

Entrepreneurial Life Design: Bridging Innovation and Personal Growth in Entrepreneurship Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents Entrepreneurial Life Design (ELD) as a career and life design innovation that bridges innovation with personal growth. Applied in Entrepreneurship Education (EE), it integrates entrepreneurship with traditional life design approaches to empower individuals for sustainable transformation. The paper proposes three arguments for ELD before presenting the comprehensive ELD framework. First, it positions entrepreneurship with its innovation process, entrepreneurial perspective and tools as the primary advancement in the career and life design literature. Second, it highlights the need to prepare entrepreneurs for modern challenges better, showing how ELD can fill this gap in EE. Third, it emphasises that developing an entrepreneurial mindset is essential for equipping individuals with the competencies to navigate modern life's challenges. Lastly, the paper highlights ELD's transformative potential for education, society, and the economy.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Life Design; Entrepreneurship Education; Life Design; entrepreneurial mindset; personal growth.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced world, entrepreneurs face more challenges than ever. As individuals who recognise, assess, and capitalise on opportunities to develop new products, services, or ventures while typically taking on the risks and rewards of the entrepreneurial journey, entrepreneurs have always faced high pressure as part of the job (Kuratko, 2005). Increasing rapid transformations demand constant adaptation: New regulations heighten the triple bottom-line demands, requiring a balance of economic, social, and environmental responsibilities. Studies show that the mental strain on entrepreneurs is significant (Schaltegger et al., 2016; Muñoz & Cohen, 2018) and thriving in this environment requires immense personal strength and resilience. Despite these challenges, contemporary Entrepreneurship Education (EE) largely focuses on business development rather than the entrepreneur's individual development. This educational gap leaves entrepreneurs needing to be equipped to handle the personal and professional pressures they encounter. Addressing this gap requires a shift in focus toward nurturing the individual(s) behind the business.

Despite advancements in Effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2009) and the individual-opportunity nexus theory (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), incorporating skills, strengths, and network notions still needs a more explicit focus on the entrepreneur. Some frameworks, such as the team canvas (Ivanov & Voloshchuk, 2015), address team dynamics and individual contributions within the team, yet they still need to place the entrepreneur at the centre. More recent frameworks, such as those based on ikigai (Tittel et al., 2023), the Japanese concept that deals with the meaning and purpose of life, aim to address the needs of entrepreneurs better but still need a fully integrated approach to personal development.

Entrepreneurial Life Design (ELD) uniquely combines personal growth with innovation, offering a holistic and comprehensive approach to navigating transformation challenges (Wolf & Landberg, 2023; Maisch & Wolf, 2022). Rooted in personal development and career planning (Savickas, 2012) and enriched with Design Thinking (Burnett & Evans, 2016), innovation and entrepreneurship perspectives, ELD encourages individuals to view their lives as a series of human-centred design projects, where their needs, individual strengths, and values are fundamentally integrated to create



sustainable solutions to upcoming challenges while going through an entrepreneurial journey.

Further, an entrepreneurial mindset that transcends business ventures can be applied to various aspects of life (Neck et al., 2020). Integrating entrepreneurial thinking - recognising opportunities, taking risks, and creating value by innovating solutions - equips individuals with the methods, perspectives, and strategic planning skills to align opportunities with personal values and long-term goals. ELD holistically guides individuals through the process of transformation. The first studies measuring the effects of this comprehensive approach discuss the effects on resilience, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy (Wolf & Landberg, 2022; Poech & Wolf, 2024).

This conceptual paper presents the framework of ELD, which integrates an entrepreneurial mind- and skillset with career and life design thinking. This paper's central thesis presents three key arguments for the ELD framework. First, it identifies the integration of entrepreneurship as a significant innovation within traditional career and life design literature. Second, it highlights gaps in EE, showing how ELD shifts the focus more onto the entrepreneur. Finally, it argues that developing an entrepreneurial mindset through ELD is a potential way to equip individuals with the skills to navigate modern challenges such as transitions, unexpected changes, and mental challenges.

