

Running head: Social Representations in Austria



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MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

“Social Representations of Work, Entrepreneurship and State Enterprises in
Austria:
A mixed-methods Approach in Work and Organizational Psychology”

verfasst von / submitted by
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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science (MSc)

Wien, 2018

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree program code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A 066 840

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree program as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Psychologie

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Erich Kirchler

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all people that helped me throughout the process of creating and finishing this Master's Thesis. It was and still is an important step, not only in my academic career but also for my personal development.

I am especially thankful for having amazing people like Helena Hartmann, Hannah Hitz, and Martina Holzmann in my life (alphabetical order, you are all great!). You were there whenever a crisis occurred, thank you!

And of course, my parents! I wouldn't be here without them.

Table of Content

Introduction.....	1
Theoretical Background.....	3
Method	9
Sample Description.....	9
Material and Procedure.....	10
The Usage and Analysis of Social Representations.....	12
Polarity and Neutrality Index.....	12
Core-Periphery Analysis.....	13
Correspondence Analysis.....	15
Results.....	15
Homogeneity Index of the given stimuli	16
Analysis of the Polarity and Neutrality Indices	17
Core-periphery Analysis of Social Representations of “work”	20
Core-periphery Analysis of the Social Representations of “entrepreneurship”	23
Core-periphery Analysis of the Social Representations of “state enterprise”	25
Correspondence Analysis of the Stimuli.....	26
Discussion.....	34
Limitations and Implications	38
References.....	40
Appendix A.....	45
Appendix B.....	63
Abstract.....	65
German Abstract.....	66

Introduction

Exploring individuals' thoughts and behavior as well as uncovering the motivation behind it, is one of the most basic goals of psychological research. In this thesis the social representations in a sample of the Austrian work force will be investigated in an attempt to reveal the implicit attitude and emotional connection towards work, entrepreneurship, and state enterprises. I tried not only to take into account the possible differences between the public sector and the private sector but also cohort effects that might occur between different generations of working people. This may provide a basis for further research on social representations in Austria or the impulse for researchers as well as practitioners to start developing interventions to change or modulate the perception of individuals of work, entrepreneurship and state enterprises, especially in times of change and rapid technological development.

Change is an omnipresent aspect of our everyday life and therefore concerns everybody in every part of life. People's lives are heavily influenced by the rushing development of technology, as well as changing and evolving requirements by the individuals themselves. Existing concepts and ideas are subject to change, such as the importance and perception of time spent at work or for oneself (e.g., Levine, 2003; McGrath & Tschan, 2004; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Working requirements have changed more noticeably and rapidly in the last few years than before and are influenced not only by technology, which has already become a well-established tool for many young individuals (e.g., Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2016), but also by a financial crisis that shocked big global players as well as individuals in local work environments (Arup, 2010). These rapid changes led to a new world of work in which different generations with varying and sometimes conflicting attitudes towards concepts such as work itself, work-life balance, or independence in terms of self-employment, need to work together as a team. This raises the following questions: How do individuals perceive this change, and do they have the perception of these generation conflicts at all? Is there a difference in attitude towards topics such as entrepreneurship in individuals who work in the private sector or in the public sector? Do self-employed individuals and employees differ in their opinion about work, considering that both groups face different levels of responsibilities and risks?

In order to get answers to these questions and to find out how individuals perceive these situations, it is important to ask individuals who are in these positions. Looking into theory, one

can assume that certain knowledge structures are learned via a set of social learning processes (Kulich, el Sehity, & Kirchler, 2004) and modulate not only what we know but also how we think about different aspects of life. Because these structures are mostly learned implicitly and therefore an individual is generally not aware of them, it is harder to measure them compared to, for example, the number of sick leaves or even more abstract concepts such as the perceived quality and level of well-being. Since these knowledge structures are characterized as being latent and qualitative, an intuitive way of examining a person's inner mindset concerning specific topics is by using a free association task. Social representations theory and free association tasks as the method to operationalize representations are well-established and used in diverse contexts, ranging from psychoanalysis to social psychological topics. However, both have not found much reception and application in the field of work and organizational psychology, at least in the Austrian scientific community.

Furthermore, while different work requirements and job demands as well as generational conflicts caused by the new adaptation to the acceleration in working life are already well-known topics in psychological research (Yang & Guy, 2006), the general topic of how individuals think about *work*, *entrepreneurship* or *state enterprises* have been hardly researched in Austria. These three terms cover a wide range of scenarios in people's everyday (working-) life and are presumably linked with an attitude and emotional connection. In order to shed light on this connection, these stimuli have been chosen for this Master's thesis to get at least a bit of the spotlight in work and organizational psychology.

At the start of the project underlying this thesis, there was a unique chance to compare the current situation in Austria to the rapidly changing socioeconomic environment in Cuba through a cooperation between the University of Vienna and the University of Havana. The intention of this cooperation was a cross-cultural analysis of well-being as well as an analysis of free association stimuli in the light of economic changes within the last five years. This thesis uses data which was collected for the comparative study between the two countries. However, while references to the comparative aspects of the study will be made, the main focus of this thesis will be on the analysis of the Austrian sample. The development of the questionnaire as well as the chosen sample of participants was planned to maximize the comparability of this Austrian anchor study to the Cuban sample.

The aim of this thesis is to close some of the existing knowledge gaps on social representations in Austria and to make it possible for further researchers to use the data for long-term studies or other cross-cultural approaches. The qualitative approach of the association task has been chosen as it fits the requirement of getting a snapshot of the Austrian's current attitude towards work, entrepreneurship and state enterprises. Social representations theory is already widely used in social and economic psychology in the northern European scientific community (e.g. de Rosa, 1996; Gangl, Kastlunger, Kirchler, & Voracek, 2012). At the time of writing this thesis, it was still hard to find Austrian or German research that used this theoretic approach. This thesis tried to explore the latent structures of certain stimuli in the selected sample with free associations as a qualitative tool and social representations theory as theoretic framework.

Theoretical Background

Changing Demands imposed by the Work Environment and Individuals themselves

We currently live in a time of change in everyday but also in working life, which forces not only companies but also individuals themselves to adapt in order to keep up with new demands (e.g. Rosa, 2003, 2013; Korunka & Kubicek, 2017). Since the 1980s, the pressure on the free market has been rising and competition is getting tougher for companies pushing their staff to be more efficient in order to generate an increasing amount of profit (Korunka & Kubicek, 2017). One reaction to this situation is the development of an abundance of new work models with the goal of more flexibility in the labor market. Elements of such work models are the increase of flexible working time or the possibility to work from home or no fixed work place at all. Because of the urgency and impact for the economy as well as for the employees themselves, this topic is highly researched at the moment by various psychologists (Clegg & Spencer, 2007; Fried, Levi, & Laurence, 2008; Hofmans, Gelens, & Theuns, 2014). The development of new work models may also be an answer to individuals' demands for motivation in form of learning possibilities instead of money (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). On the one hand, there are many benefits resulting from flexible new work models that enable the development of social relationships at the work place (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012), but on the other hand, they seem to have a dark side as well. Many employees are overwhelmed by the intensity these models bring with them and therefore the quality of the working life itself seems to be decreasing (Burchell, Ladipo, & Wilkinson, 2002; Green, 2004). It is currently unclear

where this development is heading, because studies are not able to paint a clear picture if these so-called work improvements are actually beneficial or rather harmful to the work force (Eurofound, 2015).

Additionally, not only are the work models changing rapidly, but the technological development is accelerating our working and social life as well (Rosa, 2013). This acceleration can be divided into three aspects: Technological acceleration, acceleration of social change and acceleration of the pace of life itself (Rosa, 2013). Each of these three aspects lead to a steady increase in pressure to fulfill more responsibilities and execute as many operations as possible in a shortened time frame (Rosa, 2013). All this acceleration forces the work itself to be reorganized in some aspect in order to keep up with the high pace. The result of such an ever-changing and threatening work environment can be a quick drain of employees' resources which leads to a decrease in overall well-being. This effect was found for example in a recent study (Kubicek, Paškvan, & Korunka, 2015) and may lead to the conclusion that individuals suffer and perceive work as harmful and as something that should be avoided. However, this development may not be as bad as it seems, since a young generation of employees has reached the labor market and will be a growing part of the active work force over the next decade. Generation Y is a complicated generation both for managers and companies, because they have a radically different understanding of work compared to previous generations of employees (Solnet & Hood, 2008). Born between 1979 and 1994, members of this generation make up a large and still growing group of the existing workforce and need to be taken into account in the evaluation of new work models and work itself (Solnet, Kralj, & Kandampully 2012). However, Generation Y is not the only generation to consider in the evaluation and adaptation of work models. The rising Generation Z will also be interesting in terms of its impact on the labor market and the work place since it consists of individuals born in 1995 or later, who are tech-savvy and the first generation that was born into a digital world (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014; Bernstein, 2015). The behavior of Generation Y meant a huge reshaping of the general thinking about work, whereas Generation Z is expected to encourage a new and creative way to use technological advantages in a more intuitive way, since they see it as a basic instrument of everyday life (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2016).

Differences between individuals in the working life are not only found between generations but also between sectors of work. Previous studies indicated differences between individuals

who work in the private sector and those in public enterprises. For example, individuals working in public institutions seem to have a greater need for power and require a higher level of affiliation and achievement than their peers in private companies (McClelland, 1961). These findings led to the development of a kind of “psychological type” that appears to be better suited for government work because individuals of this type seem to be eager to stay in a job despite the stress and strains that come with it (Frankel & Manners, 1980). Such differences in character and working type may be due to a lower level of expectations towards job satisfaction and motivation compared to individuals that work in the private sector (Cherniss & Kale, 1987). Although these findings are rather outdated by scientific standards, they already pointed to a measurable difference between individuals working in the private and the public sector. Differences in the psychosocial work environment may even influence the rate of sick leaves as well as the fact that civil servants seem to be much more dissatisfied with their jobs than their private sector counterparts (Bogg & Cooper, 1995; North, Syme, Feeny, Shipley, & Marmot, 1996). Therefore, in this study, the differences between civil servants and working groups such as self-employed individuals or managers in the Austrian workforce will be investigated.

Altogether, it can be said that the world of work is changing rapidly, and individuals are partly demanding changes themselves but are also suffering from the consequences (Frey & Osborne, 2017). New technologies and work models make it possible for individuals to act much more flexibly and to not be bound to a certain place to execute their work. A growing market with countless start-ups and young entrepreneurs raises the question of how “old-fashioned” jobs will look like in the future and whether there is a way to balance the demands not only of the coming work force but also of those who are close to retirement. While change is well researched in many aspects of psychology, it stands to be seen how individuals’ latent knowledge and rule structures are applied in this adapting world.

Social Representations Theory to discover latent Structures in Social Life

The concept of *collective representations* was first introduced by Durkheim in 1898 to see, if an image or small symbol could be so meaningful that it might shape the view of the world of a whole group of individuals (Flick, 1998). Later, in 1961, social psychologist Serge Moscovici adapted this point of view and developed the *social representations theory* with the goal to make

it less strict and more usable in psychological science. Since then, it has become a well-established theory in sociology, social psychology, and economic psychology.

In general, the theory behind social representations claims that within a social group, a common sense of knowledge and rules as well as a structure for interpretation exists (Kurse, 1995). This system of rules and common knowledge helps to differentiate one group from other individuals in any given social context. More specifically, it is a value-, idea-, and method-based system that helps individuals to orient themselves within – and cope with – the (social) environment and all the unknown stimuli that one is confronted with on a daily basis (Moscovici, 1976). Additionally, social representations are a fixed mindset behind the communication between members of a society. By agreeing on a certain kind of language or code, it is possible for the group to classify different environmental aspects. Examples are certain signs or symbols that have different meanings depending on the social group the beholder belongs to (e.g. graffiti tags or special clothing).

The social aspect of social representations can also be found when members of one group encounter members from a different group. The general assumption is that individuals tend to like other individuals if they spend time with them or share the same set of social representations. Therefore, participants should give different ratings of emotional response or likability for different individuals, depending on whether they are members of their in-group or the out-group. Indeed, a study showed that if the rated person is part of the in-group, the evaluations and attributions will be much more positive compared to those of a stranger (Doise, 1978 as cited in Kirchler, 1991). Through this process, social representations not only help a group to have its own identity, but also clearly separate it from other groups (Kruse & Schwarz, 1992). It also gives members of the group an individual identity and meaning within the group. Social representations make it also possible to predict certain behavior. Since it is a social construct, those rules are not fixed but rather develop in social discourse if certain topics or the values corresponding to them change (Kruse & Schwarz, 1992). By integrating unknown stimuli into our environment, we do not only change our perception but also widen the zone in which we are comfortable to interact with others (Moscovici, 2000). The development of social representations is a two-way process of objectification and anchoring (el Sehity & Kirchler, 2006).

Objectification is needed to give new unknown stimuli a form that can be comprehended and it takes place before they can be anchored in the value-, and idea-systems of individuals (el Sehity & Kirchler, 2006). In order to cope with an unknown situation, it is necessary to compare it to a known one or to develop a new rule system which allows the individual to act accordingly. Objectification is therefore a process that takes abstract concepts and puts them into a known system – such as turning it into a quasi-physical object – to make it easier for an individual to grasp (Moscovici, 1984, as cited in Flick, 1995). An example could be the sound of cracking of a wooden floor that is scary until it is possible to grasp this “threat” as the benign wave of sound that it is. The way this process is activated is to either take the theory and rearrange the new stimuli, so that they fit to the theory, or to make an exception so that the theory can fit to this new stimulus. This process is called *socio-genesis* of social representations (el Sehity & Kirchler, 2006). In practical terms, this means that if a new situation threatens or challenges the existing set of rules of a group, a collective solution for this problem must be found. Now the new situation can either be identified via an existing experience or new representations are developed. The development of new representations can therefore strengthen the existing group identity (Kirchler, 1991).

