

SOCIAL COMPETENCE OF ENTREPRENEURS WITH DISABILITIES¹

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing awareness of the fact that entrepreneurship, as a labour option for people with disabilities, is a way of inclusion in the professional world. Inspire of that, most of the literature is not concerned about that circumstance and its focus is on studying either the conditions of the entrepreneurial environment or the characteristics of entrepreneurs.

As a result of this, it is necessary to analyse entrepreneurial competencies of people with disabilities; especially, those competencies that play an important role in the success of their entrepreneurial project, particularly social competences. Moreover, it is possible that, given the particular situation of people with disabilities, such a competence is more frequent in that collective.

In carrying out our analysis, a research study is developed following a questionnaire conducted on 224 persons with certain disabilities.

The results of such research study indicate a good of social competence level including empathy, organisational competence and service orientation. Furthermore, there is a significant relationship between social competence generally speaking, which involves in particular the service orientation dimension, on one hand, and both entrepreneurial condition and the most relevant factors of abandonment of a business, on the other hand. As a consequence of that, the importance of such competence for entrepreneurs with disabilities is emphasized.

Keywords: Disability, Social Competence, Entrepreneurship, Service Orientation.

INTRODUCTION

Given that competencies are understood as a combination of traits and behaviours that are considered to promote that professional activities are successfully developed (De Haro, 2004), the characterization of the competency profile of entrepreneurs has been extensively discussed in the literature on entrepreneurship (Lans et al., 2011) with the aim of determining the relationship between competencies and the success of an entrepreneurial project (Sánchez, 2012). However, the analysis on which such literature is based, basically focuses on typical entrepreneurs, whose

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profile is that of a middle-aged, white man person (Gyóri et al., 2019) and rarely aims at studying other marginal groups, such as people with some disability (Renko et al., 2015).

Therefore, this article also includes entrepreneurs with some type of disability within our scope of study and we do that in relation to social competencies, which are especially relevant in changing environments (Baron & Markham, 2003; Chen, 2007) and developed to a great extent precisely by people with disabilities as it is reasonable to expect that for they are persons who are able to identify others' needs thanks to the fact that their own personal experience allows them to put themselves in other's shoes.

Thus, the objective of this research study is to review competences related to social awareness in the specific case of entrepreneurs who have disabilities, and to identify what relation there is, if there is any, between this objective and the decision either to launch a business or to give it up.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Amongst all competencies entrepreneurs have at their disposal, the so called social competence provides entrepreneurs with a critical sense, which enables them to perceive those needs of persons with whom they must deal enhancing effectiveness in the creation of work and leadership groups (Winterton, 2002; Camuffo et al., 2012) towards employees, customers, suppliers among others.

Furthermore, people with disabilities may have developed this type of competence to a greater extent, as they are people with enough sensibility to understand any circumstance that employees or other agents may be going through.

Mainly, such competence comprises three dimensions:

Empathy

It is the cognitive ability to become aware of what another person may feel. This competence allows entrepreneurs to really understand the problem and to increase sensibility in relation to business opportunities and their solutions (Simón Moya et al, 2015), enhancing leadership potential and enabling future leaders to help employees face the difficulties of their workplace among which, stress merits special mention (Humphrey, 2013).

Organizational Awareness

It is the ability to understand others' emotions, especially of those in whom the entrepreneur has to trust, and with whom he has to work. Furthermore, it is fundamental for the good development of entrepreneurial initiatives. In this vein, entrepreneurs with disabilities generally have high levels of emotional intelligence, what is even identified as the cornerstone of the 21st century entrepreneur (Cross & Travaglione, 2003).

Service Orientation

This competence determines to what extent entrepreneurs are understanding of client needs by allowing them to find the way to be sympathetic to customers, as long as they meet expectations related to their needs. Consequently, services provided by start-up companies are optimized. Furthermore, client needs are anticipated and satisfied in as much as the greater the

competence, the greater customer satisfaction and the greater the capacity to innovate (Humphrey, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This article uses data which result of a survey which was conducted by the University of Murcia between November and December 2018 on a sample of residents in Spain who have physical, sensory and organic disabilities. The technical sheet of such survey appears referenced in the Article of Barba-Sánchez, published in this review. It was developed within the framework of the Project "*Disability and entrepreneurship. Competence Analysis*" (CSO2016-75818-R) and was funded by the National R+D+I Plan.

Social competence has been measured through three indicators that reflect the entrepreneur's perception of his ability to put himself in the position of others (empathy) and so, to understand their emotions (organisational) allowing him to anticipate and recognise the needs that satisfy customers (service orientation). On the other hand, the dependent variables are entrepreneurial condition and business activity abandonment factors. Both variables have been measured with Lickert scales from 1 to 5. Finally, to establish the significant relations between the variables contingency tables have been made using SPSS.

RESULTS

Generally speaking, the obtained results related to social competence indicate that those dimensions concerning empathy and organisational competence are not significant for the entrepreneurial variables, which were analysed. However, service orientation is the most relevant dimension according to its significant relation with the entrepreneurial condition and also with the factors, which may lead to the abandonments of the entrepreneurial project.