Additionally, the paper outlines ELD's potential contributions to contemporary education, society, and the economy, showcasing its transformative impact on these areas.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section, we delve into the theoretical foundations of ELD and explore three key arguments demonstrating its innovative perspective on career and life design and its potential application in EE and sustainable transformation in general.

Argument 1: Evolving Career and Life Design through the Entrepreneurship Paradigm

Theoretical Evolution

Career and life design is rooted in the interdisciplinary field of career planning, drawing from psychology, education, sociology, and business to empower individuals to make informed career decisions. It helps people understand their strengths and interests, adapt to changes, and navigate their career paths over a lifetime. Historically, career planning emphasized aligning individual traits with job requirements, as seen in Parsons' trait-and-factor theory (1909). Mid-century theories, such as Roe's psychoanalytic perspective (1956), emphasised the role of unconscious motives shaped by childhood experiences in career decisions. Super's life-span model (1957, 1980) advanced the field by framing careers as

lifelong processes with multiple stages and transitions. Holland's personality theory (1959, 1997) highlighted the importance of aligning personal and environmental factors, while Erikson's theory (1968) stressed identity formation in career choices.

With the shift to constructionist paradigms, career development has moved from a matching approach to a more dynamic, constructivist model. Theories like the social learning theory of career decision making (Krumboltz & Hamel, 1977) and the social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994) incorporate social and cognitive learning to explain how beliefs and environments influence career management, emphasising factors like self-efficacy and personal goals. Collin & Young (1986) described careers as complex, individualised, and context-dependent, shaped by personal aspirations and external influences. The career construction theory (Savickas, 1997) and the life design paradigm (Savickas, 2012) further underscore the importance of proactive narrative construction and storytelling in navigating career paths.

Bridging Personal Growth with Innovation

The introduction of human-centred design and innovation thinking as principles of entrepreneurship into career decision-making represents a significant advancement in the field. This shift moves career planning towards a more holistic career and life design perspective. Human-centred design focuses places the individual at the heart of an innovation/development process (Brown, 2008), emphasising the need to align career choices with broader life goals. This approach acknowledges that career development goes beyond mere job decisions; it's about shaping a fulfilling life (Burnett & Evans, 2016).

Entrepreneurship is broadly understood as identifying opportunities, innovating, and taking calculated risks to achieve desired outcomes (Lackéus, 2015; Neck et al., 2020). This entrepreneurial mindset encourages viewing careers as a continuous, iterative process of exploration and adaptation (Lynch & Corbett, 2021) rather than a series of linear steps. It focuses on creating value from any work or life situation, using methods like rapid prototyping and the build-measure-learn approach from lean startup (Ries, 2011). By fostering experimentation, learning from failure, and adapting to change, individuals can proactively navigate career transitions, build resilience, and seize opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Conclusion

The innovation in career and life design presented here lies in integrating entrepreneurship principles, perspectives, and tools. While traditional models provide valuable frameworks for personal growth and career transitions, they don't address the complexities of entrepreneurship, which requires agility, risk management, and iterative decision-making. By blending these entrepreneurial elements with traditional career

planning, the evolving 'entrepreneurial' career and life design paradigm represents a shift from static models to dynamic, adaptive processes, forming a responsive framework for modern challenges. This approach fosters sustainable transformation by encouraging an entrepreneurial mindset, viewing careers as dynamic, iterative journeys, and equipping individuals to navigate change effectively. Ultimately, it empowers them to contribute positively to society within the broader context of a meaningful and sustainable life.