Anchoring is a process that is highly influenced by developments within the group that shares social representations. Like objectification, this process is needed to rearrange existing structures to accommodate complex stimuli or social cues (Moscovici, 1984). During this process, the new stimuli are not only classified but also attributed to some of the features that can be found in the category they now belong to. The anchoring process therefore has an influence on existing representations as well as on the newly categorized information (el Sehity & Kirchler, 2006). By reducing the new stimuli to fit into known categories or images, the process is able to integrate or *anchor* them in the existing system. One theory about anchoring says that unknown phenomena which are not part of an existing category simply do not exist within the mind of a social group, as long as they do not threaten it actively (Moscovici, 1984). Distinctive features of categories and new representations are mostly revised by the *peripheral system*, (Wagner, 1994) which will be discussed in the next section. If a new stimulus is divergent in one classification, the use of this new feature will not be accepted (Moscovici, 1984). New technologies, for example, need to be integrated in an existing set of rules and will therefore change it in the process (Flick, 1995). This aspect of acceptance is interesting when it comes to

examining individuals' perception of change, since a form of social identity is formed during the development process of social representations (Kirchler, 1991). An important element in this process is the fact that the anchoring process is highly dependent on the perceived necessity for anchoring within a group. Due to this fact, it is possible that different social groups form different conclusions about the same occurring (social) stimulus. So, a seemingly wrong reaction to a certain stimulus by a person can be due to the fact that this person is from a different group with a different set of rules that are applied in this specific situation.

Besides the above mentioned two-way process, social representations consist of two key elements, the *central* and *peripheral systems*, which can be flexible (peripheral system) or more stable (central elements) within the existing structure (Abric, 1993; Giron, 2002). The *central system* is not as easily influenced by change in the individual's (social, economic, etc.) environment since it has grown over time and is an established common sense (Abric, 1993; el Sehity & Kirchler, 2006). It makes up the core structure of a set of representations and is protected in its integrity. The central system is not really influenced by the immediate environment in which the existing representations are used (Abric, 1993).

The *peripheral system* plays an important part in the way the central system adapts and works, because it is the link between the core representations and the immediate environment (Abric, 1993). Its most important feature is to assist the individual by using the rules from the central system to set actions and form points of view within a group of individuals. It also protects the central system through its flexibility in adapting to new situations and stimuli. Using the peripheral system allows an individual to organize new stimuli around the central structure. If the peripheral system's evaluation is not too different from that of the central system, it is possible for the central system to adapt if threatened or to maintain its current state without much effort. Social representations are modified individually for each existing central system in each group. Again, it is not possible to predict with certainty the outcome of adaptation if two different groups with different representations need to classify an unknown stimulus. Without those two systems, social representations within the existing social representations theory would not be able to exist, adapt or be developed in the first place. The process of these two systems working together is called *socio-cognitive adjustment* (Abric, 1993).

It is common to use free association tasks to obtain information about existing latent structures in individuals in the least manipulated way possible (Strube, 1984). One approach to

make this data available for empirical research is by using the described theory of social representations in conjunction with further analysis on a well-structured and established basis (e.g. el Sehity & Kirchler, 2004). The social representations theory shows the importance of common rules within a society and how they are established and change over time. Combined with a free association task to objectify the latent structures, an investigation of differences between the private sector and public sector as well as a cross-cultural comparison is possible. Also, the participants' implicit attitude can be measured, and possible differences examined.

Method

Sample Description

The goal of this project was to get a sample of the Austrian work force that represents the Austrian population and at the same time can still be matched to the Cuban sample. Due to differences in the economy in both countries, compromises in the composition between availability and representability had to be made. To represent the Austrian work force, a sample of 150 people in the private sector and 100 people in the public sector should be raised to be matched. The private sector sample was divided into employees with little leadership responsibility, managers with leadership functions, and self-employed individuals. Due to the limited availability for surveying the civil servants, the public sector sample was not divided by leadership responsibility.

The participants were gathered with the assistance of a polling institute (Respondi) since the main goal was to make the sample as similar as possible for the planned comparison to the Cuban sample with an approximately representative distribution of age, sex, and education of the Austrian population. The planned sample consisted of 50 employees, 50 managers and 50 self-employed individuals in the corporate sector as well as 100 civil servants in the public sector. The original sample comprised 516 participants. Due to ambiguities and only partial usefulness of the data, some participants' answers needed to be excluded from further analysis. In a first step, every person that could not be clearly placed into one of the four categories of work mentioned above needed to be excluded as well, which resulted in a total of 87 excluded participants. 25 participants gave sociodemographic answers that could be attributed to more than one category and therefore had to be removed as well, leaving a sample of 404 participants consisting of 93 employees, 80 managers, 176 civil servants and 55 self-employed individuals.

Further reduction was necessary due to the quality of the data given by the participants. Because of the study underlying this thesis the questionnaire consisted not only of the free association task, but also of a well-being questionnaire, so there was a difference between the number of participants that filled in the questionnaires and the number that could be used for the analysis. Unfortunately, more than half of the remaining participants had to be excluded from further analysis because they had already retired, did not fill in the sociodemographic part, missed the crucial stimuli of the questionnaire or gave only nonsense answers. This left a total of 198 individuals, consisting of 48 employees, 37 managers, 32 self-employed individuals and 81 civil servants for further analysis. Table 1 shows the composition of the final sample¹.

Table 1
Sample Description

	Male	Female	Age
Employees	20	28	M = 38.1 SD = 9.74
Managers	23	14	M = 37.95 SD = 9.64
Civil Servants	45	36	M = 43.51 SD = 12.75
Self-Employed	15	14	M = 43.63 SD = 10.68
Σ	103	95	

Material and Procedure

The study was conducted during summer 2017 in Austria over the course of four weeks. All questionnaires were completed online by the participants on their personal computers or mobile phones. While the quota as well as the general description of the sample was provided by the researcher, the actual recruitment was supervised by the polling institute. An evaluation of the sample was conducted afterwards.

The questionnaire was developed in a cooperation between the Department of Applied Psychology: Work, Education, and Economics of the University of Vienna and the Department of Psychology of the University of Havana. Due to the multilingual nature of the cooperation, the

¹A total list of all participants can be requested from the author.

questionnaire was developed in German and Spanish simultaneously and translated into both languages with the help of native speakers. The translations were subsequently evaluated through backtranslation by an independent third party. Due to the broader scope of the original questionnaire, it contained not only the three stimuli analyzed in this thesis, but also questions concerning well-being structures, interaction with political institutions relating to well-being, and four additional free association stimuli about change and public life. Additionally, a short questionnaire about sociodemographic data was included, to match participants according to the required quota². The questionnaire was sent by the polling institute via e-mail invitation to the participants and took between 15 and 20 minutes to complete, depending on the individual speed of the participants. The participants were chosen to fulfill the required quota of the sample for employees, managers, civil servants, and self-employed individuals in order to be comparable with the Cuban sample. At the end of the questionnaire, the participants received an incentive in form of points that could be exchanged for vouchers or money by the polling institute. The amount of credits to be earned was fixed and could neither be modified by the researchers nor by the participants but was well established within the polling institution community. In an attempt to avoid empty questionnaires or nonsense answers in the free association tasks, participants were reminded to fill out at least one association before they were able to skip to the next task (see Figure 1).

Note: One or more questions are important for the rest of the questionnaire.
Therefore, please fill in the following questions:

- Arbeit

Im Folgenden bitten wir Sie bis zu sechs Assoziationen aufzuschreiben, die Ihnen zu verschiedenen, bereits vorgegebenen, Begriff einfallen. Bewerten Sie **anschließend**, ob diese Assoziationen für Sie positiv (+), neutral (0), oder negativ (-) sind.

Arbeit
Bitte bewerten Sie, ob diese Assoziationen für Sie positiv (+), neutral (0), oder negativ (-) sind.

	+	0	-
<input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Fig. 1. Example of response in the questionnaire if no answers were given.

² The full questionnaire in German can be requested from the author.

To abstain from corrupting the qualitative claim of the free association task, it was still possible to skip the task in total or enter associations without value for further analysis despite the possible drawback in the amount of useful answers.

The Usage and Analysis of Social Representations

An analysis of the homogeneity of the data as well as an analysis of the polarity and neutrality indices via an analysis of the variance in the average polarity or neutrality and possible covariance of age was conducted. The aim of this analysis was to investigate the possibility of differences in the implicit attitude between the different subgroups. This was followed by a core-periphery analysis of the data to find core elements of the social representations within the Austrian population. Finally, a correspondence analysis of the semantic content was conducted to find dimensions that explain the variance in the associations. For better understanding, each analysis will be described briefly in the following section. These analyses are an effective way to process qualitative data in order to allow the application of quantitative measures and therefore extend the possible interpretation in a scientific context (el Sehity & Kirchler, 2004). As stated above, the goal is to use the data as purely as possible without losing too much information in the process and in order to also take into account its qualitative structure (Kulich, el Sehity & Kirchler, 2004). It is also important to corrupt the data as little as possible, so that the specific meaning of the associations will not change due to a research bias or the influence of social representations that are not the same as the ones the participants had (Kulich, el Sehity, & Kirchler, 2004).

Polarity and Neutrality Index

The polarity and neutrality indices enable a quantitative approach of the qualitative data by computing the implicit attitude towards the presented stimulus for each person individually. Both indices are also a way of visualizing these possible differences between general connotations of certain stimuli and enable further interpretation. To compute them, participants are asked to first give their associations to a stimulus and subsequently go back and rate these associations on a scale from *neutral*, to *good* or *bad*. Those answers can then subsequently be coded in 0, +1, and -1. The polarity index is calculated by subtracting all negative connotations from the positive ones and dividing the sum by the overall number of associations. Similar to the polarity index, the

neutrality index is computed by dividing the neutral connotations (rated 0) by the total number of associations. Therefore, the polarity index can range from -1 , “*very negative*” to $+1$, “*very positive*” while the neutrality index ranges from 0, “*not neutral*” to 1, “*very neutral*” (de Rosa & Kirchler, 2001; Penz & Stöttinger, 2008). The goal of these indices is to see the general attitude of subgroups towards the same stimulus. The split into a polarity and a neutrality index is important since it gives a more differentiated view on the data compared to a single index. If the majority rates a certain stimulus rather neutral, it would not influence a combined index since every answer would be counted as 0, so a lot of information would get lost in the process. In the split design, only the neutrality index would be influenced – since it would be closer to 1 – but the polarity index would still be open to interpretation.

This process also allows further investigation of the data via quantitative tools such as analysis of variance (ANOVA). In order to take into account, the possible effect of belonging to either the age group of Generation Y and Generation Z or the older generations, age was used as a fixed variable. Therefore, and because it is a more robust procedure, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted.

Core-Periphery Analysis

Core-periphery analysis is a method to reveal shared concepts and ideas within a society. By analyzing qualitative data – the answers to free association task – an attempt to find similarities between the individual concepts exceeding personal opinions is made. If such elements can be found, they can be indicating a central nucleus of the latent social representations towards the presented stimulus. To conduct the core-periphery analysis, two independent dimensions are necessary. One is the *relative frequency* and the other one is the *absolute mean position* of a stimulus (Vergès, 1994 as cited in Kulich, 2003). The relative frequency is calculated by taking the exact number of instances a given association is mentioned and dividing it by the number of participants (Vergès, 1994, as cited in Kulich 2003; Kulich, el Sehity, & Kirchler, 2004). During free association tasks, as well as when observing the general frequency of primary words in spoken or written language, it can be found that the most-frequent word appears on average in a 2:1 ratio to the next-most-frequent one (Thumb & Marbe, 1901, in Strube, 1984). Due to this exponential distribution it is necessary to apply a logarithmic scale for this dimension (Kulich, el Sehity, & Kirchler, 2004). The second dimension, absolute mean

position, is determined by multiplying the number of appearances of one association with the rank at which it was mentioned in the task (Vergès, 1994). Then the sum of all outcomes is divided by the number of appearances in total. The mean score of all ranks is the criterium to differentiate between an early mentioning and a late one (Vergès, 1994). The results can now be displayed in a contingency table. For better understanding, an example of how the data will be displayed can be found in Figure 2. Frequently and early mentioned associations form the core elements and serve as a reference to interpret distances (Vergès & Bastounis, 2001). Second to the core are the top-right and bottom-left corner. Those contain all the associations that are either mentioned frequently but late or less often but early in the association process. Last is the array with the most peripheral associations that are not mentioned often and only in the later stage of the association process (Vergès & Bastounis, 2001).

As mentioned above, this is a good step to sort the whole mass of associations and make them available for further descriptive analysis. It is also possible to show the results in a coordinate system with the two dimensions (number of appearances, time of mentioning), if a visual approach is desired. As a cutoff point for visualizing the data, the associations had to have a relative frequency of at least .03 to secure readability³.

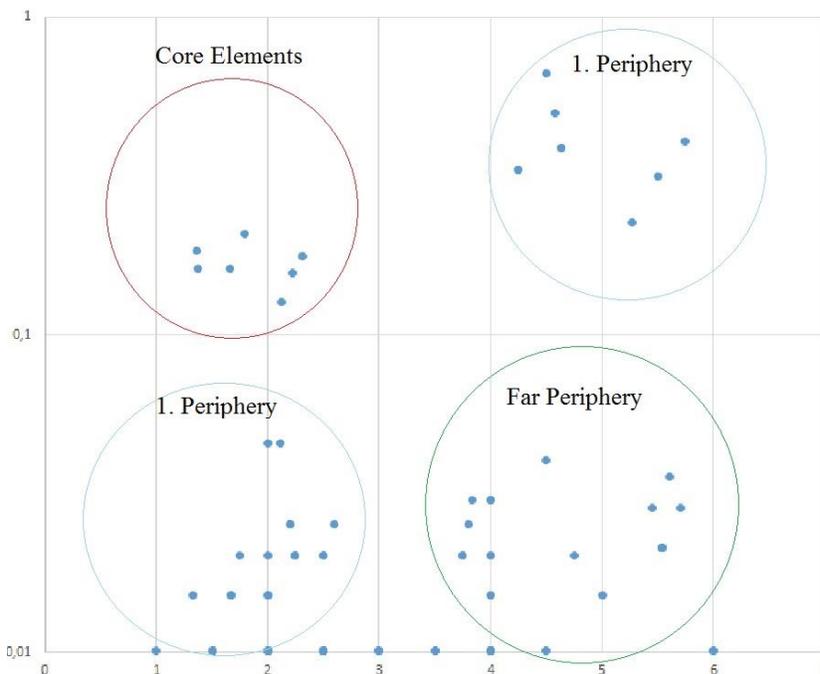


Fig. 2. Example of how core-peripheral elements could be arranged in the coordinate system

³ The full data sample can be requested from the author

Correspondence Analysis

The semantic content of the associations allows a sophisticated mixed-methods approach in reducing the information given by the participants by creating a set of categories the associations are best related to. Using the correspondence analysis, the qualitative approach of the social representations theory is still taken into account and as little manipulation of the data as possible has been done (Gangl, Kastlunger, Kirchler, & Voracek, 2012). The idea is to detect a latent structure within the data by finding categories that include as much information about the corresponding associations as possible. These dimensions allow the creation of a map containing the specific relations as well as the structure of these categories. The quantitative equivalent for this method is the principal component analysis of categorical data (Greenacre, 2007).

