

Assessing Entrepreneurial Aspirations and Self-Perceived Competencies in Transient Workers

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Abstract: This research explores entrepreneurial aspirations among temporary workers, focusing on their inclination to view entrepreneurship as a viable career path. Central to this study is assessing how these workers perceive their entrepreneurial skills. Engaging a sample of 184 temporary workers, we employed multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) to delineate profiles of entrepreneurial competencies concerning their entrepreneurial intentions and openness to entrepreneurship as a career choice. Findings reveal a varied perception among temporary workers regarding their entrepreneurial competencies, influencing their entrepreneurial intentions and willingness to consider entrepreneurship as a career. Many temporary workers do not view themselves as adequately equipped with the necessary competencies for an entrepreneurial journey. This study highlights the diversity in self-assessed entrepreneurial skills among temporary workers and how they correlate with their career aspirations and intentions. The insights gained offer valuable implications for individual and organisational strategies to foster entrepreneurial competencies.

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Introduction

Sullivan and Baruch (2009) observe that stable environmental factors and hierarchical organisational structures have largely influenced traditional career trajectories. This model assumed a continuous exchange

between employers and employees within a growing economy. However, recent shifts in the labour market have altered these dynamics. York and Venkataraman (2010) emphasise the increasing demand for entrepreneurial activities as critical drivers of innovation and job creation in society. Given

the evolving work environment where stability and predictability are no longer assured, entrepreneurship is emerging as a viable alternative. This shift challenges individuals to adopt entrepreneurial roles and organisations to foster an entrepreneurial spirit.

Man, Lau, and Chan (2002) highlight that entrepreneurial competencies—the comprehensive ability to execute entrepreneurial activities successfully—are crucial in this context. Besides these competencies, the intention and willingness to pursue entrepreneurship are also essential. Understanding whether current labour market participants view entrepreneurship as a feasible option is significant. Moreover, organisations' recruitment and selection policies must align with these new paradigms to integrate entrepreneurial strategies into their management practices.

The assessment of entrepreneurial competencies in job applicants is increasingly relevant for recruitment and selection strategies and policy programs. These programs equip individuals with the skills and mindset needed to enhance their entrepreneurial orientation and employability in a rapidly changing job market.

Galais and Moser (2009) and Kraemer, Wayne, Liden, and Sparrowe (2005) have documented the growing trend of temporary work contracts, where organisations outsource the workforce without direct employment responsibilities. This shift, part of the broader changes in the labour market characterised by instability and unpredictability, has led to mixed perceptions among temporary and permanent workers, often skewing negativity. On the other hand,

Kerr and Armstrong-Stassen (2011) and Meher and Sahoo (2008) discuss entrepreneurship as a potent economic mechanism that generates jobs and enhances job satisfaction. This opens up the possibility of entrepreneurship being a viable next step in the career paths of temporary workers.

This article delves into how temporary workers perceive their entrepreneurial competencies, intentions, and willingness to pursue entrepreneurship. We examine the individual profiles of entrepreneurial competencies related to different intentions and the inclination towards entrepreneurship as a career option. Given the rise of temporary workers in the labour market, understanding their perceptions of competencies is crucial. Galais and Moser (2009) noted that temporary workers are increasingly cognizant of the labour market's instability. This awareness positions them uniquely in the current employment landscape, not just as precarious workers but as new entities within the evolving norms of working contract regulations. Therefore, it is essential to consider whether temporary workers view their career from a lifespan perspective or see entrepreneurship as a potential path, particularly in forms like self-employment. However, a gap exists in understanding how temporary workers perceive their entrepreneurial competencies within their occupational journeys.

In this pioneering study, we explore the perceptions of temporary workers regarding entrepreneurship and their capabilities to undertake entrepreneurial endeavours as a career choice. This research adopts a novel perspective on careers, viewing them as occupational paths where entrepreneurial competencies play a crucial role. This

approach sheds light on the evolving nature of careers in the modern labour market and the significance of entrepreneurial skills. Our investigation aims to deepen the understanding of how temporary workers assess their entrepreneurial potential and consider entrepreneurship a viable path in their professional development.

