

JAK RODIČE PODPORUJÍ ÚSPĚŠNÉ PODNIKATELE

HOW PARENTS FOSTER SUCCESSFUL FOUNDERS

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Abstrakt

Účelem tohoto výzkumu bylo zjistit, do jaké míry přispěl vliv rodičů k úspěchu prvního podnikání jejich potomků. Vzorek studie zahrnoval případovou studii 20 technologicky založených start-upů působících v Německu. Pro sběr a analýzu dat byly použity kvalitativní metody; polostrukturované rozhovory jako výzkumný nástroj a odpovědi byly analyzovány pomocí obsahové analýzy. Hlavní zjištění byla, že rodina měla významný vliv na úspěch start-upu v Německu a méně žen než mužských podnikatelů se zapojilo do start-upu, což obojí odpovídá dřívějšímu výzkumu. Nová zjištění zahrnovala, že rodiče, kteří nebyli podnikateli, měli také podstatný vliv na úspěšnost start-upu a že rodiče podporovali rozvoj praktických dovedností souvisejících s komunikací, networkingem a soutěživostí. Hlavním omezením studie byl malý vzorek, takže jsou doporučeny další studie s velkými reprezentativními vzorky, aby se tato zjištění potvrdila.

Klíčová slova: podnikání, start-up, vliv rodičů, úspěch

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to establish the extent to which parental influence contributed to the success of their offspring's first start-up. The study sample comprised a case study of 20 technology-based start-ups operating in Germany. Qualitative methods were employed for data gathering and analysis; semi-structured interviews as the research instrument and responses were analysed using content analysis. The major findings were that family was the major influence on start-up success in Germany, and fewer females than male entrepreneurs were engaged in start-up, both corresponding with earlier research. New findings included that parents who were not entrepreneurs also had substantial influence on start-up success, and that parents encouraged development of practical skills, related to communication, networking and competitiveness. The main limitation of the study was the small sample so that further studies are recommended with large representative samples, in order to validate these findings.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, start-up, parental influence, success

Introduction

Start-up businesses are vital to global and national economic growth. Their importance is also represented by start-up funding in excess of \$US 600 billion in 2021, and more than 1000 examples of start-ups referred to as unicorns, privately owned start-up companies, which are valued at more than \$US1 billion that demonstrate

exponential growth (Jurgens 2022; Bucholz 2022). Many of the most successful globally renowned entrepreneurs were influenced to create start-ups by their family background, for instance Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk and Bill Gates. The support needed for the commercialisation of MS-DOS, Gates' first operating system, was obtained as a result of his mother's contact network of IBM executives (Marks

2021). However, empirical academic evidence of the influence parents has on their children as they are growing up, which provides them with the attributes and inspires them to become founders of new businesses, is sparse. The number of empirical studies that illustrate the influence that parents have on the success of their children who found their first start-ups is very limited, confirming a significant gap in the existing literature; even fewer are based in Germany or include German participants. This knowledge gap motivated this research to determine exactly what factors of family life inspired young people to start a new small business.

Theoretical Background

Start-up Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is associated with the extremely complex process of creating new organisations, which is influenced by a range of factors (Gartner 1988). Entrepreneurs are exceptionally creative individuals responsible for the technological developments that foster economic growth and are characterised by specific personality traits, which include self-starter, controller, risk taker, extrovert, neurotic personality, and speculator (Kerr *et al.* 2017). The entrepreneurial process that they initiate is exemplified by active performance comprising strategy development, action planning, networking, prompting feedback and learning from mistakes (Kerr *et al.* 2017). However, it also possesses a vital intangible element, a soul or energy, which generates intense zeal and extremely strong, multi-layered connections between members of the start-up firm that ensures shared commitment to accomplishing challenging goals (Giuliani 2019). The components of the start-up soul were empirically determined to comprise of corporate passion to make a meaningful impact, extremely close customer relationships and employees being encouraged to generate and develop own ideas and share in decision making, referred to as having choice and a voice in start-up development (Giuliani 2019). Education, training mental ability, knowledge and experience are other vital entrepreneurial components, which can be applied to the creation and development of the business, according to Kerr *et al.* (2017). However, the specific personality traits, knowledge and skills that differentiate entrepreneurs from others employed in the corporate environment, vary considerably. The underlying reason for this disparity is that each research study identifies specific traits relating to the individual(s) that is/are the focus of the research (Levine, Rubenstein 2017). The inference of this variation is that the type of entrepreneurial activity undertaken will be dictated in the skills and knowledge of the individual entrepreneur, the specific traits they will need to make the activity successful.

