

COMMENTARY

Entrepreneurship: an extension to anti-work perspectives

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Recently, news and press releases about 4-day workweek have been occupying the headlines of many media outlets. This shift in work model aims to reduce employee turnover, increase employee retention, improve work-life balance and health, and enhance work productivity and satisfaction (Pitofsky, 2023). The motive to push this shift in work model is perhaps a partial reflection of the anti-work philosophies discussed in Alliger and McEachern (2023). The central tenet in this anti-work perspective is that the employment relationship tends to be coercive and oppressive so that employees' desires have to be set aside and the organization's goals and interests need to be placed ahead of employees' health, dignity, and autonomy (Alliger & McEachern, 2023). The detrimental and damaging nature of works thus fuels the development of anti-work philosophies—e.g., avoiding or refusing works to stop suffering (Alliger & McEachern, 2023). While Alliger and McEachern (2023) proposed a list of solutions that may mitigate the adverse effects of works, one critical missing piece from the puzzle is entrepreneurship. In this commentary, we provided an extension to their article by offering another solution and explaining how entrepreneurship may dampen the detrimental effect of works and help working professionals to derive true pleasure and satisfaction from their works. This concept of entrepreneurship discussed in our paper is a broad one that consists of both (traditional) entrepreneurship (i.e., initiating a new venture outside an existing organization [Parker, 2011]) and corporate entrepreneurship (i.e., entrepreneurship within an existing organization by means of strategic renewal, innovation, and corporate venturing [Bierwerth et al., 2015]).

The promise of entrepreneurship as an antidote to anti-work issues

With the rise of the psychology of entrepreneurship (Frese & Gielnik, 2014), the number of studies that examined the cognitive and emotional processes of entrepreneurship is rapidly growing (e.g., Shepherd, 2015). The anti-work perspectives suggest that works in the organization can be tedious, detrimental to health and well-being, meaningless, exploitative, and lacking freedom and autonomy so that the work environment is considered to be punitive, coercive, and characterized by low trust and doubts among workers and leaders (Alliger & McEachern, 2023). In contrast, the research findings from a large stream of studies related to the psychology of entrepreneurship demonstrated that entrepreneurial works may improve work autonomy, job control, psychological competence and relatedness, health, and well-being (e.g., Shir et al., 2019; Stephan & Roesler, 2010).

Entrepreneurs have high decision authority and job control because they can determine how the works are organized and how the resources are distributed in the workplace (Stephan &

Roesler, 2010). Therefore, the entrepreneurial works can accommodate one's physical and psychological needs so that these works may emancipate working professionals from managerial control, offer freedom and flexibility for them to participate in self-chosen and meaningful work, increase sense of mastery and competence, and enhance feelings of connectedness to others (or reduce feelings of isolation or alienation) (Haynie & Shepherd, 2011; Haynie *et al.*, 2012; Shir *et al.*, 2019). Based on self-determination theory which indicates that meeting basic individuals' psychological needs is essential for functioning and well-being, the satisfying nature of entrepreneurial works will result in high work autonomy and improved well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Shir *et al.*, 2019). According to the findings from a systematic review study, entrepreneurs' work characteristics and activities are characterized by autonomy, variety, task identity, feedback, time flexibility, skill utilization, significance/meaningfulness, and positive work resources, and these work characteristics lead to better mental health and well-being (Stephan, 2018). A recent meta-analysis confirmed that entrepreneurship can lead to greater well-being according to some of the aforementioned rationales (Stephan *et al.*, 2023).

Potential pitfalls and downsides to entrepreneurship

Although there are many reasons to think that more entrepreneurship and corporate entrepreneurship would reduce the negative effects of work, it must also be admitted that entrepreneurship can have its downsides. One of the major downsides of entrepreneurship is the often-long work hours that entrepreneurship can require. Indeed, a review of the available evidence has found that entrepreneurs work longer hours than employees in the same industry and suffer higher fluctuations in earnings (Åstebro & Chen, 2014). What makes these long work hours even more unpalatable is finding that entrepreneurs earn 4% less per year than employees, a finding termed the "entrepreneurial earnings puzzle" (Åstebro & Chen, 2014). However, Åstebro and Chen (2014) resolved this puzzle by taking into account estimates of unreported earnings and concluded that entrepreneurs may really earn mean financial gains more than 42% above comparable employees. Thus, the longer work hours may be well-compensated by considerably higher earnings, although the under-reporting of earnings raises ethical issues.