Redefining Career Trajectories: Understanding the Shift in Career Dynamics

The concept of a career has undergone significant transformation from its traditional roots, characterised by stability and linear progression, to a more dynamic and individual-focused approach. This shift is primarily attributed to changes in the labour market, as Baron (2012) noted, and the evolving organisational context described by Baruch (2006). The earlier career models, such as Super's (1957) traditional linear progression, emphasised extrinsic rewards and stability within one or two organisations. However, technological advancements, globalisation, and socio-economic shifts have altered organisational structures and employee expectations.

Sullivan and Baruch (2009) discuss the traditional model of careers as a mutually beneficial exchange of loyalty for job security. Nevertheless, Schein (1990) pointed out that the evolving needs of both organisations and employees have led to new career models. He introduced the concept of 'career anchors,' emphasising the alignment of personal competencies, needs, and values with professional choices. Similarly, Hall (1996) and Briscoe and Hall (2006) conceptualised the 'protean career,' centring on self-directed career management and self-

fulfilment. Arthur and Rousseau (1996) further expanded the career concept to encompass a range of opportunities beyond a single organisation, focusing on the employee's mobility across various employment situations.

Greenhaus, Callanan, and DiRenzo (2008) defined three components of a boundaryless career: multidirectional mobility, career competencies, and protean orientation, identifying personal and economic factors as crucial influencers of career orientation. The notion of careers becoming increasingly independent of organisations is further supported by Granrose and Baccili (2006), leading to the concept of career profiles by Briscoe and Hall (2006), which posits the identification of potential career paths based on an individual's propensity for protean or boundaryless careers.

This evolution from organisation-centric to individual-centric career perspectives is evident in the literature, moving from the organisational focus of Sullivan and Baruch (2009) and Super (1957) to the individual-centred views of Arthur and Rousseau (1996), Briscoe and Hall (2006), Greenhaus et al. (2008), Hall (1996), and Schein (1990). In this context, individuals increasingly take responsibility for managing their careers and employability. In this article, we define a career as an occupational path comprised of individual choices throughout life, encompassing various occupational possibilities. Entrepreneurial intentions and activities, such as venture creation or self-employment, are seen as choices within this occupational journey, potentially transitional and not necessarily indicative of long-term engagement in entrepreneurial activities.

Lippmann (2008) and Krieshok, Black, and McKay (2009) have pointed out the evolving nature of the labour market, where the major challenge is the unpredictability of employment, impacting workers across various sectors. The shift from a traditional match-based employment approach to adapting to continuous change reflects the current labour market dynamics. Temporary work emerges as a response to this instability, characterised by flexible employment conditions. Temporary workers, as described by Kraemer, Wayne, Liden, and Sparrowe (2005), lack ongoing employment contracts and are often hired through agencies responsible for their contract management and recruitment, a trend noted by Kalleberg (2000) and Aletraris (2010) as on the rise.

Despite their growing presence in the workforce, temporary workers typically experience lower job satisfaction levels than permanent employees, who often view them as threatening their job stability (Kraemer et al., 2005). Galais and Moser (2009) further observed that the nature of their contracts influences the commitment levels of temporary workers. This situation indicates that while reacting to the changing work environment, temporary work might not be the most favourable solution for either workers or organisations. The rapid increase in temporary contracts might be outpacing the ability of workers to adapt and develop necessary competencies, leading to job insecurity and periods of unemployment.

Schjoedt and Shaver (2007) propose that developing entrepreneurial competencies and activities like self-employment could be a more sustainable alternative in a labour market with transient occupational paths. Owning a business could potentially enhance

job satisfaction and commitment. However, it raises questions about whether temporary workers view entrepreneurship as a viable career path and if they feel equipped with the necessary competencies for such endeavours.

Entrepreneurship as a Career Path and the Role of Competencies

Entrepreneurship, fundamentally rooted in recognising and capitalising on business opportunities, plays a crucial role in the labour market (Baron, 2006; Shane, 2012; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). As defined by Reynolds et al. (2005), entrepreneurs are actively involved in setting up or managing a business they partly or wholly own. According to Korotov, Khapova, and Arthur (2011), this concept of entrepreneurship often represents an unconventional career move in the modern labour market. It is seen as a distinct path where success is measured by achieving a career in the chosen field (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan, Forret, Mainiero & Terjesen, 2007). While traditional career literature seldom categorises entrepreneurship as a conventional career, it aligns with the kaleidoscope career model (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

Sullivan et al. (2007) note that entrepreneurs craft their careers outside the traditional employment framework, balancing authenticity, balance, and challenge - the core elements of the kaleidoscope career model. Politics (2008) highlights that entrepreneurial careers are shaped by experiences such as start-up involvement, management roles, and industry-specific knowledge, which contribute to entrepreneurial learning and opportunity recognition. Additionally, entrepreneurship is often equated with self-

employment (Kenney & Mujtaba, 2007; Levenburg & Schwarz, 2008; Salimath & Cullen, 2010; Verheul, Thurik, Grilo & Zwan, 2012), requiring intrinsic motivation and specific competencies.

Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) suggest that career choices, including entrepreneurship, are influenced by personal alignment with one's skills, values, and interests. Baron (2012) asserts that individuals are drawn to entrepreneurship when they perceive a match between their competencies and the entrepreneurial role. However, Brice and Nelson (2008) argue that perceptions of the rewards associated with entrepreneurship significantly influence career intentions. While factors like independence and vocation are crucial, financial rewards and self-fulfilment remain primary motivators (Kerr & Armstrong-Stassen, 2011; Meher & Sahoo, 2008; Schwartz & Malach-Pines, 2007). Douglas and Shepherd (2002) further showed that risk tolerance and a desire for independence positively influence entrepreneurial intentions, indicating a strong correlation between self-perceived competencies and entrepreneurial career paths (Higgins, Smith & Mirza, 2013; Jain & Ali, 2013).

Given the importance of self-perceived competencies in entrepreneurship, our study aims to understand how different perceptions of entrepreneurial competencies relate to the intention and willingness to pursue entrepreneurship as a career path, especially among temporary workers. This group, characterised by diverse professional experiences and employment types, reflects the changing nature of today's labour market. We examine temporary workers' entrepreneurial intentions, willingness to

consider entrepreneurship, and self-perceived competencies, exploring how these factors influence their career choices.

Methodology and Participant Profile

1. **Participant Demographics:** The study involved 184 temporary workers affiliated with a temporary work agency in Portugal.
2. **Survey Completion:** Participants completed a survey to evaluate their career perspectives and entrepreneurial competencies.
3. **Survey Duration:** The survey took approximately 25 minutes for each participant.
4. **Data Collection:** The survey collected comprehensive data, including participants' demographic information (age, gender), educational background, experience in identifying business opportunities, and their intentions and willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activities.
5. **Demographic Breakdown:** Details of the participants' demographic profiles, such as age, gender, and educational qualifications, are provided in Table 1 of the study.
6. **Purpose of Study:** This participant profile aims to offer a diverse perspective on the entrepreneurial mindset and competencies among temporary workers in the Portuguese labour market.
7. **Focus on Entrepreneurial Intentions:** The study particularly emphasises understanding temporary workers' entrepreneurial intentions

and willingness to engage in such Evaluation Methods.

Assessing Entrepreneurial Aspirations and Perceptions

Our research incorporated two key questions to gauge participants' entrepreneurial intentions and perceptions of self-employment as a career path. The first question asked, "Are you planning on launching a business in the future?" and the second inquired, "Do you consider self-employment as a solution for your professional life?". Participants responded to these queries with a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

Measuring Entrepreneurial Competencies

We utilised the Entrepreneurial Potential Assessment Inventory (EPAI) developed by Santos, Caetano, and Curren (2013) to evaluate entrepreneurial competencies. This tool measures competencies identified in the literature as critical for predicting entrepreneurial success and performance, encompassing entrepreneurial motivation, social, management, and psychological competencies. The EPA defines entrepreneurial potential as a unique blend of competencies and motivations that prepare an individual for entrepreneurship (Santos et al., 2013). It was previously validated, making it an appropriate tool for assessing the entrepreneurial competencies of temporary workers.