Argument 2: An Approach to Focus on Personal Growth of the Entrepreneur in EE

The Role and Challenges of an Entrepreneur

Traditionally, an entrepreneur creates and manages a business for profit (Schumpeter, 1934). Entrepreneurs identify opportunities, take risks, and demonstrate resilience in failure (Gartner, 1988; Neck et al., 2020). They possess a mindset centred on resourcefulness and value creation (Kuratko, 2005; Neck & Greene, 2011). Today, the definition of an entrepreneur encompasses a diverse group—young innovators, career changers, and individuals responding to market opportunities. However, this role comes with significant challenges. Entrepreneurs often face stress, financial uncertainty, and heavy workloads, contributing to burnout and mental health challenges (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011).

Many entrepreneurial failures arise from personal competencies that could be developed through targeted training. Moreover, modern entrepreneurship requires navigating complex external factors, such as technological advancements, economic shifts, and personal responsibilities, highlighting the need for a renewed approach to EE.

Integrating Personal Development in EE

Despite the entrepreneur's centrality in the entrepreneurial process, traditional education has focused more on business models, market understanding, and securing funding than on the individual (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008). Programs typically emphasise technical skills like financial literacy and marketing, often neglecting the entrepreneur's personal and psychological development (Hägg & Kurczewska, 2022).

Opportunity recognition has traditionally been seen as the cornerstone of entrepreneurship, emphasising discovering, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). However, matching the right opportunity with the right entrepreneur still needs to be explored. The demand to support personal development in entrepreneurship is well-documented (Hägg & Gabrielsson, 2020). Achieving alignment between personal competencies and societal expectations requires flexibility and adaptability to evolving conditions (Sales et al., 2023). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE), which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks successfully, is presented as a competence that influences both the likelihood of

engaging in entrepreneurial activities and the ability to persist through challenges (Bandura, 1997; Chen et al., 1998). Likewise, the entrepreneurial mindset encompasses cognitive beliefs that influence individuals' identification and pursuit of opportunities (Clarke & Holt, 2019). It is not just about optimism or resilience; it involves how entrepreneurs perceive risks and opportunities, shaping their behaviour and decision-making (Dweck, 2006). Cultivating these competencies in education can lead to more effective entrepreneurial behaviour as students learn to approach challenges with a proactive and opportunity-focused attitude (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

Training in psychological resilience, well-being, and complex problem-solving can help prepare future entrepreneurs for the challenges they will face (Cope, 2011; Uy et al., 2013). A notable shift has occurred, moving from traditional lecture-based instruction to more experiential and reflective pedagogies (Hägg & Gabrielsson, 2020). Educational interventions such as internships, business simulations, and project-based learning significantly influence personal development (Kolb, 1984; Pittaway & Cope, 2007). These strategies help students develop a holistic understanding of entrepreneurship and prepare them for the emotional and psychological challenges ahead.

Incorporating these elements into EE means teaching students the skills to navigate uncertainty and complexity (Chen et al., 1998; Foss & Klein, 2017). By focusing on broader strategic and adaptive skills, educators can better prepare future entrepreneurs to thrive in an unpredictable world while ensuring their personal and professional growth is fully integrated into their entrepreneurial journey (Fisher et al., 2016; Rae, 2000).

Conclusion

This second argument advocates for innovations in EE that centre on the entrepreneur by adopting a holistic perspective encompassing individual resources, needs, and life circumstances. While experiential learning, design thinking, and holistic approaches are increasingly used to develop entrepreneurial skills (Brown, 2009; Neck & Greene, 2011), the integration of personal development remains limited. Although models like effectuation and the team canvas acknowledge the entrepreneur's relevance, teaching formats still must fully address the entrepreneurial journey, particularly regarding adaptability, psychological resilience, and personal growth (Rideout & Gray, 2013). ELD addresses this gap, and by prioritising this holistic approach, EE can effectively equip individuals to navigate their journeys sustainably, integrating personal development with traditional business training. This shift addresses the specific challenges entrepreneurs face and ensures they possess the necessary skills and the personal development essential for thriving in today's complex and dynamic environment (Gibb, 2002; Kickul et al., 2009).

