LISTENING TO HOW WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS VIEW SUCCESS: A CONTEXTUAL EXPLANATION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL BEHAVIOR (SUMMARY)

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Recommended Citation
Ettl, Kerstin; Black, Laura J.; and Welter, Friederike (2015) "LISTENING TO HOW WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS VIEW SUCCESS: A CONTEXTUAL EXPLANATION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL BEHAVIOR (SUMMARY)," Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research: Vol. 35 : Iss. 7 , Article 3.
Available at: https://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol35/iss7/3
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A CONTEXTUAL EXPLANATION OF
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Principal Topic

Success, often measured quantitatively with economic factors, is an enduring topic in entrepreneurship research. Seldom do studies ask entrepreneurs about success from their perspective. Entrepreneurs and their firms are closely connected, however; company development depends not only on anticipated economic consequences but also on how the business interacts with other areas of the founder’s life. It is useful to consider influences of individual motives and goals on the entrepreneurial process. We examine the entrepreneur’s view of success empirically and theoretically as a contextualized outcome based on the founders’ goals and motives, shaped by personal norms as well as professional norms. We explore three questions: Which contextual factors most affect the individual’s understanding of success? How do entrepreneurs’ own success definitions influence entrepreneurial intention, behavior, and company development? How should entrepreneurs’ definitions of success inform entrepreneurship research?

Method

Conceptually we build on expanded version of Ajzen’s theory of planned behavior. Empirically we draw on findings from interviews of 31 German and 12 US women entrepreneurs. Using system dynamics methods, we use interview analyses to create causal models of interviewees’ experiences, motivations, actions, and outcomes. We then identify common themes to develop a model of success and factors that influence it, as well as its effects on intention and behavior.

Results and Implications

We show that personal and social norms influence the individual’s view of success; thus “success” is highly individual and not easily quantifiable. Nevertheless, we observe that influencing factors in Germany and the USA are thematically similar. The emerging model helps clarify the interrelationships among factors affecting success-in-context and portrays the strong influence of contextual aspects on entrepreneurs’ goals and success definitions. An entrepreneur’s personal success definition, along with perceived professional norms, subsequently affect intention, behavior, and company development. The study underscores the diversity of today’s entrepreneurs, and qualitative data and system dynamics methods contribute to more richly textured, holistic understanding. We argue that future research should explore entrepreneurial behaviors that economic indicators alone cannot capture, as they are affecting what founders do and how companies develop.

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