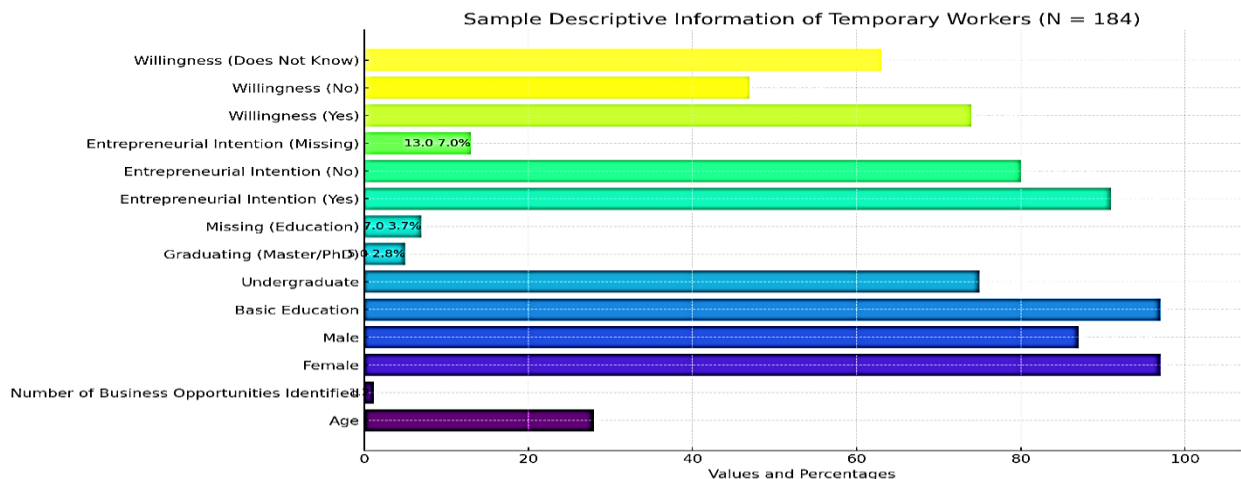


Fig.1 Sample Descriptive Information of Transient Workers (N=184)

The assessment covered various dimensions of entrepreneurial competencies:

Entrepreneurial Motivation: Assessed four items on economic motivation and two on independence motivation.

Social Competencies: Measured by two items each on communication and persuasion capacity and the ability to develop social networks.

Management Competencies: Evaluated through three items on vision, four on resource gathering, two on leadership capacity, and two on entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

Psychological Competencies: Analysed using two items on innovation capacity, three on emotional intelligence, and four on resilience.

Each item was rated on a five-point scale from 'completely disagree' to 'completely agree'.

Identifying Business Opportunities

Additionally, we queried participants on the number of business opportunities they had

previously identified, asking, "How many feasible business opportunities have you thought about?". This question allowed participants to reflect on and quantify the business opportunities they had considered, providing further insights into their entrepreneurial mindset and experience.

