MINDFULNESS AND TAKING ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTION (SUMMARY)

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MINDFULNESS AND TAKING ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTION

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Principal Topic

Research in psychology, neuroscience, and medicine provides evidence that mindfulness - attention to and awareness of present events and experience - affects cognition, emotions, behavior, and physiology in beneficial ways, and leads to better workplace functioning (Good et al., 2015). Although mindfulness generally has beneficial effects, Good et al. do raise questions whether mindfulness detracts from, or is conducive to goal pursuit in performance settings. This paper investigates the role of mindfulness in relation to taking entrepreneurial action. We theorize that both high and low levels of mindfulness can have positive or negative effects on taking entrepreneurial action.

Method

We test our hypotheses with two waves of original survey data from the Swedish adult population. We identified 450 individuals with an interest in commencing start-up activities within the next six months and asked them to respond to Brown and Ryan's (2003) dispositional mindfulness scale. Six months later, we asked the same individuals to report on the extent to which they had taken action to realize the intended new venture.

Results and Implications

Our findings point to a multifaceted effect of mindfulness on taking entrepreneurial action. On the one hand, high levels of dispositional mindfulness are associated with not taking any action, when compared to taking some action. On the other hand, when the individual crosses the threshold from no action to some action, the relationship between mindfulness and the extent of action undertaken has a clear U-shape: individuals either low or high on mindfulness take more action than individuals with medium levels of mindfulness. A possible explanation for our findings is that those high and low in mindfulness start qualitatively different businesses. Mindful individuals may be more often involved in endeavours that have aspects of social entrepreneurship or that consider environmental aspects. For individuals low in mindfulness, it may be easier to close themselves from negative repercussions of their actions. As a consequence, those high in mindfulness may have higher thresholds before taking action, but once these thresholds are satisfied, they take much action. Good et al. (2015) discuss mindfulness as a root construct, arguing that mindfulness can fundamentally alter our conception of human life as mindfulness tends to focus on ‘being’ rather than ‘having’ or ‘doing’. Combining these two modes involves transcending paradox. A wider future research question is how ‘being-while-doing’ or ‘being-while-obtaining’ can be implemented together.

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