Argument 3: Training Entrepreneurship as a Future Competence for Everyone

Entrepreneurship as a Future Competence

Entrepreneurship, broadly defined, is increasingly recognised as a critical future skill in today's rapidly evolving world (Lackéus, 2015). The European Commission (2019) identifies entrepreneurship as one of the seven critical lifelong learning competencies, highlighting its relevance beyond business creation. Scholars emphasise entrepreneurial competencies, such as those outlined in the EntreComp framework (Bacigalupo et al., 2016), as essential for entrepreneurs and employees in the 21st century (Lackéus et al., 2020).

An entrepreneurial mindset involves attitudes and behaviours that enable individuals to identify opportunities, take the initiative, and innovate in uncertain environments (Neck et al., 2020). This mindset is valuable across all areas of life, not just in starting businesses. It encompasses resilience, adaptability, and a proactive approach to challenges - skills increasingly necessary in a world of constant change (Gibb, 2002). Developing an entrepreneurial mind- and skillset equips individuals to act on opportunities and create value in various fields, from engineering to the arts. The entrepreneurial mindset fosters creativity, critical thinking, and the ability to turn ideas into action, making it a valuable professional skill for everyone (Daspit et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurship for everyone

In the modern world, the relevance of an entrepreneurial mindset is growing. As technological advancements accelerate and work environments evolve, individuals must navigate complex, rapidly changing situations by fostering innovation, adaptability, and a proactive approach to problem-solving (Brundiens et al., 2021). The ability to embrace change, spot opportunities for sustainable transformation, and think entrepreneurially becomes crucial for personal and professional success. These competencies should be integrated across all disciplines, equipping students with the tools to succeed in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world (Bennett, & Lemoine, 2014).

Expanding EE to include a holistic perspective incorporating personal development areas, such as value thinking, is essential for a sustainable future (Brundiens et al., 2021). Bridging the entrepreneurship paradigm with personal growth through innovative pedagogy is relevant beyond business education. This shift recognises modern careers demand for a more dynamic and adaptable framework, incorporating innovation and entrepreneurship principles, perspectives, and tools.

Embedding EE into the core curriculum of all disciplines can prepare students to be more innovative, adaptable, and capable of creating value in diverse contexts (Gibb, 2002). Integrating entrepreneurial thinking and doing in general education has profound implications for individuals and society. It promotes a culture of innovation, reduces silo-thinking, and bridges

the gap between personal growth and professional success.

Conclusion

The entrepreneurial mindset is increasingly recognised as a critical competency for everyone, not just those pursuing entrepreneurial ventures. This underscores the need to embed entrepreneurial education across various disciplines, equipping individuals with the skills to navigate modern challenges and opportunities. Including the entrepreneurial mindset in career and life design prepares everyone for the future, making it a valuable paradigm of 'entrepreneurship for everyone.' Incorporating ELD pedagogy into educational contexts promotes an entrepreneurial mindset, focusing on personal growth and providing a framework that integrates innovation, design, and entrepreneurship principles. ELD challenges traditional educational boundaries and fosters a holistic learning experience that prepares individuals to thrive in the modern world.

APPLICATION FRAMEWORK OF ELD

In developing the ELD framework, we utilised a multi-faceted approach that combined theoretical insights, practitioner experiences, and empirical observations. Initially, we conducted a thorough review to identify existing gaps in EE models. This foundational work was enriched by qualitative insights gathered from practitioners, highlighting the contemporary challenges entrepreneurs face. Iterative experimentation with the double diamond model initially developed by the British Design Council (2018) allowed us to refine our approach, ultimately including a third diamond that centrally integrates personal development with entrepreneurial competencies. This methodology grounds the ELD framework in existing research and ensures its relevance and applicability in real-world contexts.