In a first step it is necessary to purge the given associations from duplicates and synonyms as well as nonsense answers that could disturb further analysis. Then categories for the remaining data must be developed by the research team and verified via independent raters. The inter-rater reliability should reach a value of κ between .6 and .9 to be moderate or substantial enough (Landis & Koch, 1977). After this level of agreement has been reached, the remaining differences between the raters have to be discussed and sorted in a consensual manner, so each word can be assigned to one specific category.

Now the correspondence analysis can be conducted, and a map of the qualitative data can be developed, using the outcome of this analysis. For the analysis the programs Excel, SPSS, and R with the additional Statistical Package CA (Nenadic & Greenacre, 2007) were used.

Results

The results section is divided into the different steps of the analysis (homogeneity index, polarity and neutrality indices, core-periphery analysis, and correspondence analysis) to ensure readability. The sample was analyzed as a whole and split into the different working groups as well as different age groups. As a general tool of research for qualitative data, the homogeneity of the given associations was checked with the homogeneity index. In the analysis, first the polarity and the neutrality indices are going to be presented before the core-periphery analysis is shown. Finally, a correspondence analysis of the qualitative data was calculated.

The two axes of the Cartesian coordinate system to display a core-periphery analysis are *relative frequency* and *total mean score* (Vergès, 1994). To give credit to the exponential

appearance of associations in a free association process, a logarithmic scale from .01 to 1 was chosen. This ensures the visualization of the geometric distance (Kulich, el Sehity, & Kirchler, 2004). Since the given associations were rather heterogenic, a criterion of segregation was set to a relative frequency of .1 to differ between *frequent* and *infrequent* associations (Kulich, el Sehity, & Kirchler, 2004).⁴ Because the questionnaire and the population was Germanophone, the answers are displayed in the original language in tables and figures. To ensure readability only items with a relative frequency of more then .03 are displayed all figures⁵.

Homogeneity Index of the given stimuli

The *homogeneity index* is an instrument that shows how similar or diverse the given associations from each subgroup as well as from the total sample are. It is computed by dividing the number of all different associations by the total number of associations (el Sehity, Kirchler, & Mühlbacher, 2003). The value ranges between 0 “*very homogeneous*”, to 1 “*very heterogenous*”. Despite the name, the index basically shows the difference of the associations in percent (.1 = 10%). The results of the *homogeneity index* can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Difference of associations

	Work	Entrepreneurship	State Enterprises
Employees	.74	.82	.89
Managers	.76	.82	.89
Civil Servants	.65	.66	.81
Self-Employed	.81	.68	.90
Σ	.57	.68	.73

As displayed in the table, the results vary from a homogeneity index of .57 (*work*) to .73 (*state enterprises*) for the total sample while the results vary more in the different subgroups. Most heterogeneous are the associations given by self-employed participants concerning *state enterprises* while *work* and *entrepreneurship* are rated rather homogenously by civil servants. Overall the results indicate a rather high heterogeneity in *state enterprises*, while most employees and managers gave diverse associations for *work* and *entrepreneurship*.

⁴ Noteworthy is the fact that the shown figures use the accurate data position within the Cartesian coordinate system while tables show calculations rounded to two decimal figures. This is an explanation for the differences between the presented figures in the following section and close examinations afterwards.

⁵ A full list of all associations can be requested from the author

Analysis of the Polarity and Neutrality Indices

The polarity index as well as the neutrality index show different attitudes between the groups towards the three given stimuli *work*, *entrepreneurship* and *state enterprises*. At first, the general results for each stimulus will be presented without taking into account the different subgroups. The reason behind this is to find the general attitude of the Austrian workforce towards the different stimuli. The results for the polarity and neutrality can be found in Table 3.

Table 3*Polarity and neutrality of the stimuli*

	Subgroup	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Polarity of Work	Employees	.28	.57
	Managers	.35	.59
	Civil Servants	.30	.53
	Self-Employed	.41	.60
	Total	.32	.58
Polarity of Entrepreneurship	Employees	.04	.53
	Managers	.04	.65
	Civil Servants	.03	.63
	Self-Employed	.29	.70
	Total	.08	.63
Polarity of State Enterprises	Employees	-.11	.68
	Managers	-.21	.67
	Civil Servants	.08	.62
	Self-Employed	-.31	.75
	Total	-.08	.68
Neutrality of Work	Employees	.26	.35
	Managers	.21	.30
	Civil Servants	.17	.25
	Self-Employed	.16	.26
	Total	.20	.29
Neutrality of Entrepreneurship	Employees	.36	.39
	Managers	.28	.38
	Civil Servants	.26	.35
	Self-Employed	.18	.32
	Total	.27	.36
Neutrality of State Enterprises	Employees	.27	.40
	Managers	.21	.33
	Civil Servants	.24	.35
	Self-Employed	.23	.34
	Total	.24	.36

The mean value of the polarity shows a definitive positive attitude towards *work* over the different subgroups. With .32 on a scale from -1 to 1 it is perceived as rather positive, even when compared to the attitude towards *entrepreneurship*, which – with a polarity of .08 – only has a slightly positive connotation. The stimulus of *state enterprises* evoked slightly negative associations, even though the group of civil servants made up two fifths of the total sample and, as stated before, in-group ratings tend to be more positive than ratings from the out-group. A different result could be found regarding the neutrality index. Each stimulus had a neutrality between .16 and .28 over all subgroups. *Entrepreneurship* had the highest mean in neutrality which is consistent with the low polarity rating. Taking both indices into account, it underlines that the associations for each stimulus were rather heterogeneous, especially towards *work* since it reached a rather high polarity as well as an elevated neutrality.

It has been found that differences in the attitude towards the workplace occur between civil servants and individuals working in the private sector and that the cohort of the participants may influence their attitude towards the stimuli (e.g. Cherniss & Kale, 1987, Solnet & Hood, 2008), a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted.

The MANOVA was conducted using the participants mean scale scores of polarity and neutrality as dependent variables to determine, whether their attitudes about *work*, *entrepreneurship*, and *state enterprises* could be influenced by being an employee, manager, civil servant or self-employed person. The results of the MANOVA indicate no significant differences towards *work*, *entrepreneurship*, or *state enterprises* for the different subgroups, Wilks' Lambda $F(1.4) = 0.88$, $p = .127$, $\eta^2 = .04$. However, the only result that could indicate a trend could be found for the polarity towards state enterprises, $F(3.47) = 1.54$, $p = .017$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the civil servants ($M = .09$, $SD = .07$) was significantly different than for the self-employed individuals ($M = -.31$, $SD = .12$), with the latter group having a more negative attitude towards state enterprises. The results for the post hoc comparison for the total sample can be found in Table 4.

Table 4*Post hoc analysis of the polarity*

		Mean difference	SD	p	CD	
					Lower	Upper
Employees	Managers	.10	.15	.903	-.28	.48
	Civil Servants	-.20	.12	.360	-.51	.12
	Self-Employed	.20	.15	.568	-.20	.60
Managers	Employees	-.10	.15	.903	-.48	.28
	Civil Servants	-.30	.13	.112	-.64	.04
	Self-Employed	.10	.16	.931	-.32	.51
Civil Servants	Employees	.20	.12	.360	-.12	.51
	Managers	.30	.13	.112	-.04	.64
	Self-Employed	.40	.14	.025*	-.04	.76
Self-Employed	Employees	-.20	.15	.568	-.60	.20
	Managers	-.10	.16	.931	-.51	.32
	Civil Servants	-.40	.14	.025*	-.76	-.04

Notes. *significant on $p = .05$

To see if the cohort of the participants influenced the implicit attitude towards the stimuli, a MANCOVA was conducted. Once again, the participants' mean scale scores of polarity and neutrality were used as dependent variables but this time the age was controlled for each subgroup.

The results of the MANCOVA indicate no significant main effect of age on the subgroups, with Wilks' Lambda $F(1.43) = 0.88$, $p = .110$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Since age does not seem to influence the implicit attitude of the participants, it will be excluded during further quantitative analysis of the data.

Core-periphery Analysis of Social Representations of “work”

The stimulus *work* evoked 764 associations in total, 437 of which differed from each other. The frequency as well as the mean position of some of the most frequent items for each stimulus can be found in Table 5. The core of these social representations is determined by associations that are mentioned early on in the process and with a high frequency. As shown in Table 5, the three most common associations were *stress*, *money* and *colleagues*. These words can be seen as the core elements of the social representations of *work* over all working and age groups of the sample. The upper-right area of Figure 3 contains the first part of the first periphery area which would include all associations that have a high frequency but are mentioned rather late in the association process. As shown in the figure, this area is empty because no association was given at a high enough frequency but late in the process. The bottom-left area shows the second aspect of the first periphery area. Here, all associations that are mentioned early in the process but with a low frequency can be found. The last aspect is called the second periphery area which consists of words that are mentioned late and with a low frequency. Due to the heterogeneous sample of associations, most words have a frequency that is below .1 and are therefore classified within the first-periphery and far-periphery areas and are not included in the Figures 3-5f.

Table 5*Summary of the frequency of associations for the stimuli*

	Associations	Unique	Association	Frequency	Mean rank
Work	764	436	Stress	35	2.31
			Geld	31	2.22
			Kollegen	25	2.12
Entrepreneurship	651	440	Risiko	20	2.45
			Verantwortung	17	2.88
			Arbeitgeber	13	1.69
State Enterprises	615	447	Sicherheit	11	2.09
			Beamte	10	2.5
			Politik	10	4

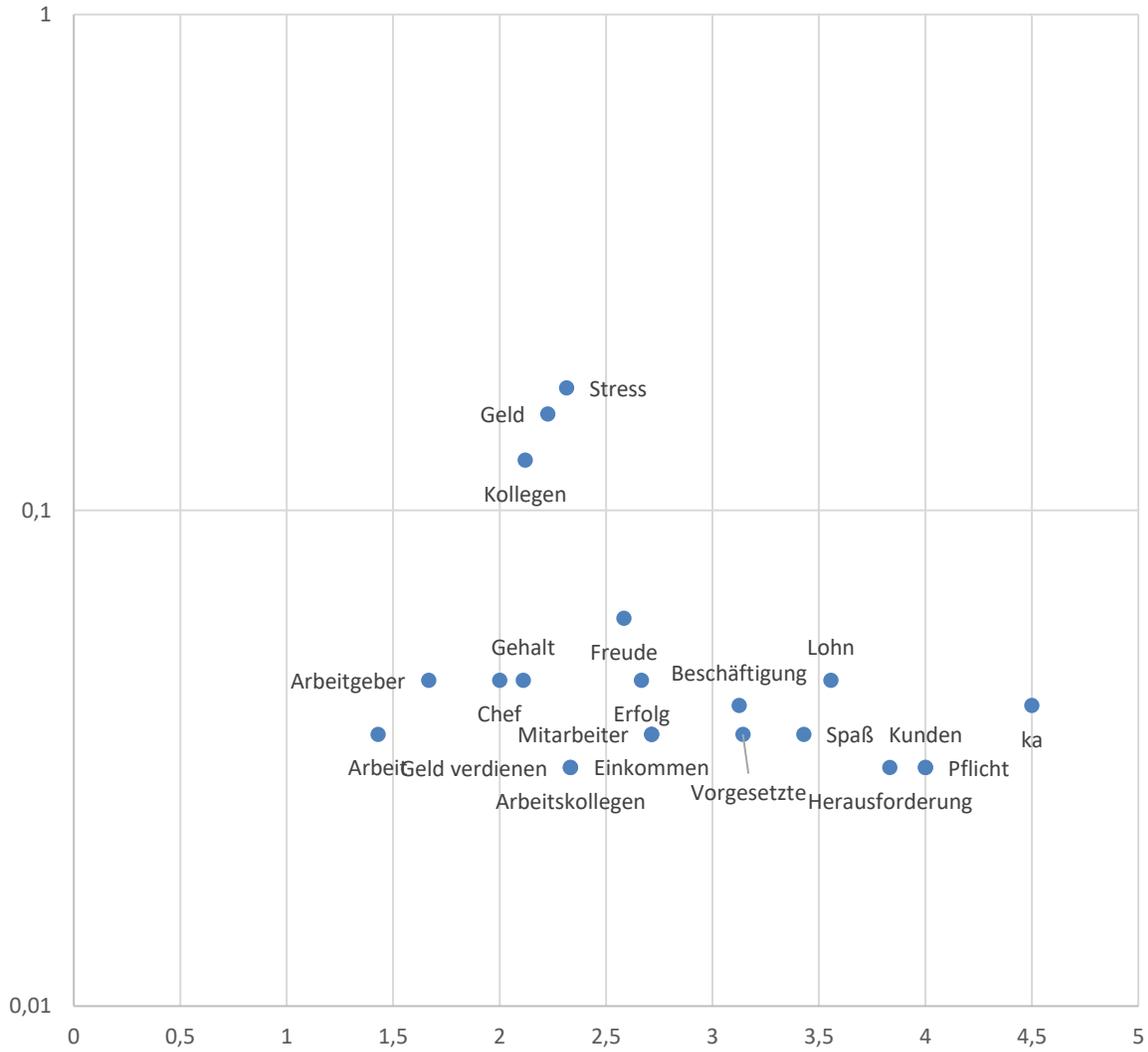


Fig. 3. Associations of the complete sample for the stimulus work

As displayed in Figure 3a (see Appendix A), the results change a little for employees compared to managers and civil servants. A total of 182 different associations have been gathered. *Stress*, *money* as well as *colleagues* remain key elements, but *salary* is also part of the core structure. As in the general sample, the top-right area remains empty because most of the associations have a low frequency.

