6-7-2014

*(EDUCATED) WOMEN AND MEN DIFFER: SOCIAL AND COMMERCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPARED (SUMMARY)*

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Recommended Citation
Estrin, Saul; Mickiewicz, Tomasz; and Stephan, Ute (2014) "(EDUCATED) WOMEN AND MEN DIFFER: SOCIAL AND COMMERCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPARED (SUMMARY)," *Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research*: Vol. 34 : Iss. 15 , Article 1.  
Available at: https://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol34/iss15/1

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Principal Topics

Recent evidence suggests that social entrepreneurship can support an entrepreneurial society (Estrin, Mickiewicz & Stephan, 2013; Mair, Marti & Ventresca, 2012), and may thus facilitate a virtuous circle for economic development. In this study, we explore the individual-level characteristics from which this circle originates. In particular, we compare the role of education and gender for commercial and social entrepreneurship, and investigate the moderating effect of the institutional environment on these relationships.

Drawing on career choice theories which highlight the importance of individual values for occupational decisions (Ashby & Schoon, 2010), we suggest that individuals with higher education and females may be relatively more likely to engage in social compared to commercial entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship is a career choice particularly consistent with pro-social values, which are more common among the highly educated and women (e.g. Schwartz, 2009; Schwartz & Rubel-Lifschitz, 2009). With strong national constitutional-level institutions in place, entrepreneurial success is to a greater extent due to individual skill and effort rather than arbitrary external circumstances. In such institutional contexts, entrepreneurial entry is likely an increasingly appealing choice for highly educated individuals who can draw on their skills and knowledge acquired through education.

Methods

We apply two-equation, multilevel, generalised structural equation modelling to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor data collected in 2009 merged with country-level institutional indicators. We use nationally representative samples of 114,341 individuals and 47 countries. Our dependent variables are individual social and commercial entry.

Results and Implications

We find support for our hypotheses. We contribute to entrepreneurship theory by enhancing the understanding of the differences and similarities between social and commercial entrepreneurship, and add to research on education and entrepreneurship. First, we provide evidence that the two types of entrepreneurship attract different individuals. Thus our results suggest that social entrepreneurship “widens the funnel” of entry into entrepreneurial activity, bringing in individuals who are otherwise not attracted to entrepreneurship (especially highly educated individuals and women). Second, we found that higher education closes the gender gap in social entrepreneurial entry. Third, we shed light on the type of national institutions that create boundary conditions for the effects of education on entrepreneurial entry.

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