

The Lonely Entrepreneur: Antecedents and Effects of Social Isolation on Entrepreneurial Intention and Output

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Abstract : The purpose of this research is to provide the foundations for a broad research agenda examining the role loneliness plays in entrepreneurship. While qualitative research in entrepreneurship incidentally captures the existence of loneliness as a part of the lived reality of entrepreneurs, to the authors' knowledge, no academic work has to date explored this construct in this context. Moreover, many individuals reporting high levels of loneliness (women, ethnic minorities, immigrants, low income, low education) reflect those who are currently driving small business growth in the United States. Loneliness is a persistent state of emotional distress which results from feelings of estrangement and rejection or develops in the absence of social relationships and interactions. Empirical work finds links between loneliness and depression, suicide and suicide ideation, anxiety, hostility and passiveness, lack of communication and adaptability, shyness, poor social skills and unrealistic social perceptions, self-doubts, fear of rejection, and negative self-evaluation. Lonely individuals have been found to exhibit lower levels of self-esteem, higher levels of introversion, lower affiliative tendencies, less assertiveness, higher sensitivity to rejection, a heightened external locus of control, intensified feelings of regret and guilt over past events and rigid and overly idealistic goals concerning the future. These characteristics are likely to impact entrepreneurs and their work. Research identifies some key dangers of loneliness. Loneliness damages human love and intimacy, can disturb and distract individuals from channeling creative and effective energies in a meaningful way, may result in the formation of premature, poorly thought out and at times even irresponsible decisions, and produce hard and desensitized individuals, with compromised health and quality of life concerns. The current study utilizes meta-analysis and text analytics to distinguish loneliness from other related constructs (e.g., social isolation) and categorize antecedents and effects of loneliness across subpopulations. This work has the potential to materially contribute to the field of entrepreneurship by cleanly defining constructs and providing foundational background for future research. It offers a richer understanding of the evolution of loneliness and related constructs over the life cycle of entrepreneurial start-up and development. Further, it suggests preliminary avenues for exploration and methods of discovery that will result in knowledge useful to the field of entrepreneurship. It is useful to both entrepreneurs and those work with them as well as academics interested in the topics of loneliness and entrepreneurship. It adopts a grounded theory approach.

Keywords : entrepreneurship, grounded theory, loneliness, meta-analysis

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