In Figure 3b (see Appendix A), the results for managers are visualized. A total of 131 different associations have been collected. The results are similar to those of employees, but

salary is only mentioned twice in total and therefore not part of the core elements of the representation.

Figure 3c (see Appendix A) shows the associations for civil servants. Interesting is the fact that *money* is close to the border between the core elements and the area of the first-periphery. In total, 321 unique associations could be gathered. The high number is due to the fact that this group forms the biggest category within the total sample.

The last working group is displayed in Figure 3d (see Appendix A) and consists of a total of 129 unique associations given by self-employed persons. This group is especially interesting because, when the segregation criterion of .1 is applied, no elements are within the core structure. *Stress* is rather close to the threshold, but not as clearly allocated as in the aforementioned groups. Besides *stress*, only one other element is close to the threshold to the core elements. *Development* is mentioned later in the process but still reaches a high frequency. Another notable fact is the amount of nonsense answers given by this group. *Yes* and *no idea* are mentioned often enough to be classified within the first-periphery area. The rest of the data is similar to the other groups. The results for the different age groups can be found in Figure 3e (see Appendix A). The main difference between the two age groups is that the younger generations Y and Z have a similar structure in the core elements, and despite different arguments in recent studies (e.g. Solnet & Hood, 2008), *money* is a core element. In comparison, older generations focus more on *stress* and *colleagues*, while *money* misses the threshold for being a core element (Figure 3f, see Appendix A). Both groups have no first-periphery area associations.

Core-periphery Analysis of the Social Representations of “entrepreneurship”

The stimulus *entrepreneurship* evoked a total of 651 associations with 440 unique associations. The analysis of the total sample shows that only *risk* was mentioned early and often enough to be classified as a core element of the social representations of *entrepreneurship*. As for the stimulus *work*, the first-periphery area is empty as most associations have a relative frequency of less than .1 due to the heterogeneous answers. Close to the threshold to the core elements is only *responsibility*, followed by *employee* and *work* (see Figure 4).

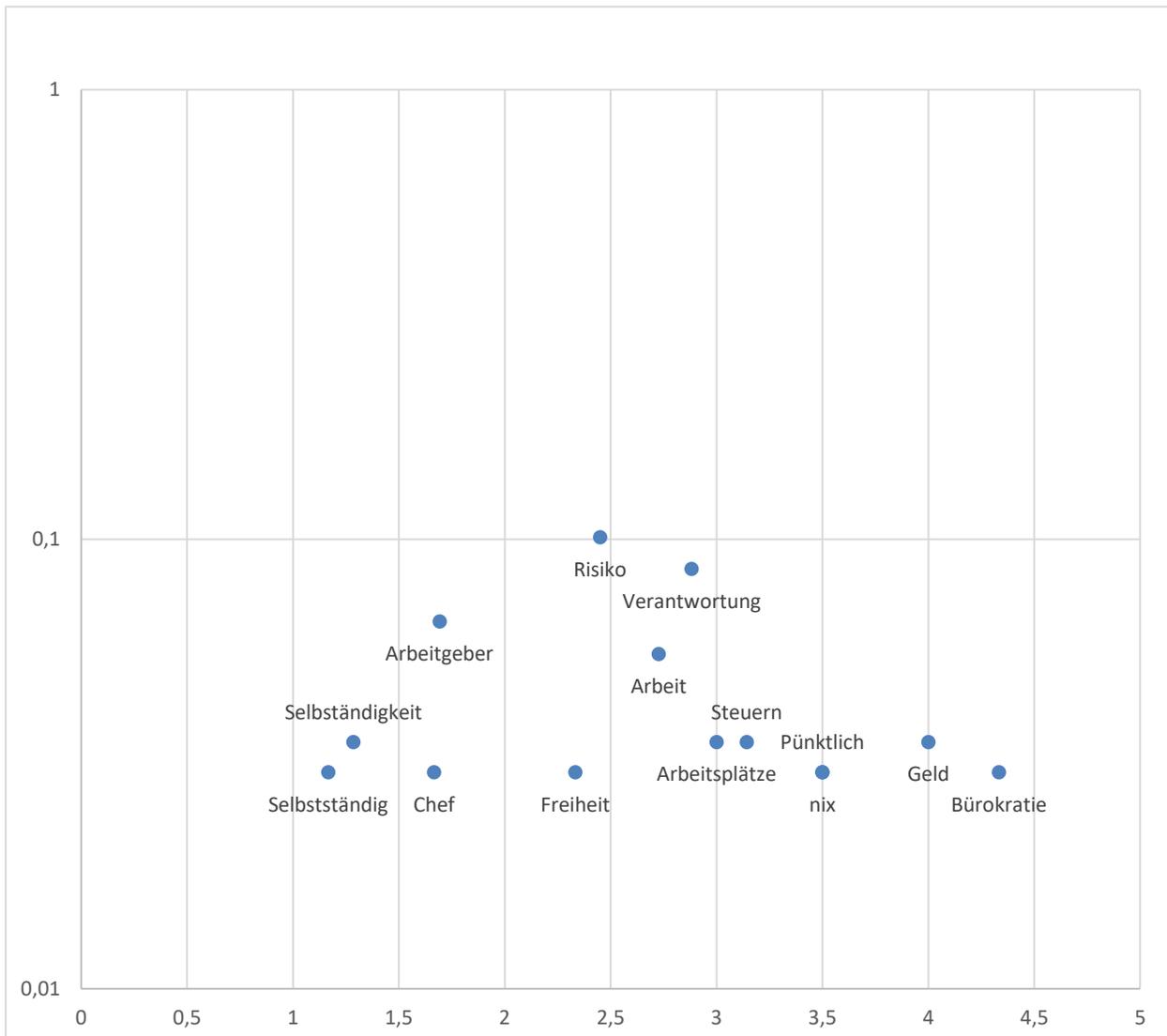


Fig. 4. Associations of the complete sample for the stimulus entrepreneurship

Figure 4a to 4d (see Appendix A) show the different results of the individual groups for the stimulus *entrepreneurship*. For employees it is notable that *risk* barely manages to stay in the core-elements area because it is mentioned not only less frequently than in other groups, but also later in the process. It is mentioned less often than the nonsense answer *nothing*. The core element *employer* is mentioned early and often and is therefore clearly part of the structure behind the social representations of *entrepreneurship* for employees.

Managers have *risk* as the core element, but also *being on time* within the first-periphery area of the social representation. The group of managers differs from the total sample in this aspect, since only self-employed participants have associations within the first-periphery area. The composition of the second area of the first-periphery is also interesting. *Autonomy*, *personal responsibility*, and *boss* are mentioned often as well as soon in the association process.

Civil servants show no clear core structure of the social representations of *entrepreneurship*. *Responsibility* and *risk* are close to the threshold, but do not clearly belong to this area since they are mentioned rather late. *Freedom* and *employer*, for example, have a similar relative frequency, but are clearly within the second area of the first periphery.

As stated above, self-employed persons differ from the results of the general sample because they are the only ones who have a first area of first periphery. Besides the nonsense answer *no idea*, *work* is mentioned with the highest frequency, but rather late in the process. *Self-responsibility* as well as *risk* form the core elements of the social representations and *responsibility* closely misses the threshold to be seen as a core element. In Figure 4e (see Appendix A), the two age groups Generation Y and Z are visualized in comparison to the other generations. If the criterion of .1 for frequency is applied, the older generations do not have core elements, while Generation Y and Z mention *work* and *risk* as core elements. While *risk* and *responsibility* could be counted as core elements for older generations if the threshold was lowered, the results are not as clear as for younger generations (Figure 4f, see Appendix A). *Employer* follows close to those two associations for older generations but has a lower relative frequency than *responsibility* or *being on time* for younger generations.

Core-periphery Analysis of the Social Representations of “state enterprise”

The stimulus *state enterprise* evoked a total of 615 associations with 447 unique associations. The analysis of the total sample shows that not a single association was mentioned often enough to pass the threshold of .1 in relative frequency to be seen as core element of the social representations of *state enterprises* (see Figure 5). Most frequently mentioned were the words *security, civil servants, as well as nepotism. Politics* is mentioned often but rather late in the process and would only be seen within the first periphery area. The relative frequency of less than .1 for each association could be due to the heterogeneous answers.

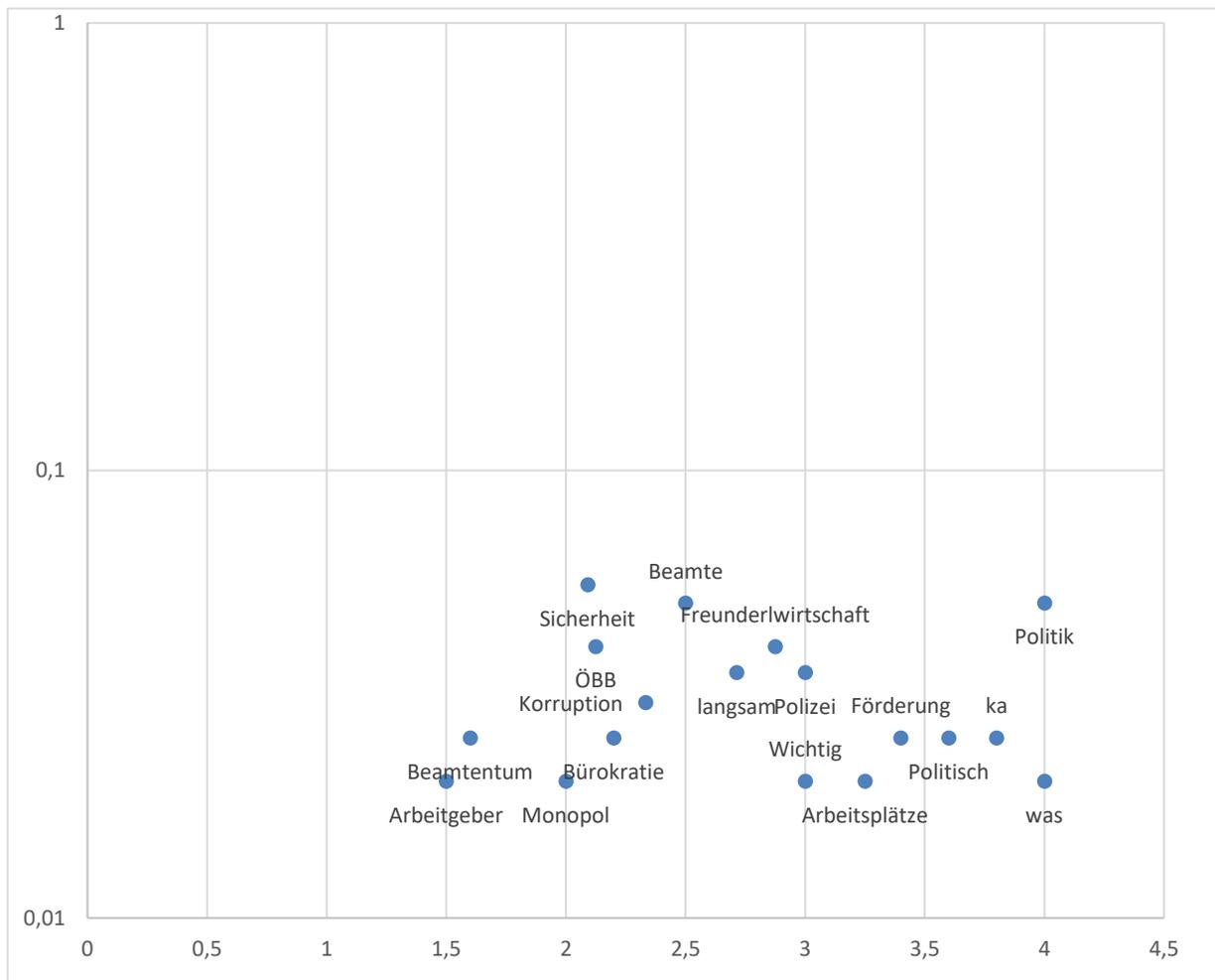


Fig. 5. Associations of the complete sample for the stimulus state enterprises

Differing from the general results, the group of employees mentions *civil servants* often and very early in the process (see Figure 5a in the Appendix A). The second and third most frequent answers are *no idea*, and *what*. Most of the associations did not reach a frequency of being mentioned more than once despite a sample size of 48 individuals and 125 associations.

A similar result can be found within the managers group with the difference that *civil servants* is mentioned so late in the process that it is only part of the first periphery area, while the core elements could not be clearly determined. In total, a sample of 38 managers produced 114 associations which are displayed in Figure 5b (see Appendix A).

As shown in Figure 5c (see Appendix A), civil servants do not have a core elements section, and neither have managers nor employees. Interestingly, the term *civil servants* are not even mentioned once in a total of 268 associations from 81 different individuals. Mentioned most frequently and early in the process are the terms *security* and *police*. Those are closely followed by *politics*, mentioned later, and *nepotism* and *sponsorship*, mentioned less frequently.

Last but not least, the group of self-employed individuals produced a total of 108 associations with the stimulus state enterprises with a sample size of 32 participants. Most frequent is the association *what* that appears rather late in the process and is the only association that passes the threshold of .1 and therefore is seen as part of the first-periphery area. *ÖBB* (*Österreichische Bundesbahnen; Austrian Federal Railways*) and *security* are mentioned early but only as often as items from the bottom-right area. Most associations are mentioned only once (see Figure 5d in the Appendix A).

As seen in Figure 5e, the younger age group has *civil servants* only just in the core elements section of the social representations with a total of 281 associations, while the older generations show more diversity in their 334 associations (Figure 5e and Figure 5f, see Appendix A). Both groups mention negatively connoted attributions like *slow*, *corruption*, and *nepotism* quite often and early in the process.

