ENTREPRENEURS’ IDENTITIES IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN HIGH-TECH AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS (SUMMARY)

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ENTREPRENEURS’ IDENTITIES IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN HIGH-TECH AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

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Main Topic

Entrepreneurial identities are cognitive schemas of interpretations and behavioral meanings that characterize entrepreneurs (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009; Murnieks, Mosakowski and Cardon, 2012). Entrepreneurs refer to themselves through self-categorization that establishes meanings and expectations associated with that role. Entrepreneurs’ self-identity is comprised by their action-orientation as innovators and risk-takers, and by their peripheral characteristics as organizers, facilitators and communicators. Entrepreneurs maintain two contradictory needs: distinctiveness and a need to differentiate the self-identity and a need for inclusiveness and belonging to a particular social group (Shepherd and Haynie, 2009). Anderson and Warren (2011) argue that entrepreneurs face the paradoxical identities sameness and otherness. Although entrepreneurs have multiple and paradoxical micro-identities, they are expected to present identity synergy and a high level of relatedness between identities (Pratt and Foreman, 2000).

In this study we explore entrepreneurs’ identities in two different contexts: high tech and social entrepreneurship. We propose that entrepreneurs identities may be organized in less synchronized ways as entrepreneurs can introduce their identities as a sequence of events, reflections and characteristics (Giddens, 1991) rather than by their overt actions as entrepreneurs as seen socially.

Methods/Key Propositions

Based on life stories of 40 Israeli entrepreneurs, 20 high tech and 20 social entrepreneurs the findings indicate that high tech entrepreneurs’ expressed less synchronization between identities as compared to social entrepreneurs. High-tech entrepreneurs’ narratives toward their identities contained self-criticism of their sameness and otherness. High-tech entrepreneurs tend to diminish their personal capabilities as contrasted to their mystified image as social heroes. Compared to high tech entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs presented higher synergies between their identities. Social entrepreneurs devote less attention to their need to synchronize sameness and otherness.

Results/Implications

Our findings extend the literature in several ways. First, it compares entrepreneurs’ identities in different contexts and shows differences in types of entrepreneurs. Secondly, the findings contribute to the understanding that entrepreneurial identities have several overlapping dimensions of evolution: 1. the individual level - evolution identities of each entrepreneur story, 2. the contextual level – identities evolution within the context in which the organization operates (high-tech or social arenas) and 3. the cultural level – the evolution of entrepreneurial identities within given culture. Thirdly, the findings contribute to the entrepreneurial affect literature.

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