

Do Nice Entrepreneurs Finish Last?

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Everyone shows some level of self-interest, aggressiveness, or exploitative behaviors, but they can be beneficial in some professional environments. These behaviors are often linked to what psychology refers to as the Dark Triad: traits such as Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. While these traits are often viewed as harmful, new research suggests that they may play a pivotal role in the process of new venture creation.

These three traits are summarized below:

- Machiavellianism is a trait that reflects cold cynicism and strategic long-term planning. High levels of the trait may result in manipulative behaviors and seeking control over others, but individuals with a moderate amount of the trait exhibit strong adaptability, extreme competitiveness, and an eagerness for risk-taking.
- Narcissism is a trait that reflects entitlement and self-love. High levels of the trait may result in extreme grandiosity, but individuals with a moderate amount of the trait exhibit extraverted behaviors and a charismatic nature.
- Psychopathy is a trait that reflects a lack of empathy and callousness. High levels of the trait may result in exploitative behaviors, but individuals with a moderate amount of the trait exhibit the ability to shine in highly stress situations and tend to be engaging and successful in society.

The research study focused on whether and how individuals scoring high on any of these traits are attracted to and perform as entrepreneurs, with the results showing that all three traits lead to entrepreneurship. But why would we expect that individuals with these personality traits would be attracted to entrepreneurship? The entrepreneur has often been portrayed as a lone ranger, an almost-mythical hero that leaves the binds and constraints of a traditional corporate environment in search of emancipation. As someone willing to sacrifice the security of a traditional corporate environment, entrepreneurs are said to bear the uncertainty and risk of entrepreneurial action, presumably for greater autonomy.

Entrepreneurs may be motivated through darker and more complex power-based motives, seeking control not over their own professional environments, but over others as well. Prior literature suggests that individuals who show high levels

of the Dark Triad traits are consistently attracted to entrepreneurship. However, only individuals high in narcissism exhibit positive relations to new venture performance, suggesting that the perceived fit between personality and the environment of entrepreneurship does not live up to the expectations of those individuals high in Machiavellianism and psychopathy.

The findings suggest that the qualities of poise, tenacity, charisma, confidence, and a propensity for embracing risk, which are encouraged by individuals high in the Dark Triad traits, appear to play an important role in whether individuals are attracted to entrepreneurship or successful in its execution.

In total, the research study suggests that both productive and unproductive drivers of entrepreneurship are important to consider in the process of new venture creation. Entrepreneurship offers great societal and economic benefit; therefore, we should consider more deeply how and to what degree these darker motives for entrepreneurship should be tolerated in order to reap the rewards of new venture creation.

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