Building on the previously presented arguments, we introduce the ELD framework that bridges personal development with innovation, offering an interdisciplinary education approach that promotes 'entrepreneurship for everyone' and fosters a sustainable transformation mindset:

The **ELD framework** (see Figure 1) is an evolution of the double diamond model (Design Council, 2018) for human-centred design. While the double diamond model, commonly used in EE, addresses only the problem and solution spaces, the ELD framework extends this model by introducing a third diamond, the entrepreneur space. It further adds the implementation space, which rounds up, forming a continuous cycle through the entrepreneurial journey. The arrows above highlight the iterative approach, in which steps can go forward or jump backward.

The spaces' diamond shape symbolises divergent and convergent thinking phases, essential for addressing complex, wicked problems (Buchanan, 1992), where numerous influencing factors exist and multiple solutions are possible. This approach leverages principles from human-centred design to foster creativity, user-centricity, and iterative learning processes, all of which are crucial for the success of innovation projects. Additionally, it is most effective when conducted in a collaborative peer-learning environment with interdisciplinary teams.

The **Entrepreneur Space**, not necessarily but often the starting space, can be seen as the foundational phase, focused on creating a holistic self-understanding of 'who you are' and 'where you want to go'. This space is commonly entered with a transformational challenge (see Figure 1: Bridge 1) and closed with a more detailed picture of one's identity and personal story. During the divergent phase, this space opens with different tools and approaches to self-analysis (Wolf & Landberg, 2023), incorporating elements of positive psychology (Seligman, 2018; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2009) and ikigai (Tittel *et al.*, 2023). The self-analysis encourages reflection on strengths, resources, values, and goals. The convergent phase focuses on making sense of the divergent data collection on self-awareness, converging towards the core insights and defining a guiding personal compass (see Figure 1: Bridge 2). By deeply understanding their abilities and passions, individuals can better focus their efforts and align them with their entrepreneurial pursuits.

The **Problem Space** focuses on developing a comprehensive understanding of the situation that needs to be improved/innovated/changed, ending with a specific design challenge (see Figure 1: Bridge 3). During the divergent phase, extensive information is gathered through research, observations, and stakeholder

interactions to explore and understand the situation holistically. This information is analysed and distilled in the convergent phase to identify the specific problem that needs to be addressed. A deep understanding of the problem domain is essential to ensure that later solutions are relevant and practical, minimising the risk of failure or misunderstanding. Defining a clear and relevant problem statement is crucial to opening the most impactful perspective on the Solution Space.

The **Solution Space** is where innovative and impactful solutions are developed. Ideas and solutions are generated during the divergent phase without the initial judgement or evaluation. This phase integrates creative inspirations with insights from the entrepreneur and the problem space, encouraging "moonshot" solutions that imagine an ideal future beyond current realities. In the convergent phase, the focus shifts to selecting and testing the most promising ideas. These ideas are evaluated, refined, and turned into practical solutions through proactive prototyping and testing. This iterative approach allows for continuous optimisation and adjustment, resulting in well-conceived, creative solutions that address the identified problems. The final step is deciding which solution to pursue (see Figure 1: Bridge 4).

Finally, the **Implementation Space** focuses on implementing developed solutions and scaling them for a more significant impact. This phase involves more than just executing ideas; it involves continuously navigating and recalibrating. Regular routines, such as reflections and strategy meetings, help guide the implementation process, ensuring it stays aligned with the principles and decisions developed in earlier stages. This approach ensures that EE is used in whichever context has a lasting impact on the entrepreneurial journey, in which innovative solutions are transformed into sustainable realities through iterative, flexible loops.