Start-ups are a unique business configuration, which differs from generic entrepreneurial activity. They are distinctive as new, independent, very small or micro companies with on-going operations, and a reputation for innovation and for scaling-up operations in a relatively short period of time (Kollmann 2019; Luger, Koo 2005). Start-ups also tend to adopt unconventional approaches to business and business relationships compared with established firms (Luger & Koo, 2005). The start-up phase of the business lifecycle varies, depending on rate of revenue growth and jobs created, is typically 10 years or less, and its products or services, technologies and novel business models (European StartUp Monitor 2016).

In Germany, start-up activity makes a major contribution to national economic growth, job growth, competitiveness and innovation; 8136 new start-ups were recorded in three years to December 2020 (Startupdetector 2020), 20% of which were digital companies (Cedefop 2018).

Parental Influence on Successful Start-ups

According to the large study on 204,074 students from 28 OECD countries, which investigated the relationship between an individual's social identity and intention to become an entrepreneur, where parents and/or peer group were the possible influencers (Falck *et al.* 2009), 4.16% of German students had a parent in an entrepreneurial occupation, and approximately 0.9% of German students intended to become an entrepreneur. The results also showed that when the student's parents were in an entrepreneurial business, the entrepreneurial intention of that individual was 2.8 to 3.3 percentage points higher than if they were not entrepreneurial. Students with entrepreneurial peers also influenced entrepreneurial intention. The study also concluded that entrepreneurial identity was developed over a long time period and depended on being exposed to the entrepreneurial characteristics of parents and peers to some extent. However, a major limitation of the study is that the relative success level of entrepreneurs, who developed skills and knowledge consequent on parental influence, is not tested.

Germany was also included in quantitative research conducted in 14 counties with a sample of 2164 students, average age 23.5 years, studying business in different universities; 192 students were German, 104 females and 88 males (Engle *et al.* 2011). The research confirmed that family is a significant predictor of entrepreneurial intent for the German sub sample and that parental experience with small business ownership has a positive effect on entrepreneurial intent in Germany. However, this study provides no indication of how parents, role models or friends influence the degree of entrepreneurial success in the first start-up venture.

A systematic review of 92 empirical studies published between 1989 and 2019, concerned with the link between entrepreneurship and the family role, however, only 4 studies were conducted in Germany (Cardella *et al.* 2020). It revealed five core issues related to entrepreneurs, which had dominated the growth in studies about them, the most prevalent was entrepreneurial intention linked to parental influence. However, none were directed at the extent of success of the start-ups, where the founder was exposed to parental influence. The main focus of all of the German studies was the influence of a role model on a young person's intention to become an entrepreneur, at which points in the start-up life cycle the role model was important, and how parental profession had an impact on entrepreneurial intentions. The main finding was that empirical intention was weaker if the entrepreneur's parents were employed in the public rather than the private sector (Fritsch, Rusakova 2012).

This literature search suggests that a huge knowledge gap exists as to how, and to what extent, parental influence is a factor in the success of start-ups initiated by their offspring in Germany. Therefore, the research problem of this study was to scrutinise the type of participation, which German start up founders' parents provide in development of the human, physical and social capital associated with the profitability and growth of their first start-up.

Objectives

The aim of this study is to identify how parental influence during childhood and adolescence contributed to the success of start-up businesses. This is approached from two perspectives:

- how first-time founders perceived that parental influences had contributed to the success of their first start-up businesses;
- when reflecting on those experiences, founder's suggestions of the attributes, which they would attempt to develop in their own children to support their success as founders of a first start up.

The scope of the study is restricted to first-time founders of start-ups based in Germany.

