
Editorial

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The special issue on ‘Entrepreneurs under pressure: the tensions and dark sides of entrepreneurial life’ aims to highlight a set of alternative discussions in the current entrepreneurship discourse. Research has for a long time put entrepreneurs as of great importance for bringing growth and occupation to society. As a likely result, the dominant path for academic inquiry in the field of entrepreneurship has been to study success and the road to success (i.e., positive consequences of entrepreneurship) by researching a laundry list of factors such as strategy, environment, motivation, and competence or experience levels of entrepreneurs. Still, we know that the success is often not obtained without sacrifices and strong commitment and that there could be potentially ‘darker sides’ of entrepreneurial life. In practise, many entrepreneurs can witness that the road to success is not without obstacles and that establishing a new venture can involve extremely hard work. Signs of too large sacrifices would be burn-out syndromes, tension, depression, extensive conflicts between work and family, and increasing sick leave. Moreover, entrepreneurship as a process of novelty may violate borderline cases for current rules, norms and ethical standards.

To this background, it is not that surprising that the above issues have not received much attention in entrepreneurship studies. This may be a potential shortcoming while

costs for disablement and other negative consequences can be high. There are a number of stakeholders (for instance, employees, investors, banks, and society) besides the entrepreneurs themselves that can suffer significantly if the entrepreneurs make too large a sacrifice or fail to establish and organise a venture around a spotted opportunity. This makes it also possible as costs on a societal level. As a response, to the above points raised, the articles in this special issue focus on the potential threats and pressures in entrepreneurial life, focusing on tensions and darker sides related to opportunity recognition and exploitation.

The special issue is based upon a collection of four articles. The authors use different conceptual approaches, units of analyses, observation points and empirical connections to study potential tensions and dark sides of entrepreneurial life and existence.

In the first article, entitled 'The costs of entrepreneurship', Parker explores issues beyond entrepreneurship as something that is believed to solve a wide variety of organisational and economic challenges while instead focusing upon costs involved in enterprising. While doing so, the article elaborates upon monetary and non-monetary costs that influence entrepreneurs themselves, and those costs that affect the society. Parker finds in a conceptual analysis that for instance entrepreneurial over optimism, entrepreneurial work culture, unproductive and destructive entrepreneurship are causes to entrepreneurial costs. Maintaining that practitioners and policy-makers should not discourage entrepreneurship altogether, the article discusses mitigation of such costs on individuals and society, by the entrepreneurs themselves as well as interventions of third parties and policy-making. In a discussion of the challenge involved in proposing interventions that can reduce costs without diminished benefits, public policies is suggested to pay attention to issues such as dysfunctional business decision-making, intellectual property rights and unproductive lobbying for the society at large. The article calls for further research on this – what could be considered as a costs benefit balance of entrepreneurship – how to minimise the costs, while preserving benefits.

The second article, entitled 'Identifying sources of occupational stress in entrepreneurs for measurement' by Grant and Ferris, focuses upon what could potentially be a personal oriented cost of entrepreneurs – occupational stress – and how such experiences could be involved in the daily working lives of entrepreneurs. Although something that can be an important issue for entrepreneurs engaged in venturing, the authors point out that studies on the sources of stress ('stressors') faced by entrepreneurs is lacking. In response, this research combines previous literature, focus groups and interviews with entrepreneurs to identify salient sources of occupational stress. The result of the study is a list of categories of stressors grouped in themes such as administration issues, establishing/maintaining the business, and factors in areas related to financial, interpersonal, public image/selling yourself, responsibility, uncontrollable situations, and workload. These themes are connected to approximately 30 subcategories within these broader dimensions that could be used as a pool for measures of occupational stressors specific to entrepreneurs. Grant and Ferris suggest these could be captured in something that they call the Sources of Entrepreneurial Stress Scale (SESS). This is thus a call for future research to develop valid measures that specifically address entrepreneurial stressors and to assist progress in knowledge generation related to occupational stress and entrepreneurship. In an effort to address the neglect in previous work, the research should also encourage future work to explore the darker side on issues such as taxation issues, personal risk, role conflict, stakeholder expectations, responsibility, and workload.

The third article, entitled 'Entrepreneurs' health – the importance of psychosocial working conditions and individual factors' and authored by Vinberg, Gundersen, Nordenmark, Larsson and Landstad, suggests that the health conditions of entrepreneurs might be an issue that is neglected but important for understanding resources that contribute to success of entrepreneurial behaviour. While doing so, the study focuses upon explaining health consequences for entrepreneurs based upon individual characteristics, individual resources and psychosocial working conditions. The health issues focused upon is explaining differences related to self-rated health, sickness presence and sickness absence based upon explanatory factors such as gender, age, change competence, job demands, physical exercise, social activities and social support. Vinberg et al. conclude that efforts directed towards improving health conditions of entrepreneurs needs to focus upon individual as well as organisational characteristics. Noticing that individual characteristics, resources and venture working conditions is important for the health resources needed for entrepreneurial behaviour and venture development, this research leaves important implications for further research. Especially, the authors suggest that reflection and/or behaviour training can be important strategies for entrepreneurs to avoid and cope with challenging working conditions.

Finally, in the fourth article, entitled 'Corruption and the ethical context of country-level entrepreneurship', Anokhin and Acar present results from a study on corruption and the ethical context of country-level entrepreneurship. Interested in corruption as a form of business risk and by drawing parallels between societal ethical standards and uncertainty, the authors propose that important insights into understanding ethical standards may be developed by comparing levels of perceived and actual corruption. The authors find support for an inverted U-shaped relationship between the level of ethical standards and innovative activities. Interestingly, the study results argue for that moderate levels of ethical standards are preferable both to domestic innovative activities and foreign involvement of a country. This implies that the ethical contribution to entrepreneurial activities may be a rather complicated issue to consider. The authors discuss that it seems to be an optimal amount of the ethical standards to domestic innovative activities and attraction to foreign capital. This suggests that entrepreneurship research interested in ethics can potentially benefit from acknowledging that there could be a naturally costly dark side to the most desirable and highly promoted entrepreneurial efforts.

The select of the articles related to this special issue contribute to the development of dialogues of potential costs involved in entrepreneurship. In summary, we hope that the articles inspire to new research and new research opportunities related to the particular theme we highlight. The engagement of entrepreneurial activity worldwide is significant, and entrepreneurship education is considered to be one of the more fast growing. As such, it is likely that we need to broaden our interests and themes of discussion. Counting the number of specialised journals witness of a discipline that is in need for alternative dialogues and new debates. The goal of this special issue is to stimulate this development and some potentially new areas of academic inquiry in entrepreneurship research.