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## SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

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# Who stays proactive after entrepreneurship training? Need for cognition, personal initiative maintenance, and well-being

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## Summary

Personal initiative training is a promising way to increase entrepreneurial personal initiative, which is a key behavior for successful entrepreneurship. Although personal initiative training has been shown to promote personal initiative, little is known about how this proactive behavior can be maintained over time and what the consequences are. The training transfer literature suggests that training effects usually decline with time. It is not clear, however, which factors contribute to personal initiative maintenance and which benefits go along with it. In a randomized controlled field experiment with 912 microentrepreneurs in Laos, Togo, we investigate the influence of need for cognition—a cognitive factor driving proactive behavior—on personal initiative maintenance after training. In addition, we examine the effect of need for cognition on the well-being consequences of personal initiative maintenance. We show that people high in need for cognition tend to maintain posttraining personal initiative longer than those low in need for cognition. However, contrary to our predictions, need for cognition has no effect on the level of well-being that results from personal initiative maintenance. Our findings contribute to a better understanding of personal initiative and its maintenance and could be used to increase training effectiveness.

## KEYWORDS

entrepreneurship, maintenance, need for cognition, personal initiative, proactive behavior, training, well-being

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is important for economic development (Jus, Desai, & Hensch, 2008; Baumeol, 2002; Hahn, 2013), especially in developing countries (Bates, Kitchin, & Ireland, 2013; Goodridge & Stevenson, 2010). To combat poverty in developing countries, business training programs for entrepreneurs have been developed. However, the long-term impact of business training seems to be limited (McKenzie & Woodruff, 2014). This is also suggested by the training transfer literature: Training effects usually decrease over time (Arthur, Bennett, Stanek, & McIndy, 1998; Babin & Ford, 1998; Blume, Ford, Babin, & Huang, 2010). Such a decline is particularly problematic for entrepreneurs, because entrepreneurial success is not the result of single entrepreneurial actions but requires a more constant search

for business opportunities (Shane & Venkateswaran, 2005). Thus, trainings that only result in short-term changes in entrepreneurial behavior do not lead to long-term entrepreneurial success. This leads to the conclusion that a critical factor of training is maintenance; maintenance describes to which degree intended training effects are retained over time (Blume et al., 2010).

Our study focuses on personal initiative maintenance, its antecedents, and its consequences subsequent to personal initiative training for microentrepreneurs. Personal initiative is proactive behavior that is self-starting, future-oriented, and persistent (Fay & Frese, 2001; Frese & Fay, 2001; Parker, Brink, & Strauss, 2010). Individuals high in personal initiative show self-initiated behavior that is meant to change their environment and goes beyond following an obvious idea that is "up in the air" (self-starting behavior), consider future

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