Methodology

The empirical study adopted a subjective stance in recognition that subjective human opinions would be employed to meet the research objectives of: identifying how parental influence contributed to a new founder's start-up success; how the founders in this study would adapt the nature of their parental influence to the next generation of the family as a consequence of their experiences (Saunders *et al.* 2019). The research design was exploratory research, selected because its flexible framework facilitated changing the direction of the study if new information emerged that required

further investigation. The research strategy was case study, an in-depth appraisal of 20 start-up businesses (Yin 2018). Case study strategy facilitated asking questions regarding, what, who, when, why and how to resolve the issue of how parental influence impacted the offspring's success as a first-time entrepreneur and subsequently their perception of the attributes they would develop in their children to support their success as first time founders. Qualitative methods were used for data gathering and analysis.

Sample

A purposive sample of 20 first-time founders operating throughout Germany was accessed from the German firm StartUp Detector (Startupdetector 2020), which includes 501 start-ups founded between 1 December 2017 and 31 December 2020. Our sample included 17 males and 3 females aged between 18 and 45. All start-ups were technology-based and the majority, i.e., 13, was located in Baden Wurttemberg and North Rhine Westphalia. The number of employees varied between 9 and 25 and annual revenues for 2022 vary from €5 million to zero. The profile of each start-up business is presented in Table 1.

Data Collection/Analysis

Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews with first-time founders, the interviews were conducted by means of a video conferencing platform (Ritchie, Lewis 2013). The ethical aspects of the research involving human participation were adhered to: potential interviewees were contacted and asked to participate in the research; they were informed of its purpose and that all information gathered would be confidential and stored securely. Prior to the start of the interview, all interviewees were provided with a written statement about the purpose of the interview, its format and time scale, and asked to confirm their agreement to take part in the interview and to it being recorded (Saunders *et al.* 2019). The pre-prepared interview questions had been translated into German to ensure their meaning could not be misunderstood. The interview began with category questions that provided personal details, educational attainment and family background.

The two major questions were:

1. Please describe the main features of your start-up.
2. Parental Influence on Success:
 - i) Please specify the major aspects of your upbringing, which have supported you to be a successful first-time entrepreneur?
 - ii) Which aspects of your childhood and adolescence had a negative impact on your success as an entrepreneur?

After the interviews were completed, the conversations were transcribed to text and translated

Tab. I: Start-Up Business Profile

	Year Founded	Employees	Revenues 2022 (€)	Business Valuation (€)	Sector
E1	2022	9	50,000	750,000	Online Marketing
E2	2020	6	100,000	n/a	e-Commerce
E3	2018	45	2 million	4 million	Food
E4	2020	0	0	5 million	Social Media
E5	2020	0	100,000	2.5 million	Career Platform
E6	2020	12	100,000	5million	EduTech
E7	2019	0	25,000	200,000	FinTech
E8	2019	15	5 million	35 million	E-Commerce Social Media
E9	2018	8	500,000	n/a	Electronic Optical Equipment
E10	2020	9	0	6 million	Career Platform
E11	2020	25	3 million	5 million	Online Marketing
E12	2020	14	500,000	4 million	Travel
E13	2018	5	1.8 million	n/a	Healthcare
E14	2019	6	> 100,000	7 million	MedTech
E15	2018	30	4.5 million	20 million	Electrical Engineering
E16	2019	2	200,000	800,000	e-commerce
E17	2018	0	No longer in business	No longer in business	MedTech
E18	2018	0	100,000	500,000	EduTech
E19	2021	12	200,000	5.5 million	Electrical Engineering
E20	2018	2	800,000	4.5 million	Beverage

back into English. Content analysis was employed to categorise the responses and all transcripts were read line by line to identify the parts of the responses that aligned with the major categories, and their subcategories: Entrepreneurs and Parental Influence; Start-up Company; Entrepreneurship (Mayring 2014).

Results

Family and Business Profiles

The responses to the category questions facilitated the personal profile: participant qualifications, parents' qualifications and work background (see Table 2).

Parental Influence

The single-family home, a symbol of German culture, influenced one participant to be motivated to create their own business and to make a difference:

"this is what I have created, and this is my mark, my footprint in the world" (E1).

Many participants stressed the importance that their parents placed on gaining qualifications; several founders' parents had degrees and valued them, which generated certain expectations of educational attainment. and advice on the type of institution most suitable for degree study:

"I got to decide whether to go to a private university or to a state university... the private university helped me insofar as I got into the founders' institute of

a university in Heidelberg, which I probably wouldn't have come across or would not have been aware of if I had studied at university X or somewhere else." (E1)

In contrast, E18 strongly denied that their parents' educational background had any influence on their success as an entrepreneur but admitted their education was important to them.

