

Would-be social entrepreneurs need more than a kind heart

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To want to be a social entrepreneur, empathy is not enough for millennials. They need to feel confident in their ability to solve social problems and feel valued by the people they want to help, according to new research published in the *Journal of Business Venturing*.

The study examined key character traits of approximately 300 students undertaking modules on [social entrepreneurship](#) as part of wider university courses, and found that while not all kind-hearted individuals consider the idea of becoming a social entrepreneur attractive, those that do are the ones who feel confident of making a difference, and who feel valued in their interactions with potential beneficiaries.

The researchers questioned participants at two different stages on their courses, several weeks apart, on elements such as perspective-taking, empathic concern, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy, social worth, and their social entrepreneurial intentions.

The study found that self-efficacy has a strong positive effect on whether someone is intending to become a social entrepreneur, as does a sense of social worth. In addition, the study found that both self-efficacy and social worth explain how empathy translates into social entrepreneurial intentions.

Social [entrepreneurship](#) is an attempt to use a business to solve [social issues](#). Examples include D.Light Design, which makes low-cost lights sold in areas without reliable electricity, or Jamie Oliver's restaurant

Fifteen, which employs chefs from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Dr Elisa Alt, co-author of the study and Senior Lecturer in Strategy and Planning at Anglia Ruskin University said: "We have long known that empathy plays a big part in social entrepreneurship, especially in comparison to traditional entrepreneurship, which tends to have a self-oriented motivation. But we cannot assume that every kind-hearted person will want to become a social entrepreneur. Our study is among the first to shed light on how individuals actually channel their empathy into careers in social entrepreneurship.

"Our focus on university students also offers an interesting perspective on a generation that is often portrayed in paradoxical ways. Millennials are either generation 'me me me', or the generation that is seeking meaning through a stronger sense of social responsibility. Our study paints a more nuanced picture of how they go about forming career intentions.

"With millennials currently comprising 35% of the UK workforce, and set to represent 50% of the global workforce by 2020, our findings offer practical insights for social entrepreneurship educators, as well as potential employers interested in sparking 'social intrapreneurship', and shaping this generation's involvement in social innovation."

Millennials are considered to be people who reached young adulthood in the early 21st Century.

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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