As for the results obtained in relation to the entrepreneurial condition of persons with disabilities (Table 1), there is, thus, a manifest relation between the capacity to empathise with clients and so to identify their needs, on one hand, and with the fact of having the intention to launch a business, on the other hand. Thus, there is evidence of the fact that people with disabilities, who either have a business (15.2%) or intend to have one (23.6%), have the perception that their social competence is high or very high. Among those who do not intend to launch a business, only 34.3% of them have in most of the cases their perception of themselves that they are not competent in service orientation.

Entrepreneurial condition	Not very competent	Competent	Very competent	Total
Has a company	0.0%	16.0%	16.5%	15.2%
Intends to launch a business	0.0%	16.0%	26.6%	23.6%
Has had a business	0.0%	20.0%	30.2%	27.0%
He has no intention of launching a business	100.0%	48.0%	26.6%	34.3%
Pearson's Chi-squared: 22.894***				

(***): $p < 0.01$; (**): $p < 0.05$; (*): $p < 0.1$

Source: Project Survey "*Disability and entrepreneurship. Competence Analyse*".

In order to look further into the reasons for “*having no intention of launching a business*”, we have analysed if, according to the reasons mentioned by respondents, there is any relationship between the such inhibiting factors which mostly dissuade from starting up a business and the service orientation competence. The results are shown in Table 2. Thus, 14.1% avoid launching a business due to lack of professional experience, even if there is significant recognition of their ability to identify customer needs (37.4%).

Entrepreneurship inhibiting factors	Not very competent	Competent	Very competent	Total¹
Lack of entrepreneurial experience	0	0,28	9,4%	14,1%
Pearson's Chi-squared: 71.836***				
Lack of confidence in my entrepreneurial abilities	0	0,2	8,6%	11,8%
Pearson's Chi-squared: 36.378***				
Lack of training	0	0,2	6,5%	10,7%
Pearson Chi-square: 66.543***				

(***): $p < 0.01$; (**): $p < 0.05$; (*): $p < 0.1$

Source: Project Survey “*Disability and entrepreneurship. Competence Analyse*”.

¹We have only taken into account those cases in which the question was to indicate the importance of those factors for NOT launching a business” received an assessment 4-5 (Enough-Much).

Moreover, 11.8% of respondents find that lack of confidence in their own abilities is an inhibiting factor for launching start-up company, but only 28.6% consider that they are competent in relation to service orientation. In similar ways, there is a lack of training.

On the other hand, among those factors mentioned as the main reason for leaving a business, there is also a significant relation to social awareness (Table 3), even if such relation only exists in the customer-oriented dimension. Thus, the most important factor for giving up a business is lack of business profitability (47.9%). In the case of giving up their business, 88.5% manifest being competent or very competent in service orientation, while 12.0% mention that they gave up because they were confronted with business financing problems. Among them, the competence level is significantly lower (40.6%), what may be affecting the ability to efficiently manage the business.

Reasons to start up a business	Competent	Very competent	Total
Lack of business profitability	38,5%	50,0%	47,9%
Business financing problems	30,8%	9,8%	12,0%
Retirement	15,4%	7,8%	9,4%
Personal reasons	0,0%	7,8%	6,8%
Pearson's Chi-squared: 24. 069*			

(***): $p < 0.01$; (**): $p < 0.05$; (*): $p < 0.1$

Source: Project Survey “*Disability and entrepreneurship. Competence Analyse*”.

CONCLUSIONS

Identifying entrepreneurial competences in order to implement measures to promote them is one of the most relevant research problems of the last few years as such competences are related to the success of entrepreneurship. However, that has not been the case of most research studies, whose effort has focused on population in general. There are not enough studies focused on people with some kind of disability as they are considered to be a negligible collective. However, the identification of critical entrepreneurial competencies among them is of greater importance, since entrepreneurship, as a very interesting professional option, allows such collective to have access to the labour world despite of the fact that their inclusion into it is not always easy.

On the other hand, among the competencies which are traditionally recognized as a guarantee of entrepreneurial success, it is worth mentioning those related to empathy, emotional intelligence or the ability to understand the feelings of the collaborators team or customer needs. Nevertheless, from our point of view, not enough research has been dedicated to them.

This type of competences becomes increasingly important in order to reinforce relationships, in order to strengthen teamwork and, last but not least, in order to enhance innovation. They are also considered to achieve special intensity among a collective, namely that of people with disabilities, that has developed a special understanding of the problems caused by such disabilities.

This research study suggests that social competence among entrepreneurs with disabilities is very relevant. There is a significant relationship between the perception that people with disabilities have of their social competence and the fact that either they are or they intend to be entrepreneurs.

Concerning the case of people with disabilities who do not plan to launch a business, the main reason is lack of professional experience. However, in such case they do not change the own perception in relation to their service orientation competence level.

In closing, we'd like to state that the main factor why people with disabilities give up an entrepreneurial project is its lack of business profitability, what is related to a high level of social competence. Other reasons, such as problems in obtaining financing, are rather related to lower competence levels in terms of identifying customer needs.

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