The acquisition of practical skills was also stressed by some parents, for instance, business skills, exemplified by E12 being actively encouraged by his mother to develop sales skills from age 8 years. E12 recounted their mother driving them to destinations where they could sell items that they had collected and which were relatively novel. Similarly, E16's parents introduced them to competitive activities such as sports and chess. There was also acknowledgement that some parents had made sacrifices to provide that education, E16, so that it was a priority within the restricted family budget.

Developing social skills and building social networks was cited by E14:

"the ability to act socially, to interact, to ensure early on those essential social skills are also conveyed, are educated and that you don't develop into a complete idiot from a human, interpersonal point of view, definitely has contributed to the fact that I think I still have friends from kindergarten today and that I am socially involved..... has resulted in contacts that have actually pushed us very actively forward in our entrepreneurial development. So, I think from that

Tab. II: Participant Profile

Code	Age Range	Gender	Highest Qualification	Age Start-Up formed (Years)	German State	Parents' Highest Educational Qualification		Parents' Occupation	
						Mother	Father	Mother	Father
E1	26–35	Male	Bachelor Degree	21	Baden-Württemberg	State Exam	Diploma	Teacher	Engineer
E2	26–35	Male	Master's Degree	26	North Rhine Westphalia	State Exam	State Exam	Teacher	Teacher
E3	26–35	Male	Master's Degree	26	Baden-Württemberg	Secondary School	Secondary School	Geriatric Nurse	Sales Representative
E4	18–25	Male	Secondary School	19	North Rhine Westphalia	State Exam	Secondary School	Teacher	HRM Administrator
E5	26–35	Female	Bachelor Degree	34	North Rhine Westphalia	None	None	Housewife	Driver
E6	18–25	Male	Secondary School	16	Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	Bachelor Degree	Doctorate	Teacher	Doctor
E7	26–35	Male	Bachelor Degree	21	Baden-Württemberg	Vocational Training	Vocational Training	Dental Assistant	Sales Manager
E8	18–25	Male	Secondary School	19	Hamburg	Secondary School	Diploma	Geriatric Nurse	Bus Driver
E9	36–45	Female	Master's Degree	38	Saxony	Standard Education	Engineering Diploma	Dental Assistant	Engineer
E10	18–25	Male	Secondary School	21	Berlin	Bachelor Degree	Bachelor Degree	Legal Compliance	Sales Manager
E11	18–25	Male	Bachelor' Degree	19	Hamburg	Bachelor Degree	Doctorate	Music Teacher Primary School	Board Director
E12	18–26	Male	Bachelor' Degree	23	Baden-Württemberg	Secondary School	Bachelor Degree	Secretary Construction Company	Programmer at SAP
E13	26–35	Female	Advanced Technical Certificate	31	Baden-Württemberg	Secondary School	Secondary School	Self-employed Dental Assistant	Self-employed Therapist
E14	26–35	Male	Bachelor Degree	23	Baden-Württemberg	Diploma	Apprenticeship as Bank Clerk	Self-employed in HR	Banker Senior Consultant
E15	26–35	Male	Master's Degree	24	Bavaria	Secondary School	Bachelor Degree	Paralegal	Self-employed
E16	26–35	Male	Bachelor Degree	30	Rhineland-Palatinate	None	Electrical Training	Office Management	Telephone Systems Engineer
E17	36–45	Male	Doctorate	33	North Rhine Westphalia	Bachelor Degree	Vocational Technician	Housewife	Self-employed
E18	18–25	Male	Secondary School	16	North Rhine Westphalia	Secondary School	Secondary School	Beautician	Industrial Electrician
E19	26–35	Male	Master's Degree	29	North Rhine Westphalia	Apprenticeship	Technical Qualification	Cosmetician	Agriculture Responsible for a German district
E20	26–36	Male	Master's Degree	28	Baden-Württemberg	Doctorate	Doctorate	Employed by DAX Company	Doctor

perspective it definitely helped the network of contacts work and serve the company”.