Correspondence Analysis of the Stimuli

The correspondence analysis is a statistical procedure that allows the investigation of the semantic content of each presented stimulus. It is a tool that reduces the information of the qualitative data by finding latent dimensions that explain the variance of the given answers. The correspondence analysis tries to take into account the qualitative nature of the data while also

enabling quantitative analysis. All associations for each stimulus were classified into a system of categories that was developed inductively by the author in cooperation with selected fellow students. The category system was later presented to two independent raters. Both were asked to individually and deductively categorize the single associations. The number of categories varied over the different stimuli and reached an inter-rater agreement between $\kappa = .61$ and $\kappa = .67$ which indicates a moderate agreement between the individual raters (see Table 6). In a subsequent step, the two raters conferred with each other to agree on a single solution of categorization to be used in further analysis. The frequency of each association as well as the corresponding category can be found in Table 7-9 for each stimulus and subsample.

Table 6
Interrater reliability

	Kappa	Std. Error	N
Work	.64	.02	436
Entrepreneurship	.67	.02	440
State Enterprises	.61	.03	447

Table 7
Categories for work

	<i>Employees</i>	<i>Managers</i>	<i>Civil Servants</i>	<i>Self-Employed</i>
Persönliche Vorteile	13	7	14	11
Finanzielle Vorteile	25	13	43	14
Wunschvorstellungen	8	10	14	6
Staatliche Rahmenbedingungen	1	4	6	5
Arbeitsinstrumente	36	36	70	18
Erfüllte Arbeit	6	9	21	7
Arbeitsmarkt	1	1	0	2
Schlechte Arbeitsbedingungen	3	2	18	1
Negative Aspekte durch Zeit	10	1	14	5
Negative Aspekte generell	3	5	11	5
Berufsarten	8	1	8	1
Alles in Ordnung	3	9	9	2
Stressoren in der Arbeit	12	8	24	6
Erfolgsfaktoren	12	6	10	6
Soziale Aspekte	14	8	38	15
Zeitplanung	10	1	9	3
Wandel	4	5	1	7

Soziale Sicherheit	2	1	6	5
Andere	12	4	5	10
Total	183	131	321	129

Table 8

Categories for entrepreneurship

	<i>Employees</i>	<i>Managers</i>	<i>Civil Servants</i>	<i>Self- Employed</i>
Alles ist gut	0	6	0	
Finanzielle Aspekte	20	9	31	12
Arten von Unternehmen	15	4	16	1
Eigenschaften guter Unternehmer	8	14	8	5
Situation am Markt	8	2	7	2
Rahmenbedingungen im Unternehmen	6	9	14	9
Personen im Unternehmen	11	5	14	4
Bedeutung für die Gesellschaft	0	2	4	2
Zeitliche Nachteile	7	2	10	1
Ständige Erreichbarkeit	0	2	1	0
Persönliche Nachteile	1	0	4	4
Konflikte mit anderen	4	2	4	2
Finanzielle Nachteile	7	6	14	4
Schlechte Arbeitsbedingungen	8	1	5	3
Positive persönliche Aspekte	0	7	19	14
Entwicklungschance	5	9	17	13
Unabhängigkeit	1	11	26	14
Absprachen und Kontrolle	3	1	12	3
Ausbeutung und Machtmissbrauch	11	3	17	6
Unternehmertum als gemeinschaftliches Gut	5	3	10	2
Staatliche Rahmenbedingungen	4	9	18	6
Staatsteile	2	3	9	3
Anderes	16	5	11	13
Total	142	115	271	123

Table 9
Categories for state enterprises

	<i>Employees</i>	<i>Managers</i>	<i>Civil Servants</i>	<i>Self-Employed</i>
Eigenschaften und Aspekte von Betrieben	7	18	32	10
Absicherung und Sicherheit	8	3	22	7
Negative Regulierung	8	14	34	18
Negative wirtschaftliche Aspekte	9	5	18	13
Staatliche Betriebe	21	20	31	6
Träges Verhalten	12	15	17	10
Arbeitgeber mit Chancen	7	3	22	4
Soziale Aspekte	7	8	15	6
Allgemeine positive Aspekte	9	2	14	4
Öffentliche Wahrnehmung	2	6	16	6
Finanzielle Aspekte	13	10	19	6
Öffentliche Akteure	8	5	20	6
Anderes	14	5	8	12
Total	125	114	268	108

The analysis produced two dimensions per stimulus that explained 46.6% and 35.2% of the inertia⁶ for *work*, 53.3% and 32% for *entrepreneurship*, and 39.4% and 33.7% for *state enterprises*. The results can be found in Figures 5, 6, and 7.

⁶ Inertia is a concept similar to the concept of explained variance.

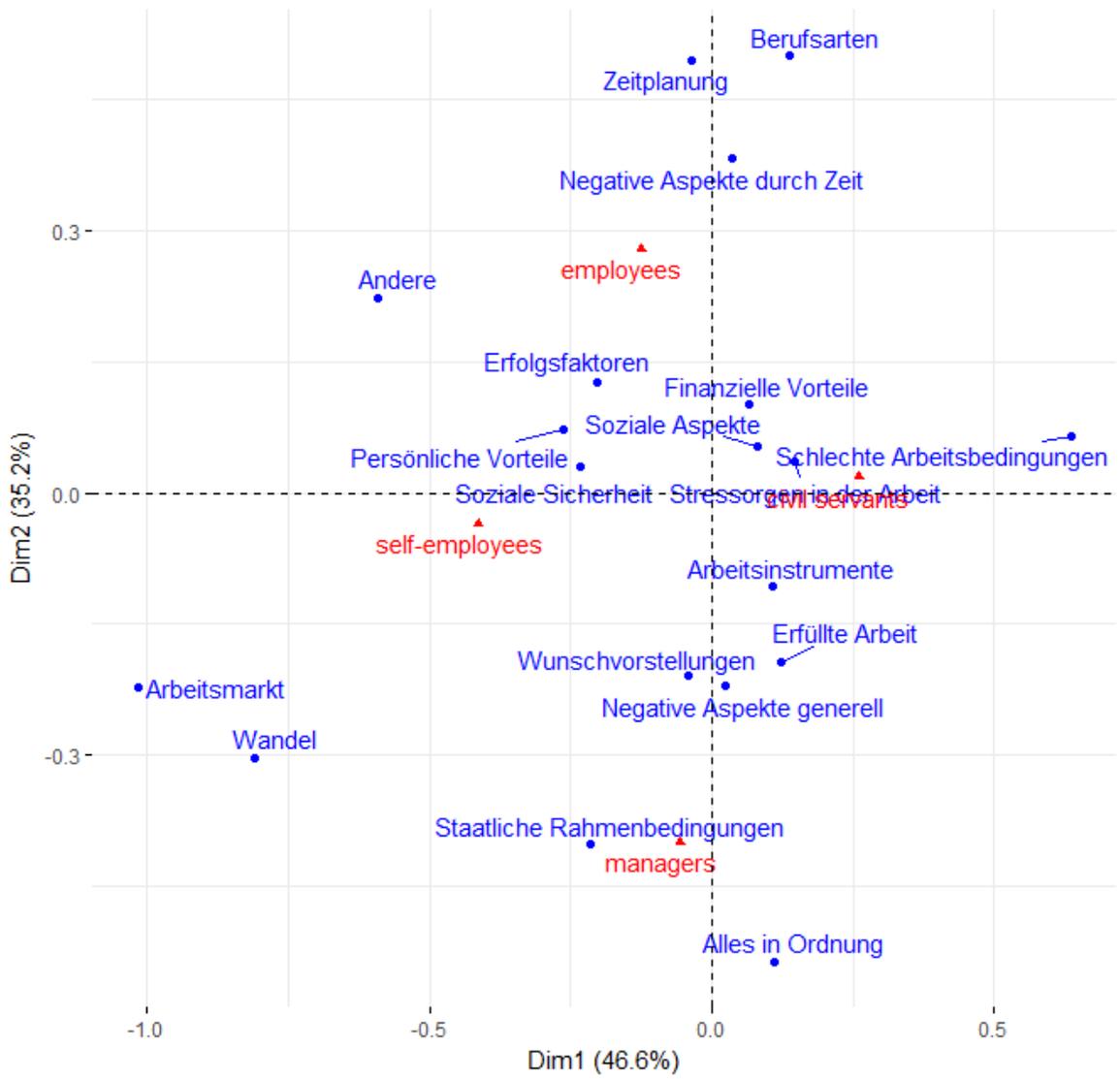


Fig. 5. Results of the correspondence analysis of associations with *work*

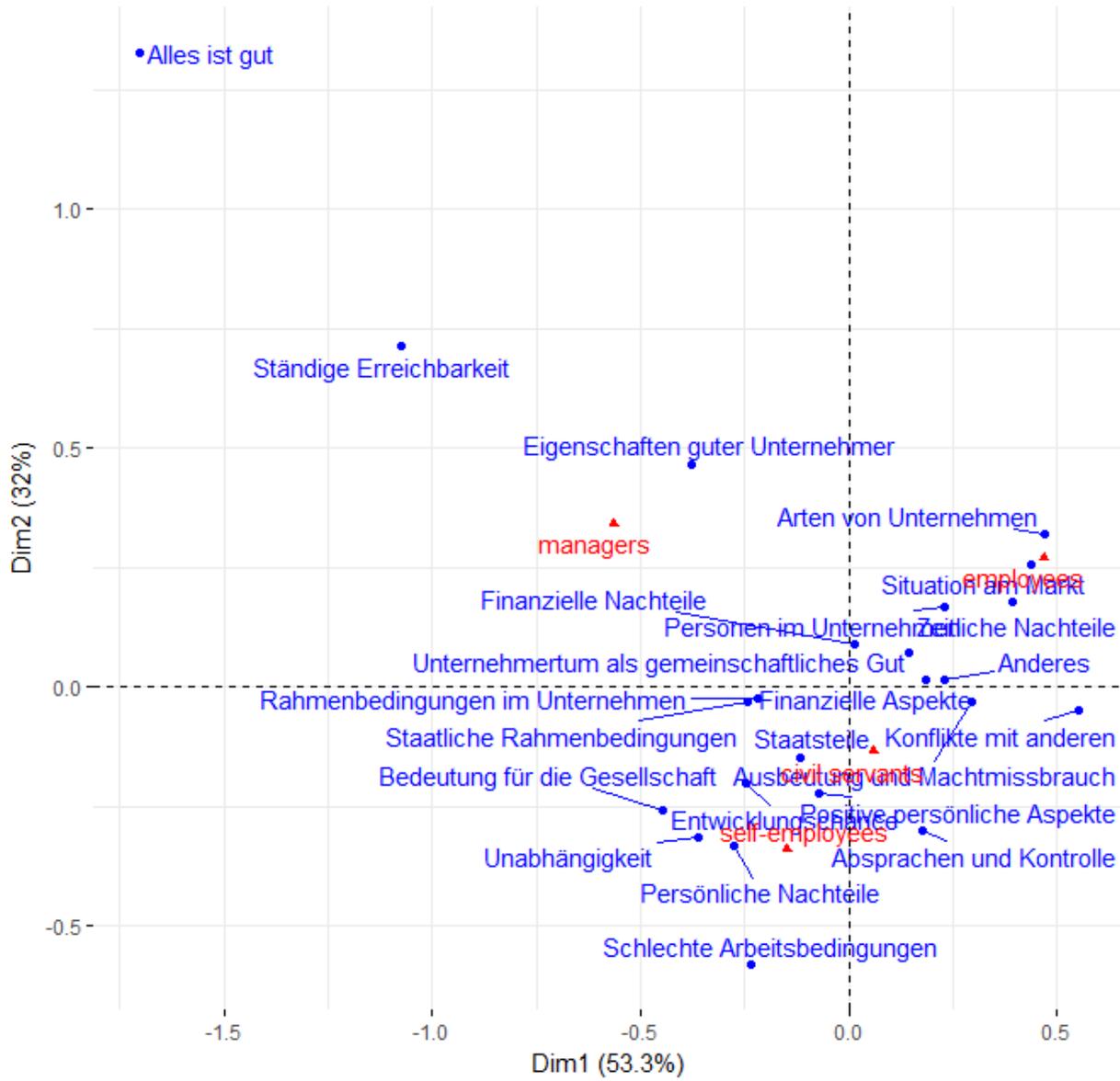


Fig. 6. Results of the correspondence analysis of associations with *entrepreneurship*

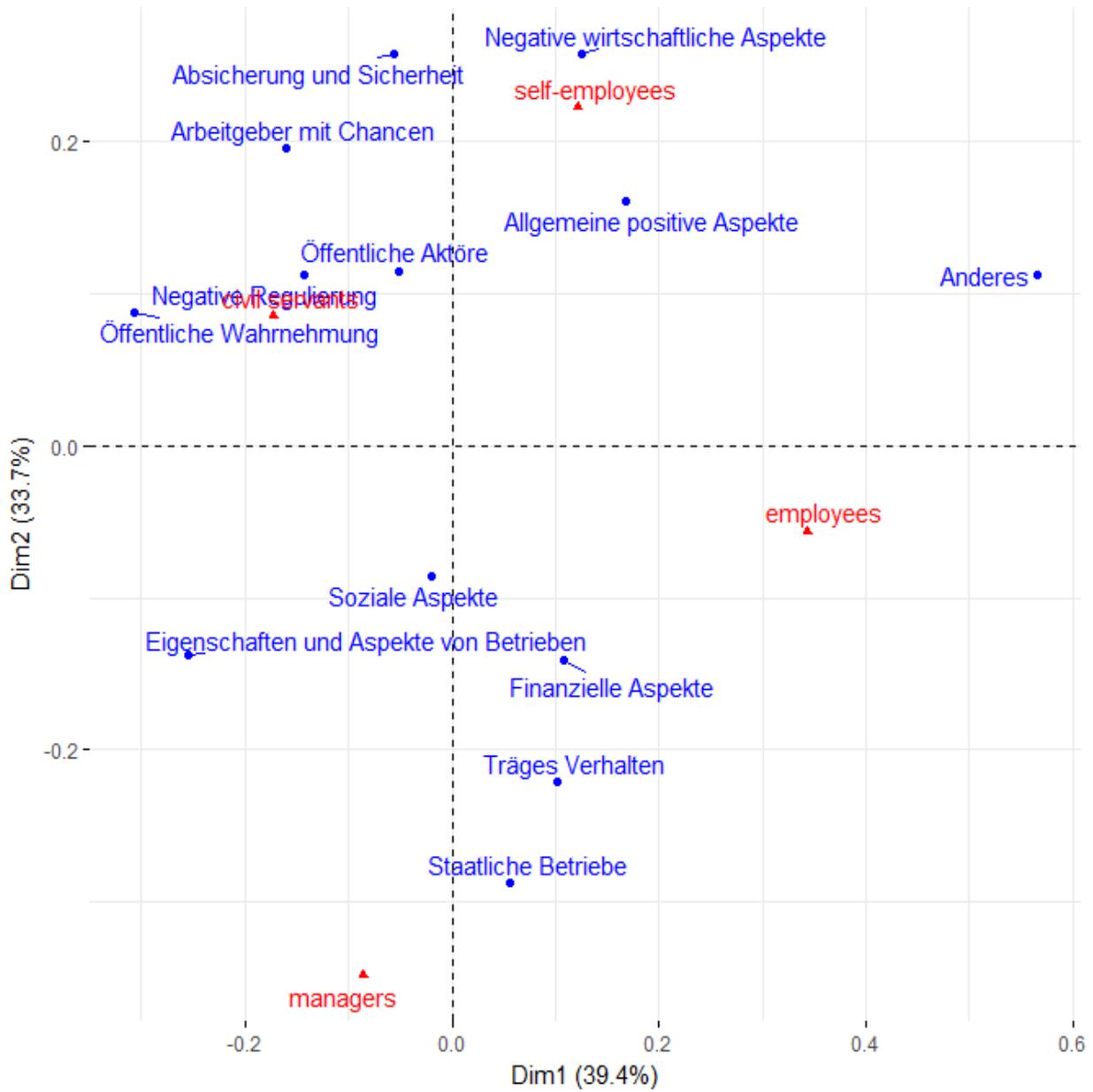


Fig. 7. Results of the correspondence analysis of associations with *state enterprises*

When presented with the stimulus *work*, employees tend to see time as an important factor in their association process. Time management as well as negative time-aspects, like working overtime, play an important role for them, while civil servants are more likely to associate stress from work and bad working conditions with the stimulus.

