A PHYSICIAN WITH A SOUL OF A COOK? ENTREPRENEURIAL PERSONALITY ACROSS OCCUPATIONS (SUMMARY)

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Principal Topic

There is a debate in the entrepreneurship literature whether personality plays a role for the decision to be an entrepreneur. While empirical evidence often reveals a significant relationship between personality traits and the self-employment status, critics of the personality approach claim that differences among entrepreneurs might even be larger than differences among entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs. This paper draws on Holland’s (1985) theory of vocational behavior which emphasizes a key role of personality for individuals’ vocational choices. I examine empirically whether pro-entrepreneurial types of individuals are likely to make different vocational choices than those who prefer to stay in paid employment. Moreover, I investigate how personality affects entrepreneurial choice within occupations.

Method

For the empirical analysis I use the Socio-Economic Panel Data, which is a representative survey of German households. Self-employment status was used as a proxy for the concept of entrepreneurship. A validated psychological construct which measures the Big Five dimensions of personality was implemented in wave 2009. We define a pro-entrepreneurial personality as a deviation of an individual’s personality from an entrepreneurial reference type that has the highest possible scores on conscientiousness, openness to experience, extraversion and has the lowest possible scores on agreeableness and neuroticism. The respondents’ occupations were classified according to the Holland’s (1985) occupational classification which contains six occupational types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (RIASEC). Control variables include age, gender, marital status, nationality, years of formal education, and parental self-employment. The hypotheses are tested by means of logistic regressions.

Results and Implications

The results suggest that personality affects both vocational and entrepreneurial choices. We find that pro-entrepreneurial personality is strongly associated with the choice of enterprising occupations. However, artistic and investigative occupational environments, which also demonstrate rather high self-employment rates, were not associated with the pro-entrepreneurial personality. Therefore, it appears more likely that high self-employment rates in those occupations are due to the supportive environment (e.g., level of entrepreneurial opportunities, entrepreneurial career models, or low entry barriers) which enables people to become entrepreneurs, rather than to the personality. Further investigations reveal that the effect of personality on entrepreneurial choice might differ substantially across occupations. Hence, future research should more precisely define entrepreneurial personality depending on the environment in which entrepreneurs act.

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