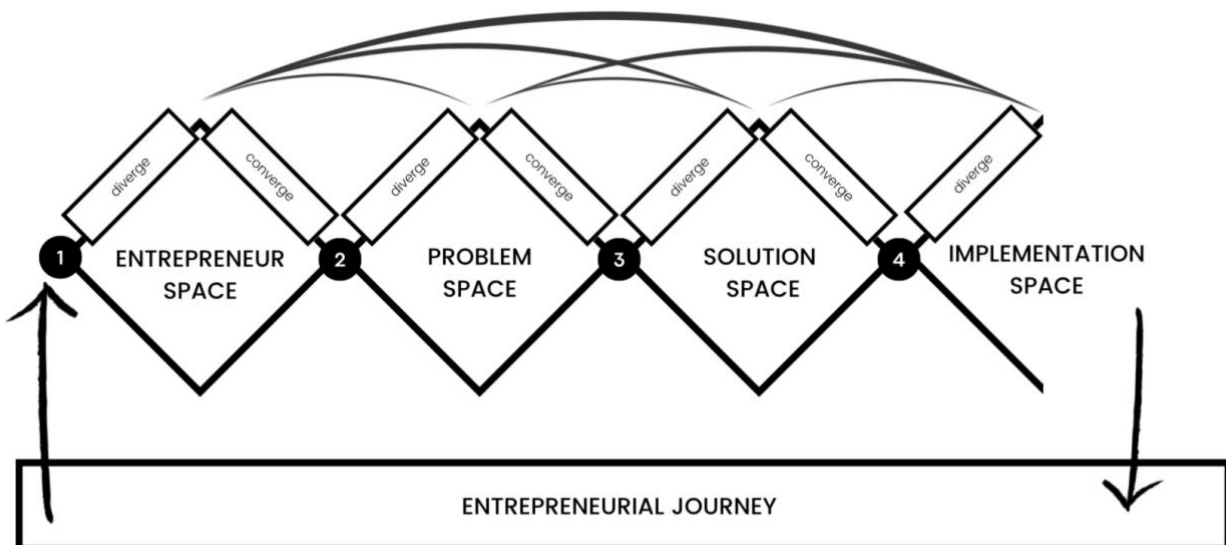


Fig. 1. Application Framework of Entrepreneurial Life Design

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The ELD framework offers a holistic and structured approach that integrates innovation with personal growth. As such, it presents an innovative pedagogical model for EE, career and life design counselling, and for educators and innovators across various disciplines.

Contributions

The ELD framework provides a fresh perspective on career and life design and EE. It introduces dynamic processes into traditional life design approaches, creating a human-centred responsive framework for modern challenges. ELD emphasises the entrepreneur's human needs and personal development, promoting an innovative pedagogy for entrepreneurial education. It further shows potential for sustainable transformation and interdisciplinary learning, fostering an adaptive mindset and essential skills for navigating complex environments while reducing silo thinking.

The comprehensive framework aligns with learning objectives across phases: It is assumed that the **Entrepreneur Space** strengthens personal resources such as self-awareness and resilience. Similarly, the **Problem Space** fosters an entrepreneurial mindset, encouraging individuals to view challenges as opportunities and adopt a positive attitude toward change. The **Solution Space** is thought to develop transformational skills through action-oriented thinking and hands-on experimentation, guiding participants from ideation to execution, networking, and building motivation.

Limitations and Future Research

This conceptual study on the ELD framework provides valuable insights but has notable limitations. While it introduces the ELD framework, it needs more extensive empirical data to support practical applications. Initial studies indicate positive impacts on resilience, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy (Poech & Wolf, 2024), but larger-scale longitudinal studies are necessary to validate these findings across diverse populations. Future research should focus on developing robust methodologies to assess ELD's long-term impacts, particularly regarding sustainability, personal resources, entrepreneurial mindsets, and transformational skills. Also, further guidance on implementing the ELD framework practically in educational contexts is necessary.

Moreover, the framework is primarily based on Western educational contexts, highlighting the need to explore its cultural relevance and effectiveness in non-Western settings. Investigating which target groups

benefit most from ELD and what contexts will also be crucial. Examining various formats, durations, tools, and educator influence will help optimise ELD implementation in educational environments.

Outlook

To fully realise ELD's potential, further research is needed to incorporate this framework into EE, career and life design, and interdisciplinary course concepts. By doing so, ELD can help develop adaptable, innovative, and resilient individuals equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

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