

Research Article

# What to do when the cage opens? Entrepreneurial motivations and individual beliefs of former convicts

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** to investigate the entrepreneurial motivations and individual beliefs of former convicts from prisons in Ceará regarding opening their own business, according to the theory of planned behavior (TPB). **Method/Approach:** a qualitative research was carried out with eleven former convicts from the Ceará prison system. The data collected through semi-structured interviews were analyzed by Atlas-ti software, using content analysis and pattern matching techniques. **Results:** the former convicts expressed their intention to open their own business based on three motivations: necessity, opportunity, and personal achievement. The entrepreneurial intention was influenced by behavioral and normative beliefs, and perceived control. **Theoretical/Methodological contributions:** this research promotes and expands the discussion on entrepreneurship after a period of deprivation of liberty, using the TPB to identify beliefs that precede the entrepreneurial intention. **Relevance/Originality:** the findings oppose the dichotomous classification of entrepreneurial motivation described by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. The study endorses the important influence of social reference in building normative beliefs, which were perceived as facilitators of behavioral intention, being often confused with beliefs of perceived control. **Social contributions:** to recognize the low employability of former convicts as a management problem, which can foster a debate on strategies that seek to minimize these negative impacts. This study invites a discuss on joint efforts between public authorities, the population and academia, to mitigate prejudice against former offenders by society.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial Motivation. Salient Beliefs. Penitentiary.

## Resumo

**Objetivo:** investigar as motivações empreendedoras e as crenças individuais de egressos de penitenciárias cearenses no que diz respeito a abrir o próprio negócio, segundo a teoria do comportamento planejado. **Metodologia/Abordagem:** realizou-se uma investigação de abordagem qualitativa, com 11 egressos do sistema prisional cearense. Os dados, coletados por meio de entrevista semiestruturada, foram examinados com o auxílio do software Atlas-ti, pelas técnicas de análise de conteúdo e *pattern matching*. **Resultados:** os egressos manifestaram a intenção de abrir o próprio negócio, motivados por necessidade, oportunidades e realização pessoal; sob a influência das crenças comportamentais, normativas e de controle percebido. **Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas:** com base na teoria do comportamento planejado, o estudo promove e amplia a discussão sobre o empreendedorismo após um período de privação de liberdade, identificando as crenças que antecedem a intenção empreendedora. **Relevância/Originalidade:** os achados se contrapõem à classificação dicotômica da motivação empreendedora, descrita pelo Global Entrepreneurship Monitor; e ratificam a importância da influência dos referentes sociais na construção das crenças normativas, percebidas como facilitadoras da intenção comportamental (frequentemente confundidas com as crenças de controle percebido). **Contribuições sociais:** o reconhecimento da baixa empregabilidade de ex-detentos como um problema de gestão, que pode ser um início para o debate de estratégias voltadas à minimização dos impactos negativos advindos dessa situação. Este estudo, desse modo, promove o convite ao esforço conjunto entre poder público, população e academia, com fins de rever e mitigar, respectivamente, paradigmas e preconceitos relacionados aos ex-infratores pela sociedade.

**Palavras-chave:** Motivação empreendedora. Crenças salientes. Penitenciária.

## INTRODUCTION

The crisis affecting the Brazilian prison system, related to the high rate of recidivism of ex-convicts after release, points to the ineffectiveness of educational programs in prison organizations in promoting the resocialization and reintegration of individuals deprived of liberty (Cordeiro, 2019; Silva & Saraiva, 2013).

In the case of trade school education, some prison organizations adopt educational programs aimed at entrepreneurship, which promote employability to ex-convicts into the workforce (Costelloe & Langelid, 2011), a challenging task, as these subjects carry with them a stigma of irredeemable offenders (Souza et al., 2019).

By adopting autonomous work or self-employment as a career option (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor [GEM], 2017; Ireland, 2012; Patzelt et al., 2014), these ex-convicts would bypass the discriminatory practices of employers who, in some cases, demonstrate negative attitudes toward hiring ex-convicts due to their criminal records, stigma, and fear of violent acts at work (Patzelt et al., 2014).

The promotion of entrepreneurship during the period of deprivation of liberty is one strategy to reduce the recidivism of former convicts, which has been the object of scientific investigations, such as Grosholz et al. (2020); Keena e Simmons (2015), Moraes et al. (2017), and Patzelt et al. (2014).

In that regard, Patzelt et al. (2014), highlight that most entrepreneurship research investigates the impact of educational programs on the entrepreneurial intent of individuals and the performance of the businesses created by students after participation in these programs. In a prison context, such programs enable individuals deprived of liberty to engage in a process of positive change in their identity (Grosholz et al., 2020).

With the assumption that opening their own business is a rational action, and to understand the factors that interfere with entrepreneurial behavior, it is necessary to investigate the factors that individuals perceive about themselves and about the environment in which they live - individual beliefs that determine intention and behavior (Hoppe et al., 2012).

It is therefore possible to identify the beliefs that are predictive of entrepreneurial behavior using theories that analyze human behavior. As an example, the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) - a conceptual structure used as a reference to predict intentions and behavior in multidisciplinary contexts (Martins et al., 2018; Schlaegel & Koenig, 2014).

