

≈ SUMMARY ≈

USING MULTIPLE PARADIGMS TO UNDERSTAND
ENTREPRENEURIAL MOTIVATIONS

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Principle Topic

This study illustrates how a multiple paradigm research methodology was used to understand more about one particular question about entrepreneurs – whether motivations for becoming an entrepreneur differ between women and men. It is often assumed that women and men are motivated to become entrepreneurs in similar ways. However, gender comparative studies of motivations for becoming an entrepreneur are relatively limited. This relatively compact body of literature on motivations for becoming an entrepreneur that offer a gender comparative approach is problematic for a number of reasons, some of which relate to their almost complete reliance on quantitative research methodologies. Thus, a multiple paradigm study offered a way of understanding more about the complex process of deciding to become an entrepreneur. To this end, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed. We pose a number of contributions to theory development within the entrepreneurial motivation field, and also make suggestions to expand methodological stances within entrepreneurship research to make more use of multiple paradigm studies.

Methods/Key propositions

While some believe that the positivist-interpretive paradigms are incommensurable, others suggest it is possible to ‘bridge’ multiple paradigms, while recognising each paradigm’s different world views and assumptions. The research design of this study was a sequential multiple paradigm methodology, where the outputs of one paradigm provides inputs into a subsequent phase of the study. Thus, the first phase of the research was aimed at replication of prior research. Using a positivist paradigm similar to that of previous studies in the area, a quantitative survey was conducted to measure whether there were gender differences in motivations for becoming an entrepreneur in the sample of 289 entrepreneurs. Following this initial stage of the research, the second phase pursued a more in-depth study, adopting an interpretive paradigm in which respondents’ own constructions were explored in a qualitative manner. The aim of this second paradigm was to provide data from which to develop theory. Fifty of the respondents to the mail survey (25 women and 25 men) participated in this second phase. These entrepreneurs were interviewed in a semi-structured, face-to-face format. The questions were designed to gauge individual opinions and therefore were broad and open-ended. Most interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes. Interviews were tape recorded and the transcripts were entered into the QSR NUD*IST Vivo (Nvivo) software package. Using Nvivo, transcripts were coded according to themes, and analysed using a constant comparison approach (Glaser, 1992).

Results/Implications

This paper offers several important contributions to the entrepreneurship literature, and more specifically to the literature concerned with gender differences in the motivations for becoming an entrepreneur. We contribute to the field by moving beyond being concerned only

with the *existence* of gender differences, to exploring the *nature* of gender differences in the motivations for becoming an entrepreneur.

The results of phase one, where prior studies were replicated, showed no gender differences in motivations for becoming an entrepreneur. These results were not unexpected, as much of the previous literature pointed to few statistical differences between women and men entrepreneurs. Phase two revealed that a subset of these men and women (who supported the same views of entrepreneurial motivation in phase one) held very different constructions of themselves in relation to the entrepreneurial role. In other words, women had adopted a male-gendered construction of the entrepreneurial role. They continued to do so in relation to their motivations to become an entrepreneur, where their descriptions and reasons for becoming an entrepreneur differed strongly to the men's, particularly in the case of work and family-related motivators.

This multiple paradigm methodology led us to conclusions which seem to dispel much of the conventional wisdom about a lack of gender differences in motivations for becoming an entrepreneur. We propose that women and men do indeed have different motivations for becoming an entrepreneur. However, prior research has not uncovered such differences because it often does not investigate the research question qualitatively, and many studies do not use any particular theoretical position. This study concludes that using different research paradigms to view motivations for becoming an entrepreneur uncovers different 'answers'. The continuing focus on positivist approaches to researching gender differences in motivations for becoming an entrepreneur may not highlight the many differences that a multiple paradigm approach can illuminate. Given the divergent results we found in using two paradigms with respect to motivation studies, rationales for why such multiple paradigm methodologies may be useful in other areas of entrepreneurship research are also offered.

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