Åstebro and Chen (2014) also argued that the bimodal recruitment into entrepreneurship may also explain the earnings paradox. As their review shows, people at either the highest levels of ability, or the lowest levels of ability, are more likely to enter entrepreneurship. Highly talented and experienced individuals are more likely to believe they have the skills necessary to succeed at entrepreneurship and thus take the risks involved. Conversely, lower-ability employees may find themselves unemployed and unhireable so they engage in entrepreneurship out of desperation. As Åstebro and Chen's data analysis shows, the higher income entrepreneurs are less likely to engage in under-reporting of income, thus they have fewer ethical issues. Moreover, entrepreneurs at the 95th percentile of earnings for entrepreneurs earn more than double what employees at the 95th percentile of employees earn (even without adjusting for under-reporting). Thus, our recommendations to engage in entrepreneurship may apply more to highly talented and skilled people.

There has also been considerable interest in the relationship between entrepreneurship and work-life balance. However, the limited empirical evidence on this issue is mixed. Some research has found that many people pursue entrepreneurship to obtain work-life balance and that owning a business enhances the ability to balance work with other life domains, such as family; in contrast, other studies have found that entrepreneurship amplifies work-family conflicts (Ezzedeen & Zikic, 2017). In their efforts to resolve this discrepancy, Ezzedeen and Zikic (2017) interviewed entrepreneurs and discovered that three factors account for whether entrepreneurship lessens or exacerbates work-life balance issues. These factors are (1) context factors, (2) work-life attitudes, and (3) boundary management strategies. An examination of these factors reveals that entrepreneurs can have considerable control over the amount of work-life balance they have. For

example, some entrepreneurs may value work-life balance and thus seek entrepreneurial opportunities that will let them have substantial work flexibility and time away from work, whereas other entrepreneurs may prioritize making a high income and their careers over other interests.

Future directions and recommendations

This commentary argues that entrepreneurship may serve as an antidote to a series of anti-work issues and phenomena that are prevalent in the workplace. We recommend that industrial and organizational (I-O) psychologists, entrepreneurship scholars, and practitioners collaborate and make synergistic efforts to not only gain a better understanding of but also mitigate the anti-work issues in the workplace. We suggest the following recommendations with the hope to facilitate effective policy formulation and implementation.

Recommendation #1: encouraging more entrepreneurship or corporate entrepreneurship

Regarding the traditional entrepreneurship route, local governments may provide incentives to encourage entrepreneurial activities. For example, it would be beneficial if entrepreneurially minded individuals could gain easy access to incubators or accelerators in the local community to help them nurture the growth of their ventures at an affordable cost (or no cost at all in some rather unique scenarios/cases). The entities from public and private sectors may work together to create an effective entrepreneurship ecosystem that is conducive to entrepreneurial activities (Clevenger & Miao, 2022). With respect to corporate entrepreneurship, organizations may consider developing structures, processes, and cultures that will reward and encourage entrepreneurial activities within the organization.

Recommendation #2: optimizing work characteristics according to entrepreneurship

We encourage policymakers in the organization to consider incorporating some work characteristics that resemble those of entrepreneurship. While revamping the entire work characteristics to mirror these of entrepreneurship may be challenging for organizations it may still be feasible for organizations to consider improving some parts of work characteristics to reflect entrepreneurial features. Organizations may consider implementing Google's 20% rule—allowing employees to allocate 20% of their time to work on their own creative projects (Feng et al., 2022). This rule is known to effectively increase work autonomy and flexibility which can mitigate the damaging effect of anti-work issues in the workplace.

Recommendation #3: a call for I-O psychologists and conferences to facilitate the formulation of evidence-based solutions and effective policy implementation

We encourage conference venues, such as The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, to consider organizing some seminars or workshops to engage I-O psychologists and practitioners in conversations so that a better understanding of anti-work issues in the real business world can be achieved. For example, the Job Characteristics Model suggested five main characteristics that influence work outcomes (Fried & Ferris, 1987). Understanding where the actual problem is in the real business world can enable I-O psychologists to develop more targeted solutions and narrow the gap between science and practice. Practitioners and policymakers may consider heeding the advice from I-O psychologists to implement policies and changes in the workplace to minimize the anti-work issues.

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