Parental social status was acknowledged in facilitating the accomplishment of E1's selected educational route and providing financial resources.

Acquisition of specific value sets was a frequent example of parental influence, examples being a value-driven mind-set linked to perseverance, even when the activity was tedious; ambition and self-determination; creative and open mindedness to new ideas, cultures, people and locations;

having confidence, self-esteem, self-awareness and a sense of responsibility; respect others; retain own principles rather than abandon them for financial gain. E2 stated that they had incorporated their parents' values into their company values.

Some founders emphasised influences that had been important to enabling them to become an entrepreneur

"Security and stability that allow you to try things out and not be afraid of making mistakes.....I have always had this feeling of security and reassurance at home. My parents would always make sure I continue improving myself and don't stop.....I think this support is especially important when you yourself, for example, don't realize how vital it is to study or go to school, so you get this motivation from your parents." (E3)

Several mentioned parental support to accomplish own ambitions, to change direction, and knowledge that parents could always be relied on:

"A pretty important aspect of the fact that I'm doing quite well in what I do today and at the same time the claim that I'll become something, as was always communicated in the family.....I think, can be broken down into different qualities, which have also been mentioned before, like a certain level of ambition, a drive to do something, a motivation to keep growing or to push yourself." (E14)

However, many responses emphasise lack of parental influence on their start-up success; for instance, poor emphasis on developing networks.

Some founders denied that parental networks had any influence on their start-up's success (E12, E14).

Negative parental influence on becoming an entrepreneur was experienced by three participants, one parent urging them to preserve their health by not working too hard, another's mother wanted them to please everyone which negatively impacted on their self-confidence when they could not, and a third was lack of parental ambition. Family location was an important negative aspect expressed by E1/E13 because small communities and those with limited mind-sets inhibited ambition and innovative thinking, each changed location in later years and were influenced by the more, open ambitious context. This was even more evident for E9 whose early years in communist East Germany combined with a high sense of insecurity attributed to their mother. Similarly, the example behaviour of E20's mother as a long-term employee in a large German multinational company, had a negative impact on their ambitions to become a founder. Parental emphasis was on job and wage security. Being the last child born was a negative influence as parents and siblings were overprotective (P16).

Desirable Attributes

The responses to question 2(ii), attributes parents should attempt to develop to support their child's entrepreneurial success are summarised in Table 3.

Tab. III: Attributes that Parents Should Develop In Their Children

Attribute	Number of Founders Citing Attribute
Ambition	4
Perseverance	5
Passion	1
Independence; freedom to choose	7
Sense of responsibility	3
Openness	2
Self-discipline	2
Courage, willingness to take risks	2
Curiosity/experimentation /Innovation	7
Critical questioning	1
Financial management including budgeting, taxation, the economy	2
Social skills	1
A feeling of security, emotional stability, trusted/ supported by family	4
Failure is acceptable	5
Self-Confidence	3
Good communication especially listening	4
Wide ranging interests	1
Education	1

Four founders suggested that parents should refrain from pressurising their children to follow a certain career path, and encourage independence, which was more likely to facilitate entrepreneurship. Children should also be given the freedom to find out what works and what does not, to experiment rather than being told that a certain activity will be unsuccessful. As E20 was the only founder who appears to have had experience working in a very large company, they suggested:

"it would have benefited me more to see different industries...maybe not just doing the internships at Daimler or somewhere else, but consciously going into a start-up, then consciously going into an SME or a medium-sized company or a completely different industry".

Discussion

The data in Table 2 confirms the lower participation of women in entrepreneurship (Hisrich 1986; Cardella *et al.* 2020; Engle *et al.* 2011) but contrary to previous studies, most of the founders' parents were not entrepreneurs (Engle *et al.* 2011), only 6 parents can be directly identified. The findings confirm an overall tendency for offspring to become entrepreneurs when parents work in the private sector (Engle *et al.* 2011). The founders young ages tended to correspond to Marinova (2016), since only 25% were over 30 years, a lower percentage than German average (Rudnika 2021). Most founders had advanced educational qualifications (Kerr *et al.* 2017), often higher than parents, and corresponds to their comments that parents placed high value on education, stressed its importance and supported their children to obtain it; a major entrepreneurial trait (Engle *et al.* 2011; Kerr *et al.* 2017). The start-up business profile (see Table 1) indicates that 55% of the businesses corresponded to unicorns, exceptional success (Jurgens 2022; Bucholz 2022). This analysis of business and family profiles demonstrates high levels of start-up success generated at a young age from founders whose families were not predominantly entrepreneurs, suggesting a relatively unique German model.

