

Abstract

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Growth through new enterprises and start-ups has been focussed since two decades, in Sweden through "starta-eget-bidraget", which since 1993 is a priority action program for unemployed. Yet, there has been little interest in science to study personal mechanisms behind the choice to start new firms or to be employed. A research question has instead been to ask firm owners why they started, or conduct a survey to ask people in general what they might choose if faced by the hypothetical question.

The aim of this thesis was to understand the personal meaning behind the choice to start a business or to be employed, described by people who have made the choice. Generalizing or prediction of this choice is no aim here. The thesis is based on qualitative empirical data collected in Bohuslän, a region in west Sweden, where six grown up persons were asked to tell the story of their working life choices. They were known to have been in the position to make the specific choice between self-employment and employment. Thus, the study does not investigate the financial aspects of the choice, as the choice between self-employment and employment would not be seriously taken into consideration by someone who has no economic means to make it.

The main findings in this study are, that the choice for those who started new firms was not to start a firm, but to find working possibilities corresponding to their interests, or even dreams. The legal form "business" was the result of this choice, not the driving-power behind it. The strongest driving force to establish and manage a small firm is here personal dreams. The individual's choice appears to be triggered by a role model, who's impact for the choice is more intense, the closer the relation between the two is. The choice appears to be hindered by, in young age, parents, gender roles and tradition. The Important Persons are here found as both Helpers and Stoppers, having a strong influence on the personal choice. The personal meaning behind the choice between employment and self-employment can overall be seen as caused by personal dreams or personal social adaptation.

The main conclusions are, that if authorities want people to start new firms, the interest should be placed in changing attitudes to gender roles and traditions, as well as to amplify the possibilities to connect to role models. Above all, though, the policy should, according to this thesis, in this case be to stimulate personal understanding of changes in working life and to strengthen the personal creative dreams.

Key words: Employment, self-employment, choice, needs, dreams, role models, Important Persons, limitations, feelings, social adaptation, gender roles, tradition, multi-occupational working life.

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