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SUMMARY

IS PASSION CONTAGIOUS? TRANSFERENCE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL EMOTION TO EMPLOYEES

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Principal Topic

An emerging stream of research concerns the powerful role emotion plays in enhancing the success potential of would-be entrepreneurs. Yet entrepreneurs do not act alone; successful recruitment and management of employees are critical factors influencing the success of emerging ventures. A growing body of literature on alternative models of human resource management in such firms has emerged.

Interestingly, we have only anecdotal evidence concerning the role that emotions of non-founders, or recruited employees of entrepreneurial firms, play in influencing firm survival and success. It is a theoretical puzzle whether strong emotions of entrepreneurs themselves, perhaps combined with effective HRM, are enough to lead to firm success, or whether in small firms the emotions of the employees are also important. Work by Dean Shephard (2003) suggests that employees feel the grief of failed ventures along with founders, so it seems likely that employees may also feel more positive emotions similar to those of the founder.

Drawing from the psychological literature on emotions and emotional contagion, as well as literature on transformational leadership, we build a model of emotional transference within the entrepreneurial context, and discuss the potential implications of such transference on employee persistence, commitment, and creativity, and ultimately on venture survival and success.

Results and Implications

Research on the psychological, cognitive, and emotional aspects of entrepreneurship have focused primarily on the founder and on founding teams, rather than on employees of emerging ventures. This paper begins to address this void by focusing on 1) the ability of entrepreneurs to transfer strong emotions, such as passion, to employees, and 2) the relationship between employee emotions towards the venture and their subsequent behaviors that have a significant distal impact on venture level outcomes.

The second implication of this work concerns the necessity for teaching entrepreneurs how to transfer positive emotions to other employees that will increase their commitment to the venture, and offering suggestions for how to do this, drawing from research on emotional contagion and transformational leadership. The practical impact of this work is to provide guidance on how effective HRM can be combined with enhanced emotional regulation skills of both entrepreneurs and their employees, in order to enhance venture success.

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