Both groups (employees and civil servants) mention several relatively bad features that seem to be somehow compensated by seeing the financial benefit of work. Managers and self-employed persons give responses with a more positive connotation. The self-employed participants tend to see work as a system that offers social security and personal benefits, while managers express the general feeling that everything is alright. The four subgroups have different perceptions of the stimulus. Interesting is the fact that self-employed persons see work more as a chance and something that might have a positive impact on their life, while civil servants see it more as something that needs to be done and does not necessarily lead to happiness. Managers' responses are a mixture of positive and negative associations. The results for *entrepreneurship* show a somewhat similar pattern. Self-employed participants again see the positive aspects of having the chance to develop themselves as well as being independent. They also seem to associate a certain meaning of entrepreneurship for the society. The negative aspects they mention correlate with those of civil servants. They both state nepotism and control from superior entities as negative aspects. Managers mostly tend to associate the stereotype of a good entrepreneur with negative aspects like constant reachability. Employees focus on the positive impact of entrepreneurship on the (labor) market but have mixed feelings about the term as well, since it brings conflicts and disadvantages, in their opinion. Finally, *state enterprises* do not show dimensions that were as clear as those of the other two stimuli, which was to be expected due to the findings of previous analyses in this thesis. Employees do not seem to have a real structure in attitude or associations towards state enterprises, while civil servants have a rather negative perception towards the public sector. Both civil servants and self-employed persons see the benefits of security with regards to the state as an employer and associate a social aspect with *state enterprises*. Managers lean towards the stereotype of state enterprises being rather slow organizations. In all subgroups, the negative associations are more present than the positive aspects, which was to be expected after the findings of the polarity index analysis.

Discussion

The aim of the present Master's thesis was not only to map the social representations of work, entrepreneurship and state enterprises within the Austrian population, but also to process the data in a way that enables further research and a cross-cultural approach in this direction. The thesis also aims to contribute to revealing and understanding the current state of mind of Austria's working population and to provide a basis for comparisons to findings in different countries.

The chosen method of free associations focuses on mostly spontaneous associations with the given stimulus. This provides the participants with a great freedom in expressing their thoughts about the general assumption and their individual attitude towards the stimulus. This instrument has been chosen because of these advantages, despite the inherent disadvantage of any qualitative instrument that it is difficult to find hard facts with this method. This disadvantage consequently leaves space for interpretation and speculations about the found results and conclusions presented in this thesis.

Nevertheless, this thesis was able to give an important insight into the mindset of the working population in Austria and contribute to future research in this field. First, the instrument of social representations is currently not often used in a work and organizational context of psychology. However, as indicated by the results in this thesis, the possibilities of qualitative research paired with the possible impact on, for example developing and evaluating interventions for work-life contexts should not be underestimated. Secondly, the collected data and found results will be useful for future researchers to investigate not only further into the mindset of the Austrian population, but it will also enable them to compare the findings to other countries. Because of the broad sample and the variety of different work groups, it should be possible to compare the data to nearly every other country, even those with a different economic system than Austria. A noteworthy benefit is the mixed methods approach of the social representations theory applied in this thesis that allows more robust interpretations and conclusions than a study with an either purely quantitative or qualitative approach. Finally, the results can be used as a basis to evaluate the perception of certain institutions in the Austrian market and among the Austrian population and could therefore be taken into account if somebody wanted to change people's attitudes towards these institutions. For example, for the selected sample, the results show that

state enterprises have a rather bad standing among all subgroups which might evoke the aspiration to elevate their standing or search for the reasons behind the negative attitude.

The presented study shows what employees, managers, civil servants, and self-employed persons associate with *work*, *entrepreneurship* and *state enterprises*. It describes which elements are part of the core structure of their social representations and how the different stimuli are evaluated from an emotional point of view. Most of the time it was found that the core elements are similar for all subsamples. However, the analyses also brought to light that each group has specific items that are more important than others and that they have a unique way of answering the free association task.

Interestingly, in the polarity and neutrality indices the ratings for the different groups did not differ as much as could be expected from the theory that in-group members rate other in-group elements more favorably than elements from out-groups (Doise, 1978 as cited in Kirchler, 1991). This theory could only be confirmed concerning the social representations for *state enterprises*, but even there the difference could be attributed to the huge drop in the polarity between civil servants and self-employed participants. Here, the hypothesis that in-group members rate each other more positively than out-group members is clearly shown, since civil servants were the only group to rate *state enterprises* as positive at all. A trend was found between civil servants and self-employed persons which may be due to the fact that self-employed individuals might have a negative attitude towards the controlling factor and high regulations for entrepreneurs imposed by the state. A similar effect might have been possible for *entrepreneurship*, but unfortunately the sample of self-employed participants was the smallest and therefore might have been too underrepresented for such an effect to show. Self-employed individuals had the strongest positive attitude towards entrepreneurship which supports the previous statement that in-group members are associated with a more positive attitude than out-group counterparts. *Work* in general is a stimulus where each subsample can be seen as part of the in-group which could explain the overall positive trend in the attitude.

It is surprising that no significant results could be found between the age groups. Generation Y and Generation Z have a reputation of being a rather complex and demanding part of the general workforce that puzzles HR managers and employers alike (Solnet, Kralj, & Kandampully 2012). This statement is not backed by the results calculated for the polarity or the neutrality index in this thesis.

The qualitative approach of the core-periphery analysis again showed the homogeneity of the different subsamples in the core elements which seem to be rather stable over the whole population. The greatest surprise for the stimulus *work* can be found by comparing Generation Y and Generation Z with the older working force. Here *money*, although close, is not part of the core elements for the older generations while it is the most frequent association in the younger subsample. This contradicts statements about the mind set of younger generations who are said to be more interested in development and being independent than in money and conventional job models. The most frequent associations with *work* over all subsamples are a mixture of positive and negative associations like *stress*, *joy*, *salary*, *success*, and *pressure to perform*.

Unfortunately, the subsample of self-employed participants is most notable for the high number of nonsense answers as well as the pure absence of distinct core elements. This might be due to the smaller sample size or the data collection itself. As stated before, the use of polling institutes often goes hand in hand with paying incentives that may influence the participants' motivation to take part in studies such as the present one. Due to the qualitative approach and setup of the survey, it was not possible to check the validity of each given association or to ask follow-up questions if an answer was not clear for the author.

Similar conclusions can be made for the core-periphery analysis of *entrepreneurship* where *risk* is an important element for most of the subsamples. Interestingly, the most frequently associated words were *work*, *autonomy*, and *risk* which fit into the stereotype some individuals have about the life of an entrepreneur. Again, the difference between members of the older and younger workforce is not as big as could be expected from previous research. Both groups mention *risk* and *responsibility* often and rather early in the process. Generation Y and Z differ from the older ones, because they mention *work* more often and sooner in the process. Another noteworthy fact is the core element *employer* for employees and the location it has in the civil servants group. Both mention it quite often and soon in the process, whereas self-employed participants and managers seem to have a different representation. This difference might be explained by the higher responsibility for others that managers and self-employed persons have in common. It could also be explained by their own experiences of being an employee, which may have had an effect on their view on entrepreneurship. Altogether there were similar drawbacks that were already mentioned regarding the analysis of *work*, but it gives a good insight especially for the generational conflicts discussed in the media.

Finally, the core-periphery analysis for *state enterprises* was unclear since no element reached a level high enough to be seen as a core element by the same definition that was applied to the other stimuli. Only employees mention *civil servants* frequently enough to pass the .1 threshold. Since it would corrupt the whole scientific concept to change the threshold to analyze this subsample, it was decided to keep this threshold and not to force elements into this category, but to rather try to figure out why the association had been given in that order. Here, the homogeneity index provides a helpful insight because with .73 it shows a strong heterogeneity for this sample with the peak of .91 for civil servants. Those two approaches combined give the impression that certain stereotypes towards state enterprises exist, but the stimulus itself was not clear enough to yield a distinct direction. This might be due to the fact that some participants listed examples for state enterprises as associations such as *police*, *ÖBB*, or *politics* and *civil servants*, while others gave associations that seem to represent the public opinion and emotional impression about state enterprises such as *slow*, *corrupt*, or *nepotism*. For further research it should be considered to review the stimuli and to account for this effect of potentially evoking associations to different aspects of the same stimulus and for other ambiguities.

The correspondence analysis yielded interesting results that bolster the findings of the other two analyses. It was noticeable that civil servants and self-employed persons seem to have a similar opinion about a lot of associations, even though they are the only two subsamples that reached a significant difference in their opinion about state enterprises in the polarity index analysis. Further studies could investigate the question about character traits of individuals who want to be self-employed, are entering into a work relationship, get a managing position or serve as civil servants both before they start and after they have spent some time in the position. As mentioned in the introduction, studies have tried to find a special “psychological type” of individuals who are most suitable for the position of a civil servant (Frankel & Manners, 1980). Maybe there are also “psychological types” for other positions such as managers or entrepreneurs, or it could be the position itself that molds the individual to develop the traits needed to successfully execute the position. To answer the question mentioned above and others, the use of a mixed methods approach in work and organizational psychology could benefit not only the scientific community, but also increase the applicability of interventions for real work situations as it enables researchers to find latent structures that are otherwise not easy to measure.

Limitations and Implications

The first limitation that has to be mentioned and considered is the composition of the sample. The general idea was to have a pilot study for further cross-cultural analysis with Cuba. It is possible that stronger effects or a deeper analysis could have been possible if the sample had been collected with the goal of representing only the Austrian population more accurately. Secondly, the social representations theory is not well established in work and organizational psychology, so instructions and execution had to be transferred from other research fields which might have produced some flaws that could not have been evaluated in the scope of this thesis.

It is also a fact that paying incentives in form of a participation fee motivates individuals to participate in different studies purely because of the incentive (Cubitt, Rouvelis, Gächter, & Kabalin 2011; Dana, Cain, & Dawes 2008). Since the amount of points to be received for filling the questionnaire is linked to the average time participants need to finish the questionnaire and not to the individual time needed, it might have been possible that participants rushed through the questions to collect the expected reward. This could explain the negative effect in terms of nonsense answers or missing values since more than half of the participants did not fill out the dataset that was used for this thesis. Unfortunately, the use of a polling institute is quite expensive and even more so if the participants are part of more complex working groups. Due to the difference between civil servants and employees in the private sector, a tradeoff between collecting enough data and remaining on an affordable level of cost had to be made, which led to some cutbacks in terms of differentiation and number of participants.

Another typical problem of conducting studies with a volunteer group is the issue of self-selection. Participants in psychological studies seem to differ from the general population in aspects of attitude and motivation (Van Lange, Schippers, & Balliet, 2011). Since the participants were contacted through the panel of the polling institute, the bias might be even stronger since the participants may have a somewhat professional approach to answering questionnaires. Therefore, the results should be evaluated rather conservatively in terms of generalizability.

The consequent steps for further research should be to gather more data without the compromise to accommodate other research questions. This thesis represents a first start to see the value of qualitative approaches like the social representations theory for work and organizational psychology. This instrument needs further development if researchers want to

explore the existence and impact of latent knowledge structures in a new way. Unfortunately, deeper research will still have to cope with the high demand in man power and possibly need of incentives in qualitative research on a broader scale. Since it is an excellent way to get a look at people's current psychological and emotional situation, it is still worth the effort.

