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PEEKING INTO THE SUBJECTIVE NATURE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY: LIFE STORIES OF SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS (SUMMARY)

Ronit Yitshaki-Hagai
Bar Ilan University, Israel, yitshr@mail.biu.ac.il

Sharon Landa
Bar Ilan University, Israel

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SUMMARY

PEEKING INTO THE SUBJECTIVE NATURE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY:
LIFE STORIES OF SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS

Ronit Yitshaki, Bar Ilan University, Israel
Sharon Landa, Bar Ilan University, Israel

Principal Topic

Entrepreneurs are social agents who have unique personality traits that enable them to discover and exploit new opportunities (Gartner, 1985; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). While the current literature refers to entrepreneurs in heroic terms, attributing them with unique personality traits and capabilities (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Baron, 2004; Busenitz and Barney, 1997), these studies under-represent how entrepreneurs perceive their self identity as social agents and how they manage the emotional process associated with entrepreneurial activity (Goss, 2005; Baron, 2008). The aim of this study is to examine (1) how entrepreneurs perceive their self identity as social agents and how they construct their social role, and (2) how entrepreneurs relate to the emotional process associated with their activity.

Method

The study is based on in-depth interviews with 15 Israeli high-tech entrepreneurs. The aim of the study is to examine entrepreneurs’ stories in order to gain an insight into the way entrepreneurs perceive their self identity and social role from the references they make to past, present and future actions (Rae and Carswell, 2000; Hytti, 2005; Gartner, 2006).

Results and Implications

It was found that entrepreneurs related to the discrepancies between their socially constructed characteristics (as having high abilities) and their own, perceived self identity. Entrepreneurs related to the dysfunctional aspects of their so called "heroic" traits and their impact on their personal life. In addition, entrepreneurs anticipated their decision to become entrepreneurs as a natural stage of their professional career development, rather than as relying on an extraordinary ability to see opportunities that others are unable to recognize. This finding suggests that entrepreneurs construct their social role carefully, seeking less risk than assumed. The findings expose the emotional process that is associated with the construction of entrepreneurs self identity and their social role.

The findings contribute to the literature by suggesting that the entrepreneurial activity can instead be seen as a combination of two parallel levels of construction: social role construction that reflects the way in which entrepreneurial activity is socially constructed and self identity construction that is influenced by entrepreneurs' emotions and subjective perceptions. At the social construction level, the entrepreneurial activity is explicitly constructed by "heroic" entrepreneurs, who are considered to have superior traits. At the self construction level, the entrepreneurial activity is associated with an implicit process that is influenced by entrepreneurs' perceived self identity, emotional state and psychological ownership (Pierce, et al., 2001).

CONTACT: Ronit Yitshaki, yitshr@mail.biu.ac.il; (T): +972-3-5318839; (F) +972-3-7384037; Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel 52900.