Given the above, the following research question was outlined: *how do former convicts of Ceará's penitentiary perceive the possibility of opening their own business?* The objective was to investigate the entrepreneurial motivations and individual beliefs of former Ceará inmates regarding opening their own business from the perspective of the TPB.

The research aims to expand the discussion on entrepreneurship from the perspective of inclusive entrepreneurial education, by offering professional education activities aimed at the cognitive and behavioral transformation of ex-convicts, fostering the creation of new businesses developing an entrepreneurial mentality and identity after the period of incarceration. As such, entrepreneurial education can be considered a tool to prevent criminal recidivism and promote social reintegration, business opportunities, and of legal income to this population.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theories underpinning this research are entrepreneurial motivation under the classification of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2017), and individual beliefs related to entrepreneurial intention from the perspective of the TPB (Ajzen, 1991).

### Entrepreneurial motivation

Entrepreneurial motivation is related to the degree at which the individual values entrepreneurial behavior, based on personal beliefs about human needs (Minola et al., 2016), like autonomy, competition, material income and work ethic (Minola et al., 2016). By being personal, these beliefs (information that individuals hold about a given behavior) are often imprecise and may not correspond to reality (Ajzen, 1991), but are nevertheless fundamental to entrepreneurial action.

The relationship between economic freedom and entrepreneurial motivation is addressed by classifying the types of entrepreneurship, by opportunity and by necessity. This is in line with the structure of Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (Angulo-Guerrero et al., 2017), the largest report on the dynamic structure of entrepreneurship worldwide, operated in Brazil by the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (Vale et al., 2014).

The "needs versus opportunity" perspective is generally approached by empirical studies on factors that push the individual to entrepreneurship (Vale et al., 2014). As such, enterprises are created depending on needs and desire; exploiting opportunities, even when there are other attractive job prospects (Carsrud & Brännback, 2011); or by combining different motivations (Van der Zwan et al., 2016).

According to the GEM (2017), the entrepreneur by necessity is one who starts a business due to the lack of options for occupation and generating income. The individual is motivated by the need to develop an autonomous activity due to dissatisfaction with the available employment options, on impulse, or by family pressure (Van der Zwan et al., 2016).

In entrepreneurship by opportunity, the individual is driven by attraction or by a search for opportunities in the environment (GEM, 2017; Van der Zwan et al., 2016), including the exploration of new niche markets and innovation (Angulo-Guerrero et al., 2017), previous experience and knowledge that create the ability to recognize opportunities wasted by others (Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016), and aiming material gain (Block & Wagner, 2010).

It can be emphasized that, given the changes in systems of production and the job market fraught with structural unemployment, the entrepreneur is focused on business opportunities and can be moved by personal autonomy and the need for survival, perceiving an alternative mode of work and income generation (Vale et al., 2014).

Empirical research indicates that entrepreneurs by necessity, however, are characterized by lower levels of satisfaction (Block & Wagner, 2010; Kautonen & Palmroos, 2010), and lower levels of education (Fossen & Buéttner, 2013), and remain in the market for a shorter period (Block & Wagner, 2010). In the Brazilian context, the percentage of entrepreneurs by necessity is lower than that of entrepreneurs by opportunity (GEM, 2017).

## Entrepreneurial Intention and the Theory of planned behavior

Entrepreneurial intention is a conscious state that precedes action and directs attention to entrepreneurship (Agolla et al, 2019). It refers to an effort made by the individual to carry out the entrepreneurial activity (Paul et al., 2017).

The most used theoretical model of entrepreneurial intention (Martins et al., 2018) is the TPB, which seeks to explain behavior on a certain situation (Ajzen, 1991). Applying it in the field of entrepreneurship and based on belief, the initial factor that induces a person to perform (or not) a certain behavior, the entrepreneurial intention shows the commitment from the individual to realize the entrepreneurial desire.

According to TPB, human behavior is guided by: (a) behavioral beliefs, involving the individual's evaluation of the possible outcomes of a certain behavior, creating a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward its realization; (b) normative beliefs, related to the pressure of social referents (family, friends, and other groups) so that the individual develops entrepreneurial behavior; and (c) perceived control beliefs, referring to factors that can enable or prevent the performance of the behavior, considering the individual's abilities (Ajzen, 1991).

Entrepreneurial programs in prison promote discussion on the development of an effective way of achieving one's objectives and independence through entrepreneurship, resulting in a change in the entrepreneurial attitude of detainees. Support networks inside and outside prison create social pressures on an inmate, particularly when family and friends perceive entrepreneurship as the best option among those available. Professional qualifications through these programs implicates the development of skills and social economic training in detainees, influencing their entrepreneurial behavior (Grosholz et al., 2020).

The results of the research by Cavazos-Arroyo et al. (2017), indicate that behavioral beliefs influence entrepreneurial attitude, and a favorable attitude implies a greater entrepreneurial intention (Agolla et al, 2019; Carsrud & Brännback, 2011; Ferri et al., 2019). Findings from research by Agolla et al. (2019), Cavazos-Arroyo et al. (2017), and Ferri et al. (2019) show the positive influence of normative beliefs and perceived control on entrepreneurial intention.