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Appendix A

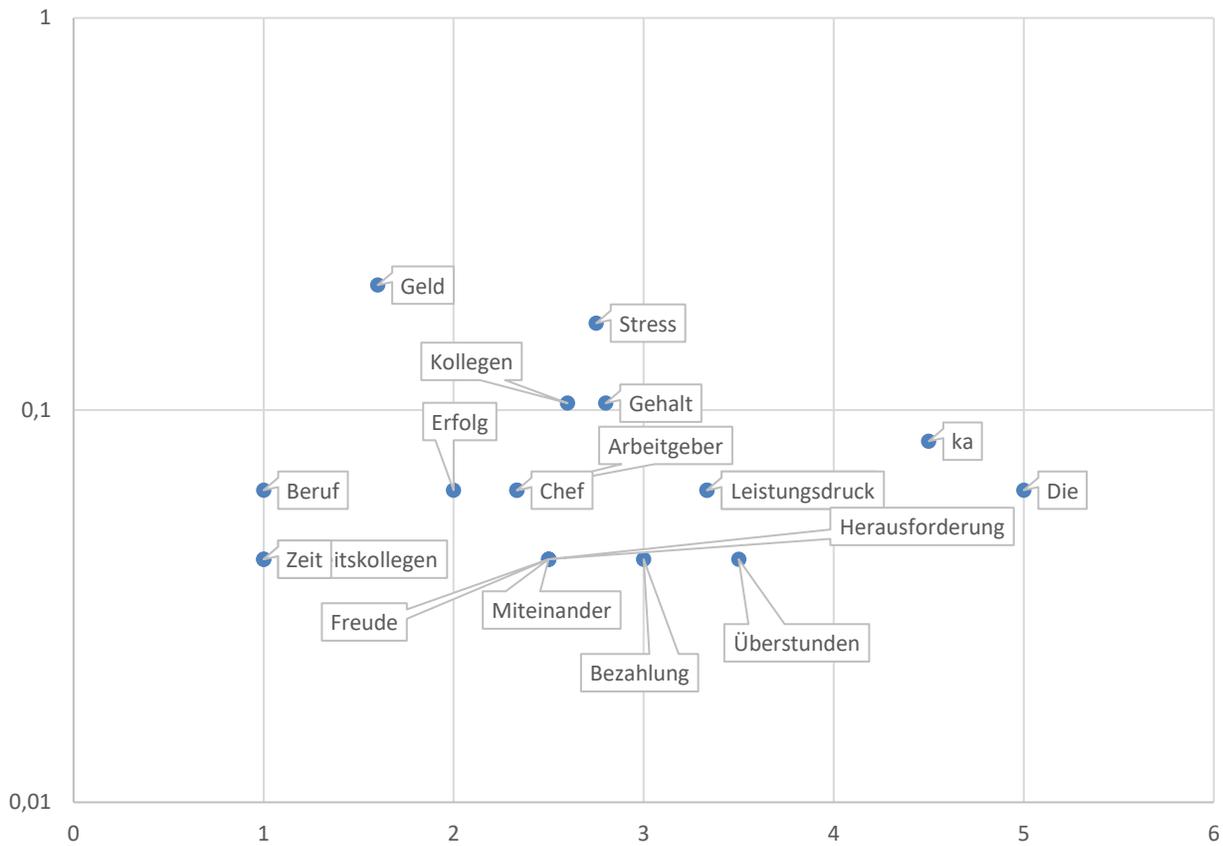


Fig. 3a. Results for employees towards work

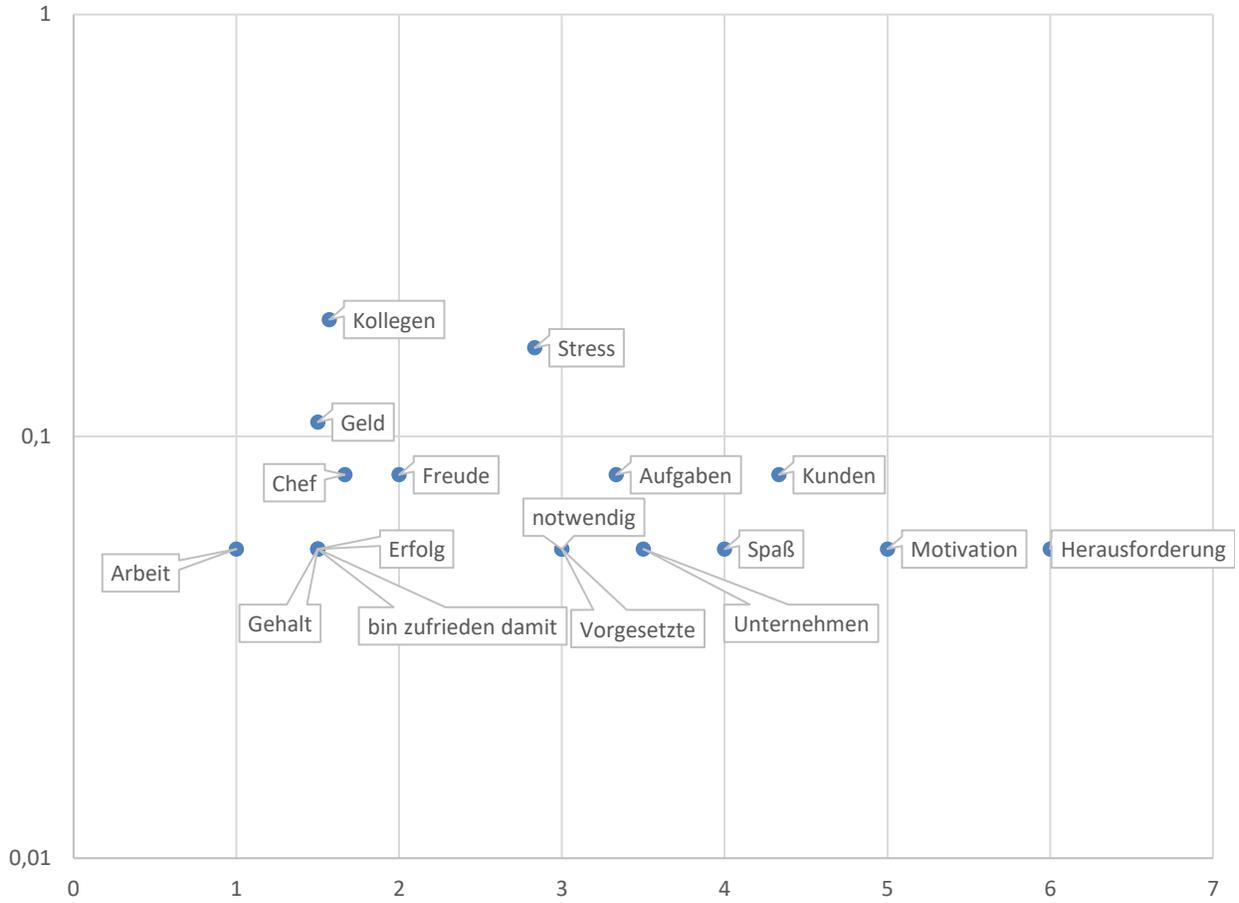


Fig. 3b. Results for managers towards work

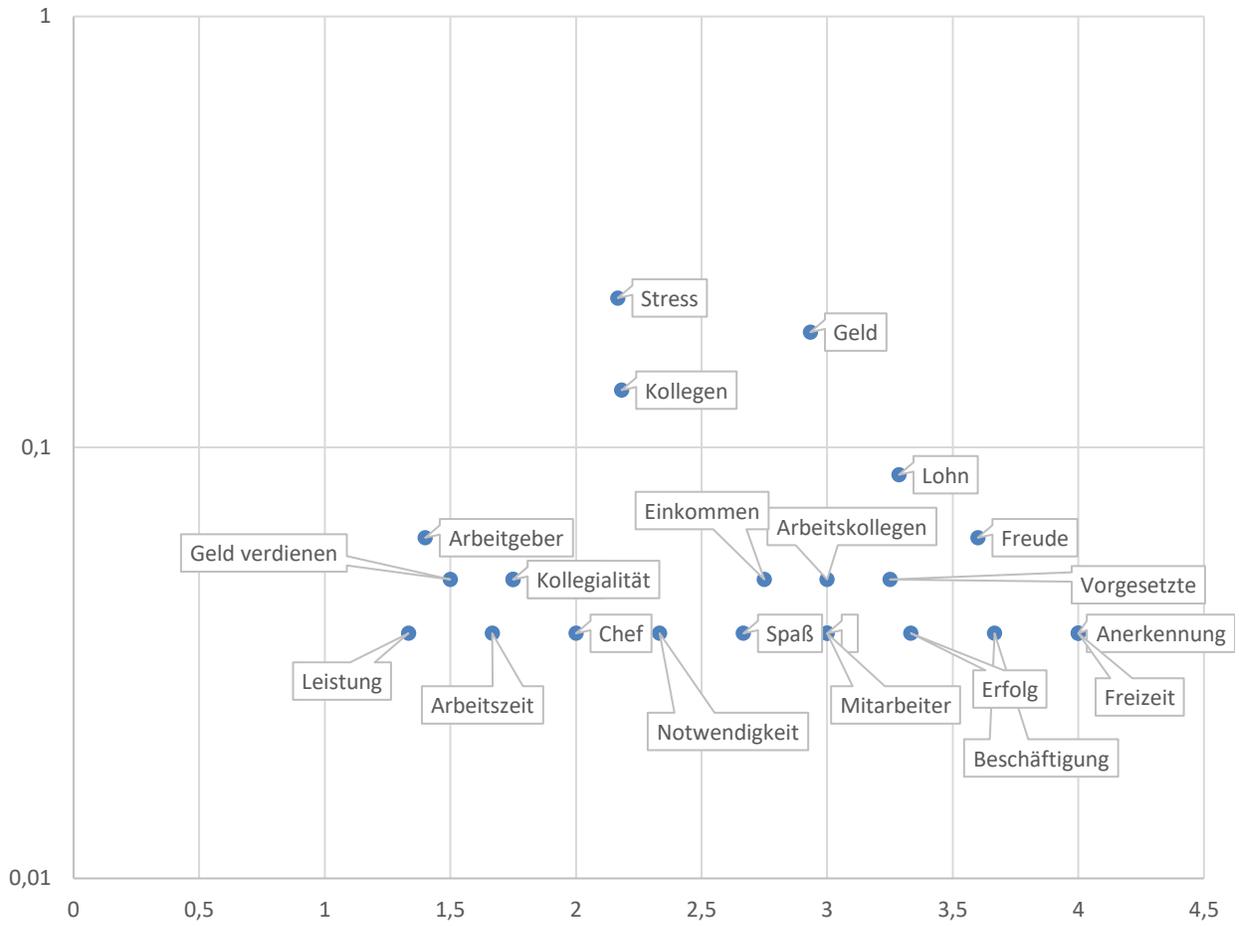


Fig. 3c. Results for civil servants towards work

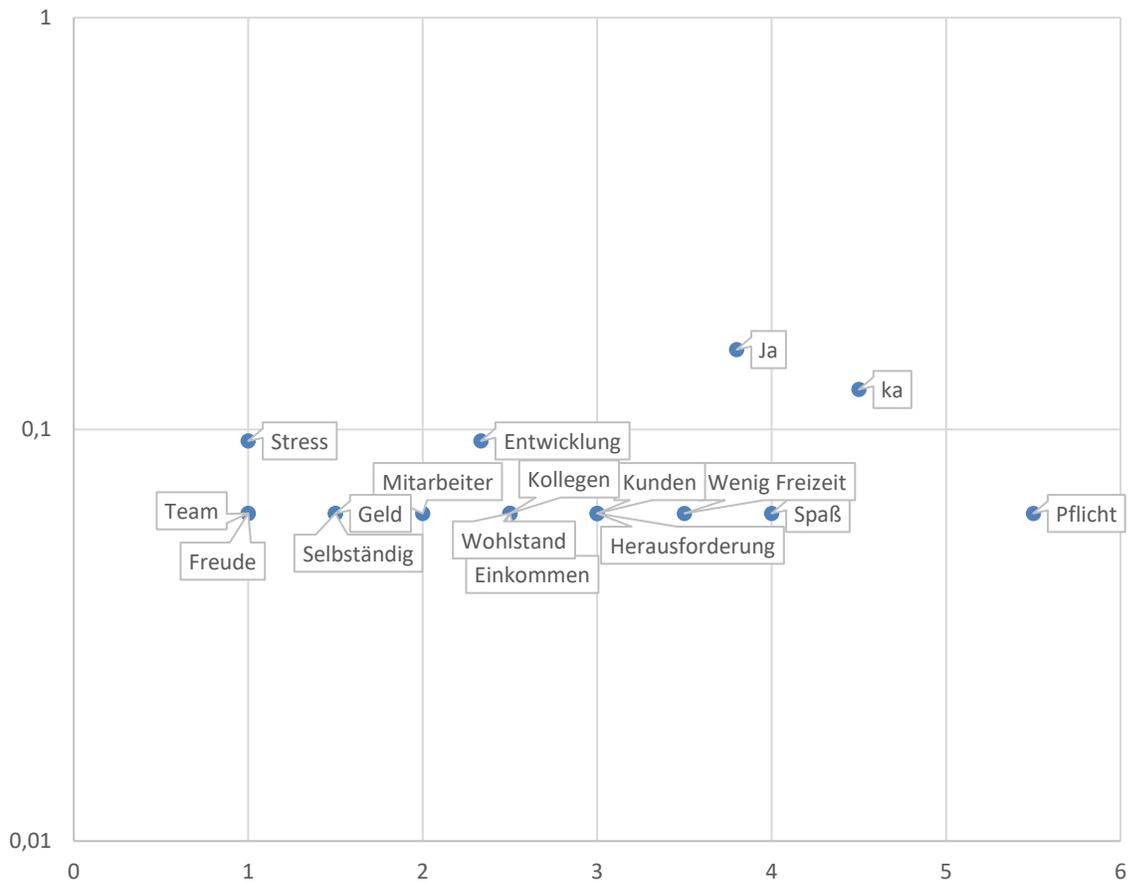


Fig. 3d. Results for self-employed individuals towards work (threshold for relative frequency was elevated to .6)

