Foreword

After a few decades of seeing the field of entrepreneurship trying to shed light on the personality traits of small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) managers and entrepreneurs, Bill Gartner said in 1988 that asking “Who is an entrepreneur?” was the wrong question. He suggested that researchers should focus instead on understanding how a person manages to start a business, thereby opening up the behavioral approach to entrepreneurship.

If Bill has the merit of laying the foundations of a new research perspective in entrepreneurship, it has nevertheless been necessary to wait for more than ten years before seeing works on entrepreneurial personality become “à la mode”. At the turn of the 2000s, academic journals began to publish a series of meta-analyses that demonstrated that personality was linked to the entrepreneurial career. Even further, Scott Shane and colleagues (2010, 2015) demonstrated that not only does personality affect vocational choice, but that the genetics underlying the personality structure also explain entrepreneurship as a career choice. To simplify, entrepreneurs are probably born with a strong potentiality that will influence their choices and their performance.

Although they did not revive research by suggesting new avenues related to the personality of entrepreneurs, with the exception of Shane and colleagues in genetics (2010, 2015), these works have demonstrated the importance of the personality to the entrepreneurial career, allowing the subject to be restored to its former glory in the field of entrepreneurship. It is in this context of renewed interest in entrepreneurial personality that the work of Simona Leonelli and Francesca Masciarelli takes on its full relevance.

I remember very well when, a decade ago, my colleague Cynthia Mathieu, a psychologist specializing in organizational behavior, suggested that we should study the narcissism of entrepreneurs. At first glance, I was skeptical: most of the entrepreneurship field saw entrepreneurs as mythical heroes, leading researchers to focus on the positive aspects of entrepreneurship, including the brighter sides of personality associated with this career.

However, for my colleague Cynthia, who was not used to studying entrepreneurs and publishing in entrepreneurship journals, it was crystal clear: “You only have to talk with them for less than ten minutes to realize that it is obvious that they are more narcissistic than the general population!” And she was right! At that time, apart from a few works here and there, notably the work carried out by Kets de Vries (1985) on the darker aspects of entrepreneurship, few researchers focused on these dimensions. That was a very promising idea to follow!

Since then, we have witnessed a true outpouring of works on these issues. This situation also forces us to carry out a new reading of the phenomenon of personality in entrepreneurship by also integrating the darker aspects of personality – in particular, narcissism. In this context, the magnificent work of Simona and Francesca is timely in offering us an in-depth review of the knowledge on the thematic, combined with very novel results and new perspectives that allow us to see what remains to be done in that direction.

Another important contribution of this book is to avoid being fooled by what can be classified as “dark” or “bright” traits. In the end, everything is a question of context. Being a pleasant person is generally perceived as a good quality, a positive aspect of personality in several contexts. However, when it is time to negotiate, a talented person in the negotiation would probably be less agreeable than the average person, as the negotiation process involves, mostly if not always, being unpleasant in order to succeed.

The authors go beyond simplistic analyses and take the perspective of the impact of entrepreneurial personality to another level. More specifically, they turn their attention to narcissism, the study of which has grown in recent years, especially in the field of entrepreneurship. So far, many recent works have highlighted that narcissism can trigger intention and action and that it affects many dimensions of management, especially leadership. They go further in showing how narcissism affects many different aspects of the entrepreneurial process.

Globally, this book sheds important light on the role of the personality in various processes relating to entrepreneurship and in the development of firms. The two authors illustrate how personality affects the innovation process, the entrepreneurial orientation, the search for financing, and certain aspects related to the entrepreneurial career. In this sense, it contributes significantly to opening up new horizons of research on the role of personality in entrepreneurship, in particular with regard to the “darker” facets such as narcissism. It is, therefore, a “must-read” for

anyone interested in the personality of entrepreneurs. There is no doubt that this book will set the cat among the pigeons on these questions and will be of great help in imagining the future of research on entrepreneurial personality.

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