The integration of detainees into the labor market can be accomplished through projects focused on employability (Wilson et al., 2000). This is because many have low levels of education and few professional skills and getting a job opportunity and staying employed should be encouraged to avoid recidivism and to build new emotional ties after leaving prison (Alós et al., 2015; Grosholz et al., 2020).

In this sense, former convicts can be motivated by an impulse for self-employment (Van der Zwan et al., 2016), becoming an entrepreneur out of necessity, because they are considered stigmatized individuals, given their criminal background (Sarasvathy, 2004), or by the recognition of opportunities, due to cognitive and behavioral changes in former convicts (Grosholz et al., 2020).

Given the theoretical contribution of this paper, two research proposals are defined:

**P1:** The entrepreneurial motivation of former convicts is binary and is based on necessity or business opportunity.

**P2:** Behavioral, normative, and perceived control beliefs influence the entrepreneurial intention of former convicts who participate in programs aimed at entrepreneurship, since entrepreneurial intention precedes behavior.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a qualitative descriptive and exploratory typology (Gray, 2012), in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with former convicts from Ceará. The dynamics of the place where the subjects serve their sentences impose limitations on researchers, such as predefined security procedures, limitations on the time available for the interview, access to a limited number of subjects, and difficulties of access that compromise the safety of researchers.

Given these limitations, the criterion used to conduct the interviews was accessibility (Vergara, 2003). The interviews were carried out in the premises of the Coordination of Social Inclusion of the Prisoner and the Graduate (CISPE) and the Deusmar Queirós Foundation, and mediated by representatives of these institutions. The interviews were conducted in person and recorded, with the permission of the interviewees. Those were carried out in April and May of 2018.

The saturation point followed the Thiry-Cherques (2009) criterion and was reached in the ninth interview. Two additional interviews were conducted to confirm saturation, one of which was conducted with a female graduate. It was not possible to conduct interviews with an equal number of men and women due to the difficulty of access to interviewees; for this reason, the interviews conducted with the three female interviewees were not discarded, because theoretical saturation was only achieved on eleven interviews

All eleven interviews were conducted individually, with former convicts identified in this investigation by the codes EG1 to EG11; their profile is presented in Table 1. Among the interviewees, eight were men and three were women, aged between 22 and 51 years. Nine interviewees were convicted by the Justice system under closed conditions and are completing the remainder of their sentence in open or semi-open conditions, some using electronic monitoring equipment. Two of the interviewees were women who, after a period of incarceration, were released from prison to await their trial in freedom.

**Table 1**  
*Profile of the interviewees*

Inter-viewee	Gender	Age (years)	Scholarity <sup>a</sup>	Sentence (years)
EG1	Female	43	Higher Education in Philosophy	10
EG2	Male	34	Higher Education in Informatics Higher Education in Mathematics <sup>INC</sup>	11
EG3	Male	25	Higher Education in Administration <sup>INC</sup>	10
EG4	Female	27	Higher Education in Finance <sup>INC</sup>	AT
EG5	Male	51	High School	NM
EG6	Male	22	High School	NM
EG7	Male	33	High School	9
EG8	Female	30	High School <sup>INC</sup>	AT
EG9	M	24	High School <sup>INC</sup>	3,5
EG10 <sup>b</sup>	Male	43	Elementary School <sup>INC</sup>	10
EG11	Male	30	Elementary School <sup>INC</sup>	NM

Notes: <sup>a</sup> INC= Incomplete, otherwise, complete.

<sup>b</sup> Recidivist.

AT = Awaiting trial.

NM = Not mentioned.

Elaborated by authors based on survey data (2020).

The interview script was created based on the binary classification of entrepreneurial motivations (GEM, 2017) and TPB (Ajzen, 1991) was used to investigate the individual beliefs of the subjects.

The data was analyzed through content analysis (Bardin, 2011) and the pattern matching technique (Trochim, 1989), wherein a comparison is made between the theory adopted in this study and the empirical reality investigated. The constituent elements of analysis presented were arranged (Table 2).

The content of the interviews was transcribed and analyzed with the aid of the Atlas.ti software, used to encode the transcription fragments in unit of registration and represent the results of each category through semantic networks generated by Network View. Each context unit is illustrated by arrows that demonstrate associations between units of registration. Each code is indicated by an ordered pair of two numbers {a - b}, where 'a' represents the frequency of use of the registration unit during transcription and 'b' denotes the interconnection with other codes. The units of context and registration resulting from content analysis were grouped into four dimensions of analysis: a) entrepreneurial motivations, b) behavioral beliefs, c) normative beliefs, and d) beliefs of perceived control (Table 3).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the mapping of initiatives for the reintegration of former convicts to encourage entrepreneurship, three initiatives administered by the State Department of Justice and Citizenship (SEJUS-CE) were identified— (1) the Querer Project, which enables professional training, encouraging cooperation and association among detainees; (2) the Living and Entrepreneurship Project, which offers training through courses and workshops, in addition to providing snack carts to former convicts, the license issued by the City of Fortaleza at no cost to former convicts (Governo do Estado do Ceará, 2017); and (3) Kiteiras Grants Project, from a partnership between SEJUS-CE, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Danone company,

aiming to provide training for former convicts and offer structural support to open a business. A private initiative was also present, the Factory School Project comes from a partnership between the Deusmar Queirós Foundation and the State University of Ceará, offering professional training, teaching, and production workshops in various areas for convicts and their families.

