fourth reason discovered in this study was related to
participants’ work experience in the ICT industry. This finding may indicate that having a substantial level of work experience such as implementing IT-based projects and managing an IT department would provide entrepreneurs confidence in their ability to venture into business. Ironically, lack of education in the ICT field might also be compensated by a substantial level of work experience in the ICT industry. This is because approximately half of the respondents who remarked on prior work experience did not come from ICT educational background and yet have been able to venture into an ICT-based business due to their experience in the ICT field.

The last reason emerged from the analysis was the desire to creating new offerings (innovation). Interestingly, all participants who mentioned this already had developed their own ICT-based products. Two participants (ICT9 and ICT10) cited the reasons why they wanted to venture into an ICT-based business; in fact, both participants blended their ICT-based knowledge and other knowledge and eventually came out with inventive e-learning ICT applications. Unsurprisingly, these two participants were amongst those participants who received pre-seed grants from the government.

Based on the findings uncovered in the study, we would like to shed light on three major discoveries. Firstly, as expected, all technology-based Bumiputera entrepreneurs were driven by pull-motivating factors rather than push-motivating factors (Carsrud and Brännback, 2011). The entrepreneurs were driven by their level of human capital such as work experiences and knowledge as well as perceived business opportunities in the ICT industry. These findings may also support previous studies (Corman, Perles & Yancini 1988; Oakey 2003) that main motivations of technology-based entrepreneurs to venture into business are more related with the ‘pull’ of an opportunity, such as the rapid development of technologies creating a number of opportunities for technological start-ups. The entrepreneur may not only able to develop technological research applications but also enhance their technical skills.

Secondly, in contrast to previous studies on Indigenous people, which generally having limited access to education (Peredo et al. 2004; Peredo & Anderson 2006), this study revealed that all Bumiputera technology-based entrepreneurs possess a fairly impressive educational background. A possible explanation for this might be that the Malaysian government has put emphasis on the investment of human capital though education amongst Bumiputera community. For instance, the University Teknologi MARA (UiTM) was established in 1956 in response to a need in Malaysia for trained
Bumiputera professionals, especially by providing subsidies to tuition fees and scholarship to Bumiputera students only. Finally, few female participants in this study may indicate that the participation of Malaysian Indigenous female entrepreneurs in technology-based industry is not encouraging. The findings corroborates the ideas of Hollowell, Mellors and Silver (2006), who suggest that the implementation of technology entrepreneurship is typically seen as a male identity as women are far less likely to set up a business in the technology-based sectors.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In summary, this study presented an attempt to explore the reasons why Malaysian Bumiputera entrepreneurs chose to venture into ICT-based businesses. Five main reasons emerged from interviews conducted where all reasons were driven by pull-motivating factors of the participants, especially in terms of perceived opportunities available in the Malaysian ICT industry and human capital aspects. This study has a number of implications for the Bumiputera society, policy makers and the academic community. Our results suggest that having knowledge in the ICT field through education and work experience is essential for the Bumiputera to venture into ICT-based business. Hence, the accumulation of this knowledge must be nurtured amongst Bumiputera society, especially via support from social members such as family members and friends as well as the Malaysian government through the enhancement of both informal and formal education, especially in entrepreneurship. The findings may also be employed for strengthening the creation of Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community (BCIC) in national policies of the Malaysian government. This study has also made a significant contribution to the body of Indigenous entrepreneurship knowledge by exploring the reasons why the Indigenous entrepreneurs choose to venture into technology-based businesses, which to our knowledge, has seldom been addressed in the literature.

Future research may consider focusing on analysing the comparison of entrepreneurial motivations between Malaysian Bumiputera and Non-Bumiputera ICT-based entrepreneurs. The sample size of the current respondents in the ICT industry could be also expanded to other technology-based industries such as biotechnology in order to provide a more holistic understanding of Bumiputera participation in technology-based industry.
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Table 1: Participants’ Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants/ICT</th>
<th>Age (Years) in 2010</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education Background</th>
<th>Previous Work Experience (Years)</th>
<th>History (Years in operations)</th>
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<tr>
<td>ICT1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bachelor of Electrical Engineering majoring in Power System (Hons)</td>
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**Abbreviations:** M: Male, F: Female
Table 2: Choosing ICT Industry as Field of Business

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Reasons of Choosing ICT Industry as field of business</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1) Having related ICT knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Perceived available opportunities in the ICT industry</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Passionate in the ICT industry</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Having ICT-related work experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>5) The desire for creating new offerings (innovation)</td>
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