Positive Parental Influence on Success

The findings predominantly confirm, the substantial parental influence on the success of the founders, which they generally acknowledge. There is overwhelming agreement that parents valued formal education and qualifications, stressed their importance to the founders, and attempted to provide the means to obtain them even if financial resources were low (Kerr *et al.* 2017). An interesting, unexpected finding was the emphasis on developing practical skills including sales skills, competitive know-how, communication, social skills and building contact networks; the extent of parental effort in these activities is notable. The founders confirmed that parental influence developed over

a long period and in many cases was reliant on their entrepreneurial characteristics (Flack *et al.* 2019) but extended the previous research because this study demonstrated that parents, who were not entrepreneurs, also possessed and passed on entrepreneurial influences.

The value sets that founders acknowledge, including perseverance, open-mindedness, creativity, acting according to ethical principles and self-confidence align with many established traits of successful entrepreneurs (Kerr *et al.* 2017; Levine, Rubenstein 2017). There is also considerable acknowledgement by entrepreneurs that financial and/or emotional support would be available if needed, including the knowledge that making mistakes was acceptable. This degree of familial support corresponds with Marinova (2016) but now in an academic setting, and with Engle *et al.* (2017) that family is the significant predictive factor for entrepreneurship in Germany.

The importance of many of the attributes and values to their success, which the founders attribute to their parents, is confirmed by their opinions of those qualities that they would attempt to develop in their children, for instance, creativity, freedom to accomplish own ambitions, communication skills and emotional stability that is provided by the family. This depth of parental influence is characterised by one founder applying values and principles to own start-up.

The concept of start-up soul is evident in the direct quotations included in the findings, passion to make a personal impact, high energy expenditure, being able to make choices and a voice as parents encouraged and shaped their future (Giuliani 2019).

A few founders were adamant that their parents had little influence on their success as an entrepreneur, stressing that no financial help had been given, and/or that their contact networks were not a consequence of parental social or business circles.

Negative Parental Influence on Success

Many fewer examples were expressed regarding parental influence that was considered negative. The position in the family as youngest member and overprotected aligns with Hisrich (1986) and parental pressure to acquire a job with a large company that would provide them with security indicates coercion to suppress entrepreneurial personality traits, for instance risk taking and learning from mistakes (Giuliani 2019). Lack of parental ambition was also a major disadvantage in a few cases. An indirect negative parental influence, and an important one, is location in a developing economy that corresponds with Hisrich (1986). However, family location within a developed economy such as Germany was also quoted as a disadvantage, although not evident in the literature. Most of the influences cited

indicate potential suppression of the acknowledged characteristics of an entrepreneur (Kerr *et al.* 2017). The founder's responses regarding parental influences that they perceived as negative were also inferred by observations that parents should

not attempt to force their children in a specific career direction, instead facilitate independent thought that would support entrepreneurship and encourage them to gain experience in different industries.

Conclusion

This research has accomplished its two objectives and demonstrated that parental influences, which were developed over a long time period, had considerable bearing on the success of the first start-up. Parental influence comprised a range of factors, predominantly, focus on education and qualifications, sets of values that correspond with entrepreneurial characteristics, and on-going financial and/or emotional support and guidance. Two major new findings were that: parents encouraged development of practical skills, related to communication, networking and competitiveness; parents who were not entrepreneurs also developed these skills in their children. Family were also confirmed to be the most important success factor influencing entrepreneurs in Germany.

The negative influences of parents expressed by a few founders were their focus on future security, youngest position in family tree, and family location in traditional or non-market driven economies. The attributes founders advised parents not to stress included pressure to follow a specified career path and suppressing independence and creativity.

The limitations of this research are the small sample and that it is restricted to first time technology-based company founders in Germany, so that it is not representative of the parental influence on the success of all German start-ups. Therefore, further research is recommended to validate these findings, a quantitative study focused on German start-ups with a statistically representative sample.

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