**Table 3**  
*Analytical research categories*

Analytical category	Context unit	Registration unit
Entrepreneurial motivations	Future objectives	Entrepreneurship by necessity
		Entrepreneurship by opportunity
Behavioral beliefs	Advantages	Personal achievement
		Financial return
		To help other former convicts
	Disadvantages	To manage own time
		Autonomy
		Lower pressure level
Normative beliefs	Perception of social referents	Loss of labor rights
		Necessity for discipline and organization
		Cost with tax
	Facilitators	Risk
		There aren't advantages to owning my own business
		Society
Perceived control beliefs	Difficulties	Family
		Friends
		Customers and suppliers
	Facilitators	Previous experience with entrepreneurship
		Personal skills
		Perception of social referents
Perceived control beliefs	Difficulties	Family entrepreneurs
		Cart Entrepreneur Project
		Bureaucracy to start a company
	Difficulties	Lack of support
		Lack of capital
		Passage through the prison system
Difficulties	Suspension of rights	
	Stigma and prejudice	
	Electronic anklet	

Note: Elaborated by authors based on survey data (2020).

**Table 2**  
*Constituent elements of analysis*

Dimensions	Constituent definitions	Operational definitions	Interview roadmap questions
Entrepreneurial motivation by necessity	Due to the lack of available employment options, the individual is motivated by the necessity for survival to undertake (Ángulo-Guerrero et al., 2017; GEM, 2017; Van der Zwan et al., 2016; Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016).	To identify whether the graduate intends to open his own business and, if so, investigate what reasons motivate him to undertake (necessity, opportunity, and others that emerge from the field).	What are your goals for the future after you leave the penitentiary?
Entrepreneurial motivation by opportunity	The individual is motivated by the recognition of opportunities and is attracted to explore such business opportunities (GEM, 2017; Van der Zwan et al., 2016; Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016).		
Individual behavioral beliefs	It refers to the individual assessment that entrepreneurial behavior can provoke, promoting a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards entrepreneurship (Agolla et al., 2019; Ajzen, 1991; Ferri et al., 2019; Grosholz et al., 2020; Liñán & Chen, 2009).	To identify the beliefs related to the favorable and unfavorable evaluation of former convicts in becoming entrepreneurs.	In your opinion, what would be the advantages of having your own business? What would be the disadvantages?
Individual beliefs normative	It comes from the influence of social groups and reflects the individual's concern about the consequences of entrepreneurial behavior for their social referents (Agolla et al., 2019; Ajzen, 1991; Ferri et al., 2019; Grosholz et al., 2020; Liñán & Chen, 2009).	To investigate which social referents exert social pressure for former convicts to enter the entrepreneurial activity.	What would people think if you decided to set up your own business? What person would approve if you decided to put your own business? Who do you think would disapprove? Why is that?
Individual beliefs of perceived control	It is related to the recognition of skills and abilities for the development of entrepreneurial functions (Agolla et al., 2019; Ajzen, 1991; Ferri et al., 2019; Grosholz et al., 2020; Liñán & Chen, 2009).	To highlight the beliefs that facilitate and hinder entrepreneurial activity about their individual capacity of former convicts.	What would make your attempt to put a business easier? Why is that? What would make it difficult for you to try to put a business in? Why?

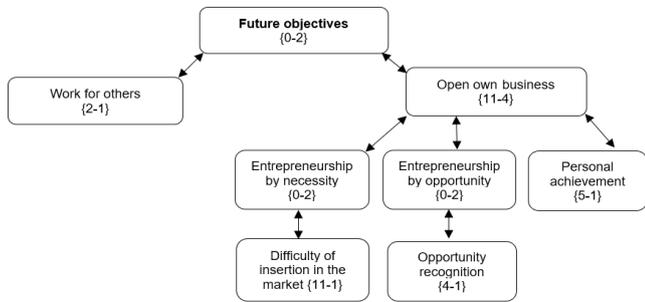
Note: Elaborated by authors based on survey data (2020).



**Entrepreneurial motivations**

When asked about their objectives after leaving the penitentiary, the interviewees chose one of two responses: “to work for others” or “to open their own business”, consolidating the ‘Future objectives’ context unit and generating the semantic network shown (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
*Entrepreneurial motivations*



Note: Elaborated by authors based on survey data (2020).

The interviewees who expressed their desire to work for others would like to resume activities that they performed before their period in prison, also showing the desire to balance working for others with an entrepreneurial career.

