

PERSONAL STATEMENT

My interest in entrepreneurship comes from my own experiences as an entrepreneur. After my graduation in Industrial Engineering from Penn State University, I started working in AMF Automation—a factory automation company serving the food industry. Being a mid-size company, I was quickly initiated in the intricacies of managing challenging technology projects and working with big customers like Tyson Foods and Kroger. Getting first-hand experience of one of Porter's five forces—customer bargaining power, I was always forced to think of ways to reduce our operating costs. I realized there was considerable trial and error involved when our machines were being tested on the factory floor often leading to delays and cost overruns. I had worked at Penn State on a simulation project and thought of applying simulation modeling to validate our designs before the machines were sent for testing. The idea was so successful that a number of our customers also requested demos of our solutions so they could see how our layout could fit more efficiently within their factories. I began to think that there might potentially be a market for our small project beyond AMF Automation and our immediate clients. Along with two other colleagues, we started selling our simulation solutions through a partnership. While many companies showed interest they were unwilling to commit too many resources to an unproven idea especially for the small niche market we targeted. After spending a year soliciting potential customers, we closed our startup with good experience but not much cash. I realized that I needed to learn about the functioning of a business, which has led me to the PhD program in Business Administration.

I have had great mentors throughout this journey who have shaped my beliefs about the role of business academia in today's world. I worked on a project with Prof. Dan Turban from the University of Missouri that tried to understand the gender disparities in entrepreneurship. This work was published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and it attracted considerable media attention due to its non-intuitive implications. I have also investigated the rising phenomenon of social entrepreneurship with Prof. Shaker Zahra, and the way it has changed through globalization in a paper published in the *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*. The strong institutional support for research at the University of Minnesota reinforced my desire to work on topics that are not only socially relevant but also theoretically and empirically grounded.

My interest in solving problems facing real world entrepreneurs led me to co-develop a class on technology entrepreneurship with a colleague leveraging our technology backgrounds. Last Spring when we offered this class for the first time, we had two successful startups—one of which was Lunchbox a smart phone application that allowed customers to check out menus and order using their smart phone. Being a student startup the company had limited resources but their application required participation by both—local restaurants and potential users. While restaurants wanted to see customers using the application before they signed on, customers would not use the application unless they found all their favorite restaurants. While the entrepreneurs grappled with this 'chicken and the egg' conundrum, I struggled to find any books or articles that could inform these entrepreneurs. My dissertation topic developed from this question and I hope to develop prescriptive suggestions from my work that can inform future entrepreneurs who face similar questions. I have been invited to present my thesis proposal at the 2010 *Academy of Management Conference* in Montreal, CA. I was also selected as a *Kauffman Dissertation Fellow* by the *Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation* in 2009 which will help disseminate findings from my dissertation among the wider audience of academics and entrepreneurs.