Results

Entrepreneurial Aspirations and Career Perspectives

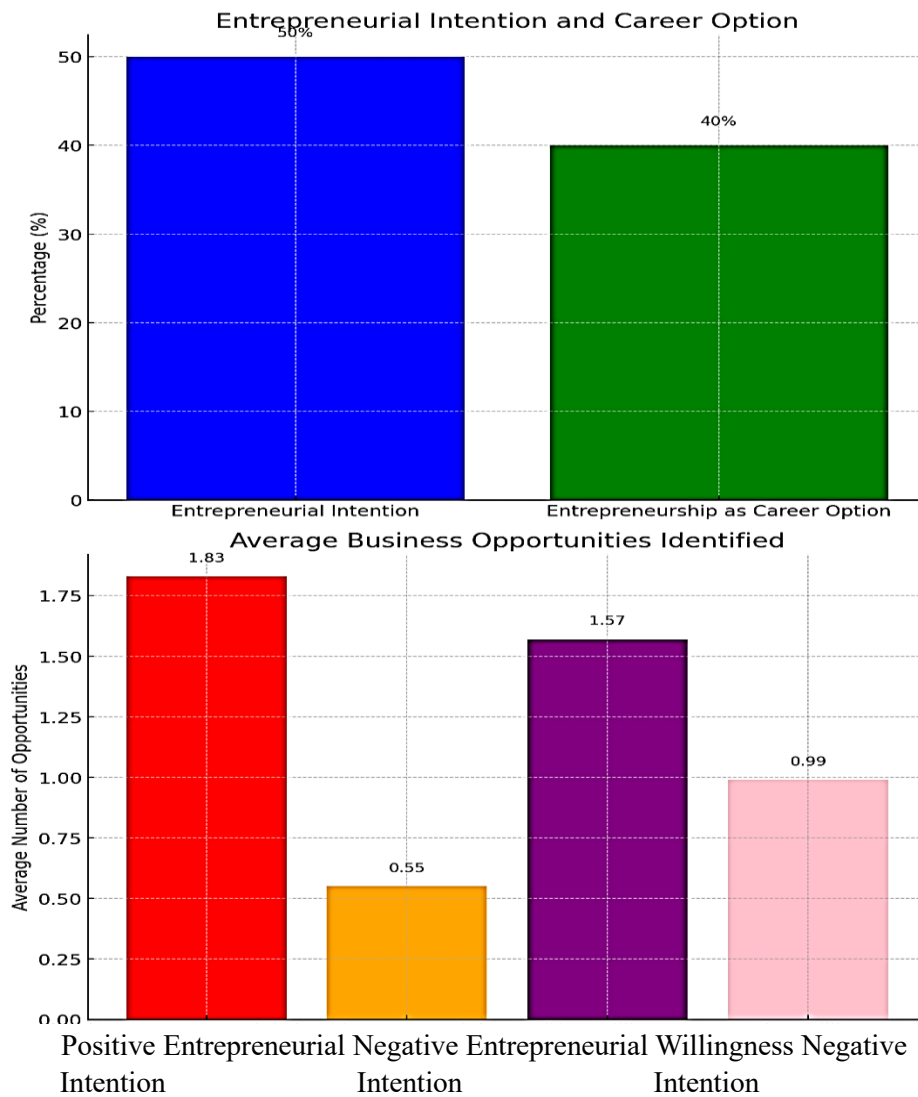


Fig 2 & 3: 2. Entrepreneurial Intention and Career Option. 3. Average Business Opportunities

The study's findings on entrepreneurial intentions and the inclination of participants to view entrepreneurship as a viable career path revealed that half of the participants expressed an intention to start a business. At the same time, 40% saw entrepreneurship as a potential professional avenue. A notable finding is a significant but negative correlation between the intention to launch a business and considering entrepreneurship as a career option (Chi-square = 25.11; $p < 0.001$, Lambda = 0.32, Pearson's R = -0.056). This suggests that not all individuals aspiring to start a business view entrepreneurship as a long-term career path and vice versa.

Identification of Business Opportunities

Participants with a positive outlook towards both entrepreneurial intention and considering it as a career choice had notably identified more business opportunities in the past compared to their counterparts. Specifically, those with positive entrepreneurial intention identified an average of 1.83 business opportunities, significantly higher than the 0.55 average for those with a negative intention ($F(1,169) = 22.21$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, participants positively inclined towards entrepreneurship as a career option identified an average of 1.57 opportunities, compared to 0.99 for those with a negative inclination ($F(2,181) = 3.40$, $p < 0.05$).

Entrepreneurial Competencies Analysis

An analysis of entrepreneurial competencies and the number of business opportunities previously identified is detailed in Table 2. The data includes mean values and standard deviations for each competency. The study found the lowest average score in independence motivation ($M = 3.16$) and the

highest in entrepreneurial self-efficacy ($M = 4.10$), indicating a range of strengths and areas for development among the participants regarding entrepreneurial competencies.

Discussion

In this study, the exploration focused on how temporary workers perceive their entrepreneurial competencies and their aspirations and readiness to embark on entrepreneurship. The initial analysis revealed a complex relationship between the intention to engage in entrepreneurial endeavours and the willingness to pursue entrepreneurship as a career. While a significant association was found, not all participants who expressed a positive intention towards entrepreneurship were willing to follow through as entrepreneurs, and vice versa. This discrepancy among participants merited further exploration.

To understand these variations, a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was conducted to categorise temporary workers based on their competencies, entrepreneurial intentions, and willingness to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career path. Four distinct profiles were identified:

1. **Group 1:** This group comprises temporary workers who intend to and are willing to embrace entrepreneurship as a career option. Notably, individuals in this group reported higher levels of entrepreneurial competencies, especially in terms of economic motivation. This aligns with findings from Brice & Nelson (2008) and Santos et al. (2013), suggesting that those with greater entrepreneurial motivation often view self-

employment as more advantageous than traditional employment. In this group, positive entrepreneurial intentions are correlated with elevated economic motivation and general proficiency in entrepreneurial competencies.

These findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of the entrepreneurial mindset among temporary workers, revealing that while some are inclined towards entrepreneurship, their competencies and motivations vary. This diversity underscores the need for tailored approaches to fostering entrepreneurship among temporary workers, considering their competencies and aspirations.