All interviewees expressed an interest in opening their own business, expressing entrepreneurial intention by presenting a predisposition to entrepreneurial activity (Agolla et al, 2019; Paul et al, 2017): as shown by the following: “I would like to have my business” (EG1), “I am already thinking about my own business” (EG4). The reports corroborate data from GEM (2017) that shows 31 percent of adult Brazilians wish to have a business of their own, and 36 percent already own a business or have taken some action to have their own company.

The motivations that would lead interviewees to open a business were grouped into three registration units: ‘Entrepreneurship by necessity’, ‘Entrepreneurship by opportunity’, and ‘Personal achievement’. The latter category emerged from the field, contrasting the binary GEM (2017) categorization, and corroborates the perspective of Vale et al. (2014).

Entrepreneurship by necessity is common among interviewees, due to limited opportunity in the job market (Holzer et al, 2003), including, family pressure and dissatisfaction with the current situation pushing them toward entrepreneurship (Van der Zwan et al, 2016). The interviews reveal the difficulty of finding formal work, which directs them toward entrepreneurship by necessity:

Everyone inside thinks about starting a business because they already know how difficult it is to get a job after you leave prison. EG3

They do not give an opportunity. When an opening appeared, I would go, I was the first! But when they looked at my history and saw that I had gone through the system, they said: “Give me your number and I’ll call you later”. When I left, I spent almost ten years in this struggle looking for a formal job, but the doors were always closed. EG11

One of the interviewees mentioned that planning for his small enterprise started while he was still serving time in closed conditions. At the time of the interview, he was wearing an electronic anklet and had been under house arrest for three months, but he had opened a small shop in his home in a neighborhood on the outskirts of Fortaleza.

The motivation ‘entrepreneurship by opportunity’ emerged when respondents acknowledged the existence of certain business opportunities which have not yet been explored. Thus, there are entrepreneurial motivations related to the exploration of new opportunities based on human capital (Vale et al., 2014; Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016), as shown by these reports:

Some opportunities appeared in front of me, such as drop shipping, which is online sales without you having goods at home; another possibility is to open a sewing workshop with my aunt. EG4

To start a business is my idea now. I had this vision because one day I got home and my wife was gone., I had nothing to eat, I wanted to eat something fast and there was nothing close to home. And then I had this vision that something could work here, with the sale of snacks at night. EG12

In contrast to the binary GEM classification, accounts of entrepreneurial motivation as a personal achievement emerged from the interviewees. This was predicted in the research by McClelland (1972), which considered the feeling of personal achievement one of the main reasons driving the individual to entrepreneurship, and by Vale et al. (2014), as a need for achievement and accomplishment, in which the authors argued that entrepreneurial motivations are complex and multidimensional and should not be exclusively necessity versus opportunity.

In view of the above, the motivations that induce respondents to become entrepreneurs go beyond the binary classification of the GEM, as the interviewees are motivated by necessity, opportunity, and personal achievement, corroborating the research perspective of Vale et al. (2014). Entrepreneurial motivation results from the interactions between several complex factors that transcend the need for survival and the perception of business opportunities. This is a relevant finding of this research.

**Behavioral beliefs**

Behavioral beliefs regarding the assessment of individuals’ future as an entrepreneur fell into two registration units, “advantages of having their own business” and “disadvantages of having their own business”, resulting in the following semantic network (Figure 2).

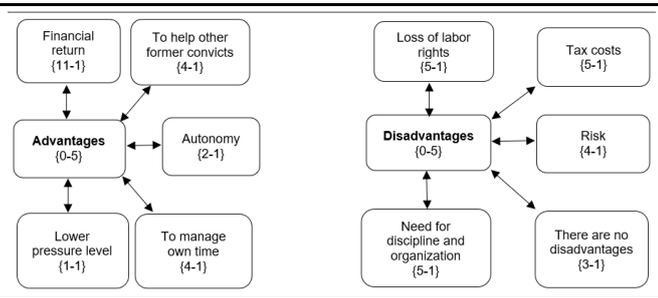
When choosing entrepreneurship, subjects consider the desire for autonomy and independence, along with the use of their knowledge and experience, the enjoyment of self-employment, and self-realization (Carter et al., 2003; Vale et al., 2014).

From the interviews, the following behavioral beliefs favorable to entrepreneurship were identified: financial return, time management, autonomy, lower pressure/stress level, and the prospect of helping other ex-convicts.

Financial need is a strong motivator for the individual to become autonomous and to choose entrepreneurship as a career option (Alstete, 2008), This is especially true in the period

immediately after incarceration, when former convicts face financial restrictions and develop activities that require little initial capital to start (Grosholz et al., 2020).

**Figure 2**  
*Behavioral beliefs*



Note: Elaborated by authors based on survey data (2020).

Former convicts see entrepreneurship as a viable way of earning income, as reported by EG6: “An advantage is an income, which I believe would be greater than a minimum wage, right?” The former convicts who already had a business before entering the prison system also agree that the financial return is one of the positive points of being an entrepreneur.

The results corroborate with Kautonen e Palmroos (2010), that argue increased income, the freedom to manage their own time, and independence are attractive prospects to entrepreneurs.

