

Executive Summary

Academic Entrepreneurship

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IfM-Materialien Nr. 257

Institut für
Mittelstandsforschung

IfM
BONN

www.ifm-bonn.org

Impressum

Herausgeber

Institut für Mittelstandsforschung Bonn
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Telefax +49/(0)228 / 72997 - 34

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IfM-Materialien Nr. 257

ISSN 2193-1852 (Internet)

ISSN 2193-1844 (Print)

Bonn, July.2017

Das IfM Bonn ist eine Stiftung
des privaten Rechts.

Gefördert durch:



Bundesministerium
für Wirtschaft
und Energie

aufgrund eines Beschlusses
des Deutschen Bundestages

Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Innovation,
Digitalisierung und Energie
des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen



Executive Summary

We examine the entrepreneurial process and success of researchers employed at academic institutions in Germany. Precisely, we asked academics about self-employment intentions in 2013 and about their entrepreneurial success in 2016. Our analysis examines academics who had entrepreneurial intentions within the first wave of the survey. We then track the further development of their business idea over a three year period.

The entrepreneurial potential of academics remains unexploited

There is a remarkable gap between entrepreneurial intentions. Only one in six academics with an entrepreneurial idea became self-employed within the observed time period. One in four gave up on their idea.

Inventions prevent the academics from giving up the business idea

Researchers who generated inventions within their research work were more likely to remain in the entrepreneurial process than their colleagues who did not generate inventions. Business ideas based on inventions require often more time and resources for exploitation than other business ideas.

Entrepreneurship infrastructure helps academics with entrepreneurial intentions but is rarely requested

Self-employed who utilized the specific supporting infrastructure on campus (e.g. start-up bureau, TTOs, patenting agencies or business consulting) started up more successfully than self-employed without such support. Despite this positive effect, only one in ten academics with entrepreneurial intentions asked for support. This is a striking result taking into account that the majority of researchers reported that they lack business and legal knowledge.

Female scientists perceive more start-up barriers than their male colleagues

We find that female researchers were less likely to start a business as well as more likely to give up their business ideas when compared to their male counterparts. This might be due to the above described perception of entrepreneurial barriers, especially the lack of financial resources. Gender-specific differences therefore should be taken into account when creating supporting programs and infrastructure.

Entrepreneurial teams are more successful due to diversity of skills

Entrepreneurial teams created more jobs than solo self-employed. One in three start-ups in academia is founded by teams. We expect that teams are more diverse in their skills, which might help each member to focus on the own field of expertise. Also, the team members in our study were more frequently able to make their living than the solo self-employed. Therefore, we suggest that by creating supporting programmes to foster self-employment the size or composition of entrepreneurial teams should not be limited with respect to team size or composition

Academics are hybrid entrepreneurs and job creators with a high survival rate of their businesses

Four in five business founders are part-time entrepreneurs. Self-employed researchers therefore seem to prefer forms of hybrid self-employment. Three years after the first survey, three in four start-ups were still in business. This indicates a rather high survival rate because on average 40 % of newly founded companies are out of business after three years. Furthermore, two in five start-ups increased employment after three years and one out of three plans to do so.