An intriguing revelation emerges from the data: a distinct group of temporary workers possesses positive entrepreneurial intentions but does not view entrepreneurship as a long-term career option (group 2). These individuals appear willing to participate in entrepreneurial activities, yet they do not perceive it as a lifelong pursuit, which aligns with the evolving concept of careers in the literature. In our interpretation, we view a career more as an occupational path than a lifelong commitment. Entrepreneurship represents another adaptable solution for these temporary workers rather than a career. They seem accustomed to confronting uncertainty and flexibly adapting to varying circumstances, reflecting their robust emotional intelligence and resilience. This aligns with the concept of entrepreneurial resilience defined in the literature (e.g., Friberg et al., 2006).

Members of this group view entrepreneurship as another step along their occupational path,

something they may need to adjust to rather than a definitive solution for an unstable career. Notably, participants in this group exhibited a significantly higher ability to gather resources than those in other groups, a critical competency for initiating entrepreneurial endeavours and navigating complex environments (e.g., Tan & Peng, 2003).

Conversely, individuals with harmful entrepreneurial intentions and no willingness to consider entrepreneurship as a career option displayed lower entrepreneurial competencies and motivations. This underscores the significance of cultivating entrepreneurial competencies. From these findings, it is plausible to suggest that these individuals may not perceive themselves as possessing the requisite competencies for engaging in entrepreneurial activities, viewing them as the next step in their occupational path instead.

This line of reasoning also aligns with the outcomes observed in group 4. An interesting pattern emerges in this segment of temporary workers, characterised by negative entrepreneurial intentions but a positive inclination to contemplate entrepreneurship as a career choice. Participants in this group express a belief that they possess competencies at a low or moderate level, a self-perception that influences their willingness not to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

It appears that these individuals, while hesitant to embark on entrepreneurial endeavours, would consider entrepreneurship as a viable career option if they believed they had the necessary competencies. Notably, these temporary workers perceive their

entrepreneurial competencies as falling within the moderate range, allowing them to regard entrepreneurship as a feasible path within their occupational journey. However, they may not yet feel fully prepared to undertake entrepreneurial activities immediately.

It is pertinent to consider that temporary workers often harbour negative perceptions of their labour situation (Kraemer et al., 2005). They grapple with precarious employment conditions and are acutely aware of the inherent instability within the contemporary labour landscape. Therefore, it becomes imperative to explore their willingness to entertain self-employment as a viable option, given the current work market conditions and evolving career paradigms.

However, our findings indicate that temporary workers do not unequivocally view entrepreneurship as a definitive career alternative, nor do they believe they possess all the requisite competencies to embrace it fully at this juncture.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While our study delved into the realms of entrepreneurial intentions and the willingness of temporary workers to consider entrepreneurship as a career choice, it is essential to note that these responses do not necessarily predict actual behaviour. Future research endeavours should aim to ascertain whether these temporary workers engage in entrepreneurial activities and genuinely envision this pursuit as a long-term career path. This would provide valuable insights into aligning intentions with actions among this demographic.

Furthermore, there are several avenues for expanding the scope of research in this domain. Firstly, considering additional competencies and exploring alternative career perspectives would be beneficial. For instance, Segal, Borgia, and Schoenfeld (2002) employed a social cognitive career theory to forecast self-employment aspirations among students. Incorporating such measures into future investigations involving temporary workers or individuals in precarious employment could offer fresh perspectives.

Additionally, alternative competency frameworks, such as the one proposed by Man et al. (2002), which emphasises the competitive advantage conferred by these competencies within specific organisational contexts, merit exploration in future research endeavours. This broader perspective on competencies could yield valuable insights into their relevance and applicability in various work settings.

The literature also engages in a debate regarding whether self-employment can be regarded as a form of entrepreneurship. Some scholars, such as Blanchflower, Oswald, and Stutzer (2001), view self-employment as the most basic form of entrepreneurship. In the context of temporary workers, it can be seen as a transitional option and an initial step towards more extensive entrepreneurial endeavours.

It is worth noting that while we explored the self-perceptions of temporary workers concerning their competencies and their views on entrepreneurship in their career paths, self-employment, like any form of work, is not without its challenges. Patzelt and Shepherd (2011) have demonstrated that

self-employment can be associated with negative emotions. Nevertheless, our primary aim was to gain insights into how temporary workers perceive their competencies and the role of entrepreneurship in their occupational journeys.

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