Self-discipline in managing one's time provokes a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship among prisoners who participate in entrepreneurial education programs (Grosholz et al., 2020), as the reports confirm: “One of the advantages is that you set your own hours, right?” (EG5) and “There are many advantages—having more time to solve my problems, for example” (EG3). These statements suggest the belief that entrepreneurship will bring more flexibility and free time, generating the belief ‘management of own time’.

Another belief was autonomy, which allows freedom of decision for the entrepreneur, offering the opportunity to work according to their values and objectives in addition to commanding and leading their business (Grosholz et al., 2020; Van Gelderen, 2010), as reported: “There are many advantages, just working for yourself, not for anyone else, that is already good. You do it your way” (EG3).

One of the interviewees believed that the level of pressure and stress in his career as an entrepreneur was lower compared to the pressure of working as a third-party employee, this being one of the advantages of having his own business. Such a report differs from the results indicated in the literature, since entrepreneurial activity generates stress for entrepreneurs at all level (Alstete, 2008).

One belief that stood out was called ‘helping other former convicts’. Four interviewees emphasized that, as entrepreneurs, they could generate job opportunities for other former convicts. Such externalizations reveal meeting the needs of third parties linked to the entrepreneur through bonds of an affective and family nature as a driving motivator to entrepreneurship (Vale et al., 2014), offering post-incarceration social support (Grosholz et al., 2020).

Regarding the disadvantages of having your own business, four beliefs were listed as being unfavorable to entrepreneurship: labor rights, tax costs, the need for discipline and organization,

and risk. It was also stated that there are no disadvantages to having your own business.

In terms of labor rights, five respondents said that they feared losing their labor rights, such as social security and severance pay, when opting for entrepreneurship: “The disadvantage is that being an employee, you have that guarantee, right? You have a proper job, you have guaranteed pay, you have a good salary, right? As an entrepreneur, you don’t” (EG5).

Also, mentioned as a disadvantage were the taxes. According to the interviewee, the high tax burden makes them question before acting — “The disadvantage is very high taxes; then we think twice” (EG7)—a reality evidenced by the GEM (2017) when warning that high taxes are a limiting factor for Brazilian entrepreneurship.

On the other hand, with the Individual Microentrepreneur program, it is possible to regularize entrepreneurial activities and guarantee social benefits such as retirement, exemption from federal taxes, and business registration fees through a single monthly payment (Behling et al., 2015). Thus, the disadvantages mentioned by the interviewees are remedied when choosing to formalize the business by joining the Individual Microentrepreneur program.

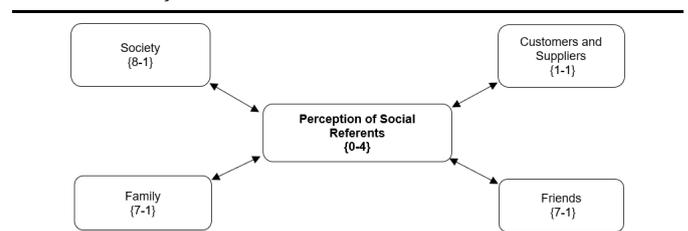
Even when pointing out the need for discipline, organization and risk as disadvantages, the interviewees maintained a positive attitude about the possibility of undertaking entrepreneurship: “You have to wake up early, you have to maintain a certain time, you have to be disciplined or the business gets messy [...]” (EG5), and “Disadvantages are just the risk of investing and losing” (EG7). The positive tone is also noted in the statements of three interviewees who were not able to point out any type of disadvantage in the possibility of having their own business.

The reports confirm the results of research showing that positive beliefs about the possibility of starting a business are related to the formation of a favorable attitude and that are directly related to the entrepreneurial intention (Ferreira et al., 2017; Liñán & Chen, 2009).

**Normative beliefs**

To investigate the influence of third parties on the entrepreneurial intent of the interviewees, the analysis category “Normative Beliefs” was linked to the context unit “Perception of Social Referents”, associated with four registration units: “Family” and “Friends” are considered social referents that influence the individual, in line with TPB (Ajzen, 1991); while the units “Society” and “Customers and Suppliers” emerged during the analysis as new social referents and considered relevant findings of this research, as illustrated in the semantic network ahead (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**  
*Normative beliefs*



Note: Elaborated by authors based on survey data (2020).

Normative beliefs indicate socio-environmental barriers to involvement in entrepreneurial activities (Ephrem et al., 2019; Liñán & Chen, 2009). This was confirmed by the identification of the referent ‘society’, cited by eight of the interviewees, which sees any action by a former offender with caution.

The only interviewee who had already undertaken entrepreneurship after leaving the prison, opening his own shop two months before the interview, agreed; he explained that he sees people’s disbelief about his enterprise and his plans for the future: “Today I see that many people do not believe that you can grow. They really don’t” (EG3).

This negative belief agrees with Pastore (2011), indicating that the aversion to ex-offenders can last for a lifetime and extend to society at large, and can be considered a social problem. In addition, GEM (2017) warns that society’s perception of minority groups affects the entrepreneurial intention of these individuals, as social norms interfere with how these subjects view life and its possibilities.

