

Entrepreneurs love their companies like parents love their children: study

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In terms of behavior and brain activation, the feelings entrepreneurs have for their companies are similar to those that parents have for their children. A recent study shows that love is a major motivator both for parents and entrepreneurs. Credit: 123RF

A multidisciplinary study, run by researcher Marja-Liisa Halko from the

University of Helsinki, asks whether entrepreneurs love their companies like parents love their children. The study used functional MRIs to study the brain activity of fathers and high-growth entrepreneurs. Fathers were shown pictures of their own children as well as other children they knew. Entrepreneurs were shown pictures of their own companies and other companies that they were familiar with.

The results from Finnish [fathers](#) were similar to those from previous [brain](#) studies primarily conducted on mothers. Looking at images of one's own child in particular deactivates the parts of the brain that are responsible for the theory of mind and social understanding. Similar deactivations were observed among entrepreneurs who self-rated as being very closely attached to their company.

Low confidence can sensitize to risks

Meanwhile, the activation of the brain areas responsible for rewarding and processing emotions seemed to be associated with the confidence of the research subjects among both fathers and especially among entrepreneurs. High confidence is more typical among men than it is among women.

"Our results indicate that less confident fathers and male entrepreneurs may be more sensitive to the dangers and risks of parenting and entrepreneurship," says Marja-Liisa Halko.

On the other hand, the results also suggest that overconfidence and the repression of negative emotions may lead to overestimation of the probability of success and overly optimistic assumptions for the company.

The study, entitled "Entrepreneurial and parental [love](#) - are they the same?", was published in the journal *Human Brain Mapping*.

The study tested the hypothesis that the emotional bond an [entrepreneur](#) feels for the company is similar to the bond experienced by a parent towards the child. Entrepreneurs are very emotionally involved with their companies, and this involvement supports the long-term efforts of the entrepreneur. This hypothesis had never before been scientifically tested.

This study, conducted by researchers Marja-Liisa Halko, Tom Lahti from Hanken School of Economics, Kaisa Hytönen from Laurea University of Applied Sciences and Iiro Jääskeläinen from Aalto University, sought to establish that the love an entrepreneur feels for the [company](#) is very similar to the love a parent feels for the child.

More information: Marja-Liisa Halko et al. Entrepreneurial and parental love-are they the same?, *Human Brain Mapping* (2017). [DOI: 10.1002/hbm.23562](#)

Provided by University of Helsinki

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