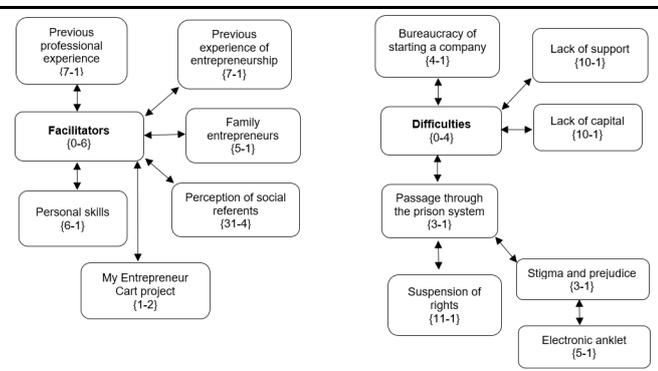
One interviewee, who had a car dealership, mentioned his views on possible customers’ and suppliers’ perception on him having his own business again: “For me to reopen my old business, there are many barriers. The biggest difficulty is how I would behave, not only with my clients, but with the environment that I will relate to” (EG2).

The most cited social referents were family and friends, closest contextual predictors (Ferreira et al., 2017), which exert great social pressure on entrepreneurial behavior (Ephrem et al., 2019; Grosholz et al., 2020). This corroborates the results of previous research, in which the expectations of these groups drive the decision to become an entrepreneur (Barros et al., 2014; Ferreira et al., 2017; Grosholz et al., 2020).

**Perceived control beliefs**

To highlight beliefs which enable and hinder entrepreneurial activity, related to their own individual capabilities, we conceived the analytical category of perceived control. This was investigated through the context units ‘facilitators’ and ‘difficulties’, as presented in the network semantics (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**  
*Perceived control beliefs*



Note: Elaborated by authors based on survey data (2020).

As facilitators, the following beliefs were identified: “previous professional experience”, “previous entrepreneur experience”, “My Entrepreneur Cart project”, “personal skills”, “family entrepreneurs”, and “support from social referents”.

Difficulties comprised four beliefs: “lack of capital”, “lack of support”, “bureaucracy”, and “gone through the prison system”.

Seven interviewees stated that previous professional experience would facilitate a new venture as an entrepreneur. One of the interviewees mentioned My Entrepreneur Cart, from the Living and Entrepreneurship Project, as something that would make his plan easier, to return to work as a freelancer selling barbecues, an activity he performed before going through the system.

The potential businesses targeted by former convicts are not unattainable and require little initial investment, given these subjects’ previous experience (Grosholz et al., 2020). They therefore recognize that entrepreneurial behavior is facilitated by experience, in line with Ajzen (1991).

Personal skills were considered facilitators in the attempt to open a business: some interviewees wanted to invest in areas that require a certain manual skill, recognizing their own aptitudes and their ability to control and master their behavior (Grosholz et al., 2020; Liñán & Chen, 2009).

The interviews indicated that “family entrepreneurs” and “support from social referents” are facilitators of entrepreneurial behavior. However, the influence of family and friends is not considered a perceived control belief since it is not related to an individuals’ skills, although the context can favor the development of entrepreneurial skills (Grosholz et al., 2020; Rodermund, 2004).

As difficulties, “lack of capital”, “lack of support”, and the “bureaucracy of starting a company” emerged from the field. These are difficulties faced by Brazilian entrepreneurs in general, not only perceived by the interviewees. According to the GEM (2017), the lack of financial resources, bureaucracy, legislation, and tax burdens are factors that limit entrepreneurial activity in Brazil.

Lack of support was pointed out as something that the interviewees perceived immediately after leaving prison. Some of the interviewees reported a lack of support from family members and close acquaintances, but it is important to note that three of them said they believed this lack of support from family came from genuine concern and overprotection over fears of a return to crime.

It is worth noting that lack of capital, lack of support, and bureaucracy also cannot be classified as beliefs of perceived control, since they do not refer to individual skills and abilities involved in entrepreneurial activity.

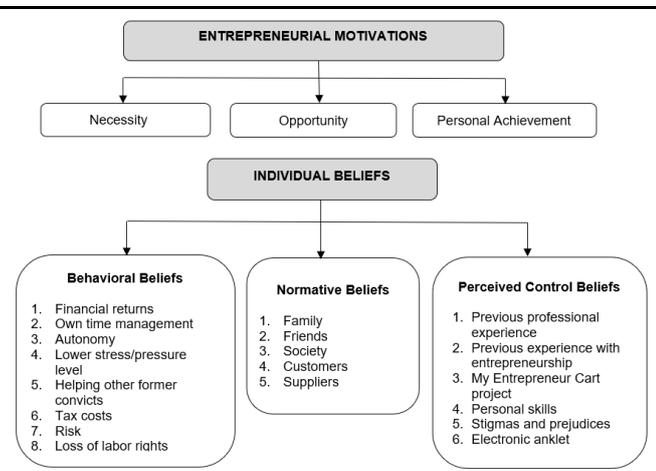
Going through the prison system emerged from the field and was created as a unit to group limiting factors from the ex-convicts. Among those are: (a) “loss of rights”, involving restrictions on legal documentation and other temporary loss of civil rights; and (b) “stigma and prejudice”, associated with the electronic anklet, which hinders performance and limits mobility and movement of the interviewees. For Ireland (2012), integrating the prisoner into social life means divesting oneself of social and cultural prejudices. The subjects’ statements suggest that not everyone can do that.

From the data analysis, it was possible to understand that: (a) entrepreneurial motivations from the interviewees did not meet the binary classification of GEM (2017), since personal

achievement emerged as another motivator; and (b) behavioral, normative, and perceived control beliefs contribute to the formation of interviewees' entrepreneurial intention. The research findings are summarized as follows (Figure 5).

**Figure 5**

*Conceptual map of the results*



Note: Elaborated by authors based on survey data (2020).

## CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to investigate the entrepreneurial motivations and the individual beliefs of individuals released from prison in Ceará regarding opening their own business, under the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

Regarding **entrepreneurial motivations**, all interviewees expressed their intention to open their own business, based on **necessity**, on **identifying opportunities**, and for **personal fulfillment**. This finding opposes the binary classification proposed by GEM (2017) and contributes to reinforce the perspective of Vale et al. (2014) that entrepreneurship is a result of multiple and non-exclusive motivations.

**Individual beliefs** were grouped according to Ajzen's (1991) classification, identifying advantages and disadvantages of starting a business, as well as factors that enable and hinder these activities, as perceived by each interviewee.

As such, among the **behavioral beliefs**, the following **advantages** were noted: financial returns, time management, autonomy, less stress/pressure to run the enterprise, and the possibility of helping other former convicts who suffer the same difficulty getting a job. The perceived **disadvantages** were tax costs, risk, loss of labor rights and security, and the need for discipline and organization. We note, however, three interviewees were unable to mention any disadvantage to entrepreneurship, suggesting a strong positive attitude.

Regarding **normative beliefs**, society was considered the social referent that **negatively** interferes with the decision to undertake entrepreneurship, while family and friends were the most cited reference groups that would provide **positive** support to the interviewees' decision to become an entrepreneur. Other social referents mentioned, but at lower importance, were customers and suppliers.

In terms of **beliefs of perceived control**, the following factors were considered **facilitators** to becoming an entrepreneur: previous professional experience, previous

experience of entrepreneurship, the My Entrepreneur Cart project, and personal skills, as they reflect the personal skills and the ability to control entrepreneurial behavior (Agolla et al., 2019). The interviews indicated that family entrepreneurs and the support of third parties were also facilitators in the decision to undertake entrepreneurship; however, such beliefs were not classified as perceived control, but rather as reinforcing the importance of social referents, through normative beliefs, as influencers of entrepreneurial behavior. The beliefs that **hinder** entrepreneurial intention: lack of capital, lack of support, bureaucracy in opening a company, and, above all, having gone through the prison system, since the interviewees have limiting beliefs about social stigma, prejudice and having to wear electronic anklets, in addition to being penalized by loss of rights, factors which can interfere with their ability to perform as entrepreneurs.

This research has the following limitations, (1) the diversity of the sample regarding criminal experience, which can interfere in perceptions of entrepreneurial motivations and beliefs; (2) the difficulty to access the public under custody of the courts, even in open and semi-open conditions, as some of the nominees were suspicious and refused to participate mere hours before the interview had been scheduled. It is suggested that future studies use a larger sample, considering the possibility of investigating inmates participating in the professional education programs offered by the prison system and proceeding to new analyses.

The main academic contribution of this study was to promote and expand the discussion on entrepreneurship as a career option after a period of deprivation of liberty. The study's innovative character is highlighted in presenting results that oppose the binary classification of entrepreneurial motivation described by the GEM (2017), in addition to reinforcing the importance of family and friends as social referents, since the interviewees reported that such referents would encourage them toward entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, the review of national studies on the reintegration of former offenders into the labor market by way of management seems scarce. Recognizing the low employability of ex-convicts as a policy problem may be the beginning of the debate on strategies that seek to minimize these negative impacts. This study is an invitation to discuss joint efforts between the government, the population, and academia to shift paradigms and remedy prejudices that continue to imprison ex-convicts, even when they are no longer surrounded by prison walls.

## Conflict of interest statement

*The authors declare that they have no financial, commercial, political, academic, or personal conflict of interest.*

## Authors' statement of individual contributions

Papéis	Contributions by authors			
	Albuquerque LC	Sousa ES	Fontenele RES	Lima TCB
Conceptualization	■	■		
Methodology	■		■	
Software	■	■		
Validation	■	■		
Formal analysis	■	■		
Investigation	■	■		
Resources	■	■	■	■
Data Curation	■	■	■	■
Writing - Original Draft	■			
Writing - Review & Editing		■		
Visualization	■	■	■	■
Supervision			■	■
Project administration			■	■
Funding acquisition			N.A.	

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