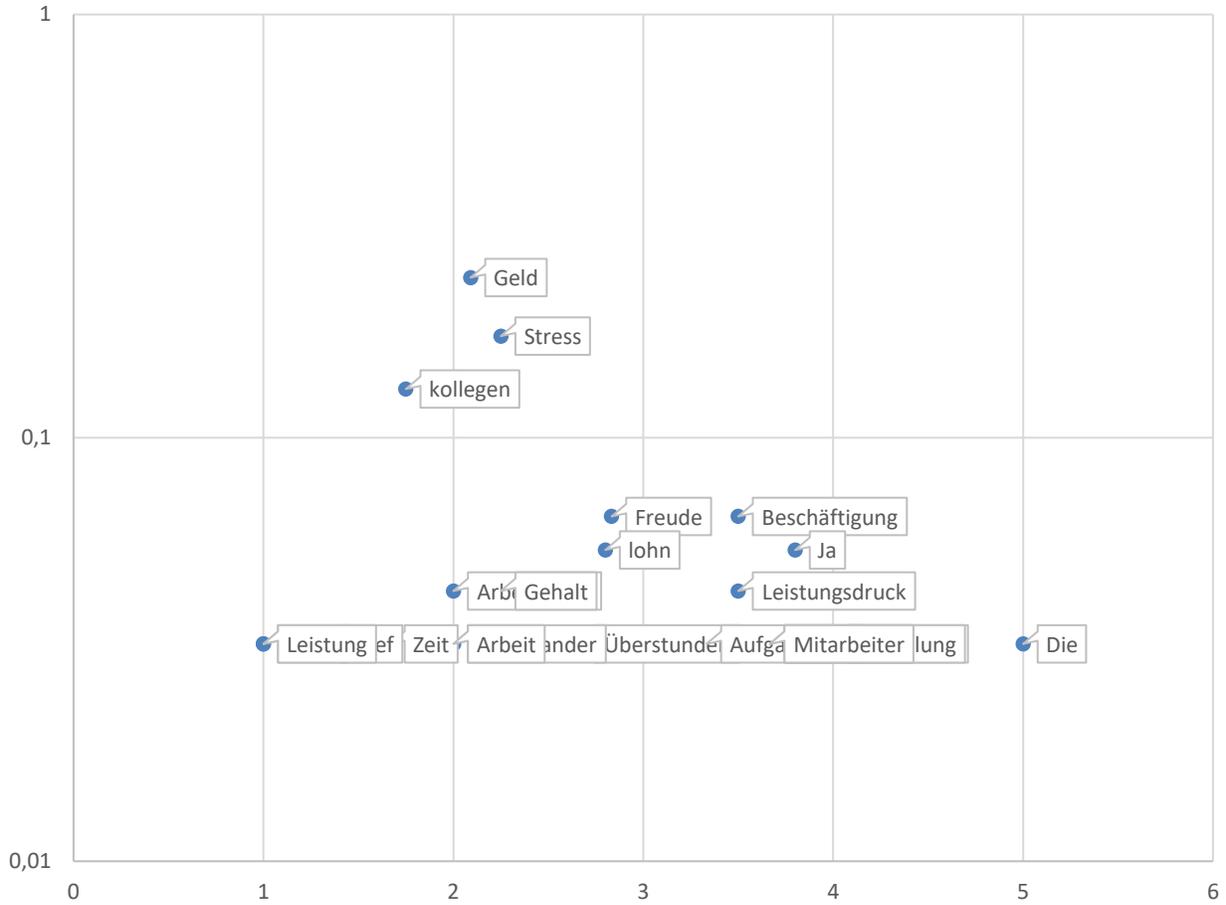


Fig 3e. Results for Generation Y & Z towards work

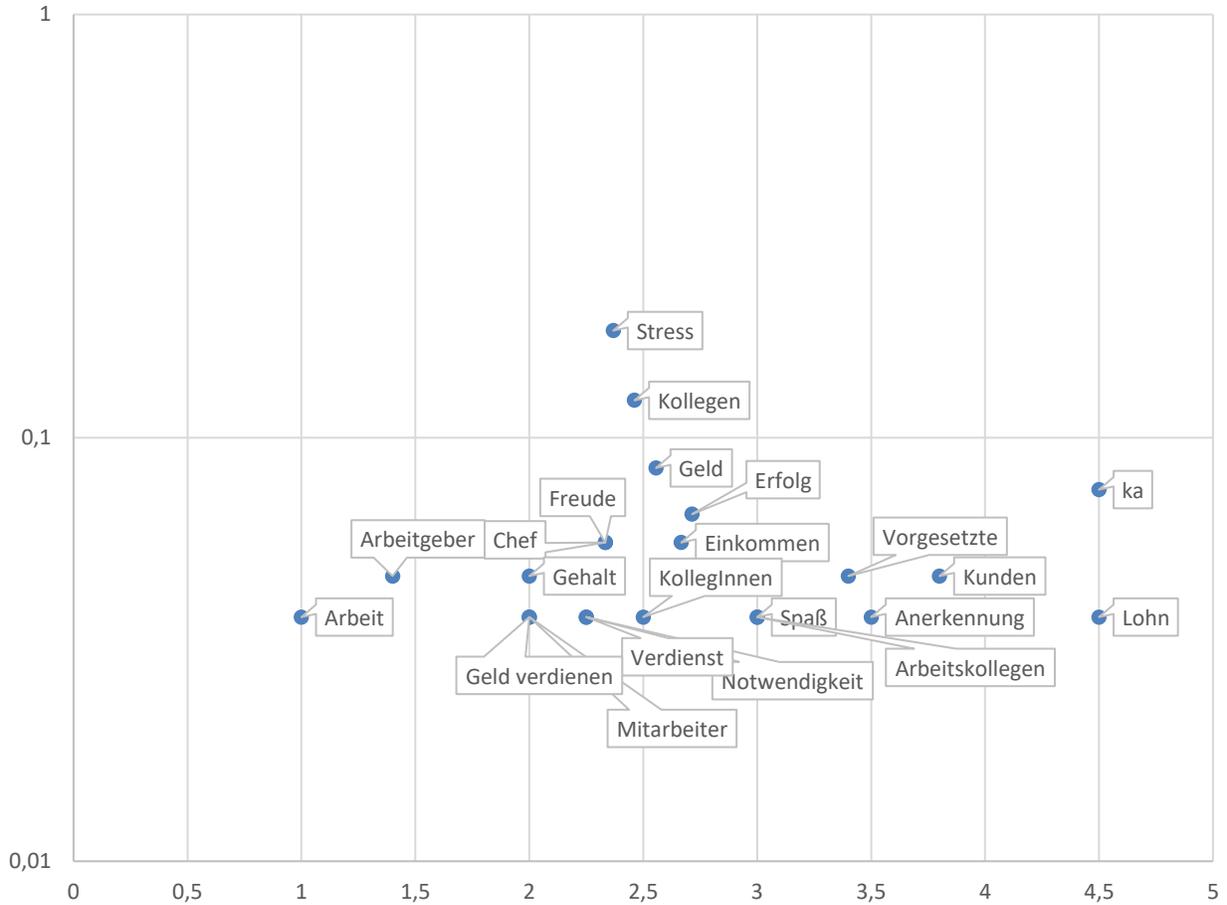


Fig 3e. Results for older generations towards work

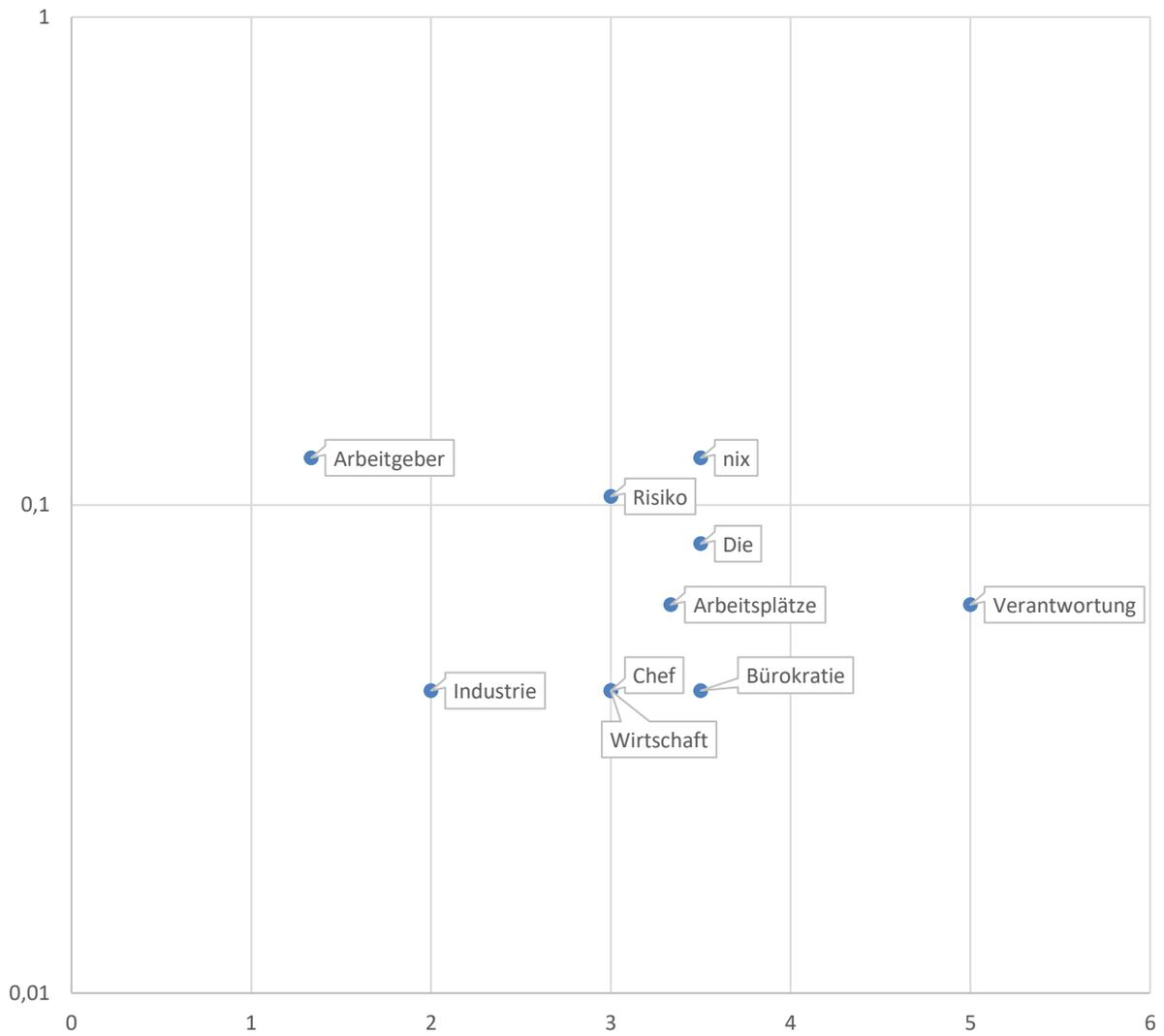


Fig. 4a. Results for employees towards entrepreneurship

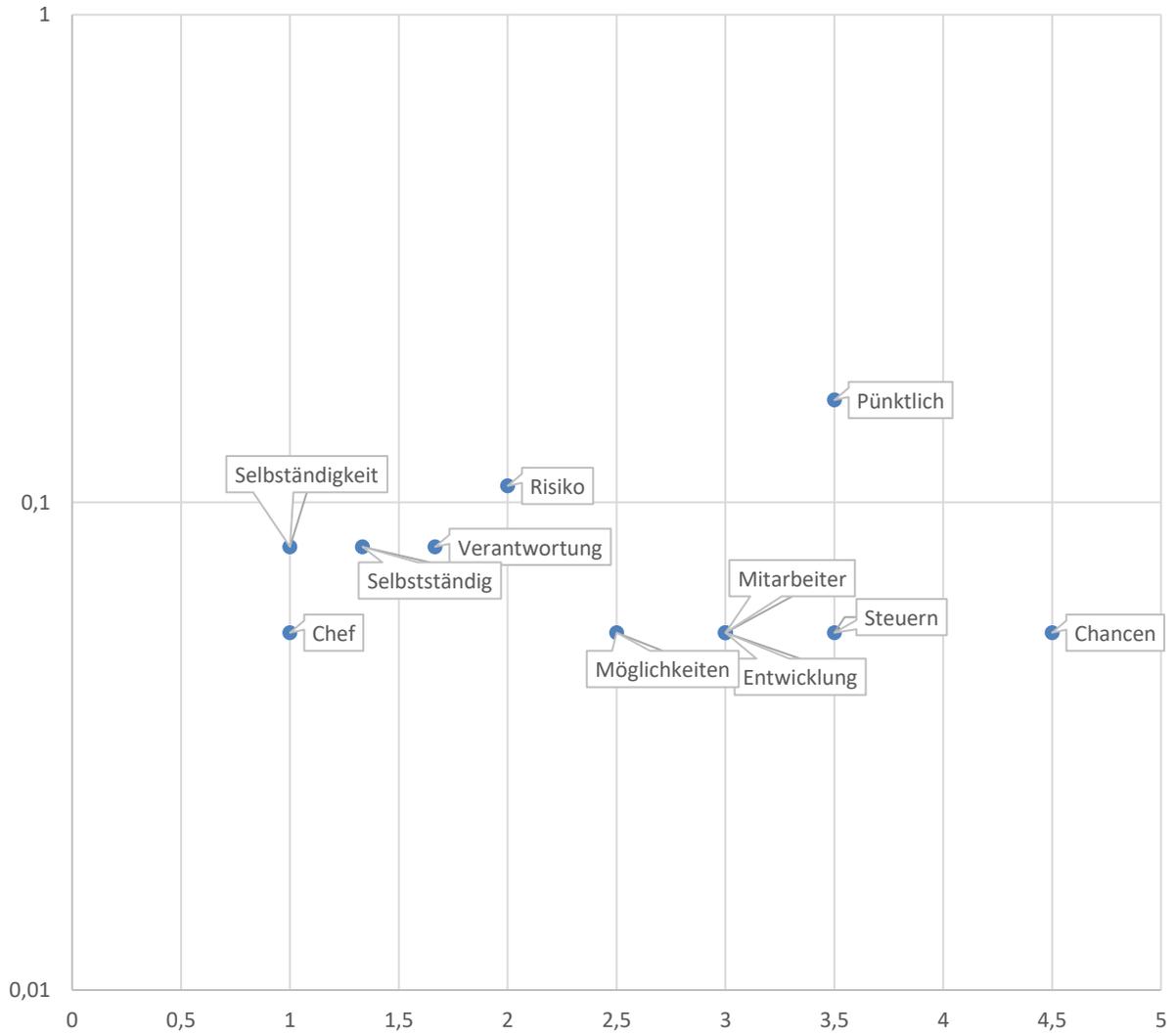


Fig. 4b. Results for managers towards entrepreneurship

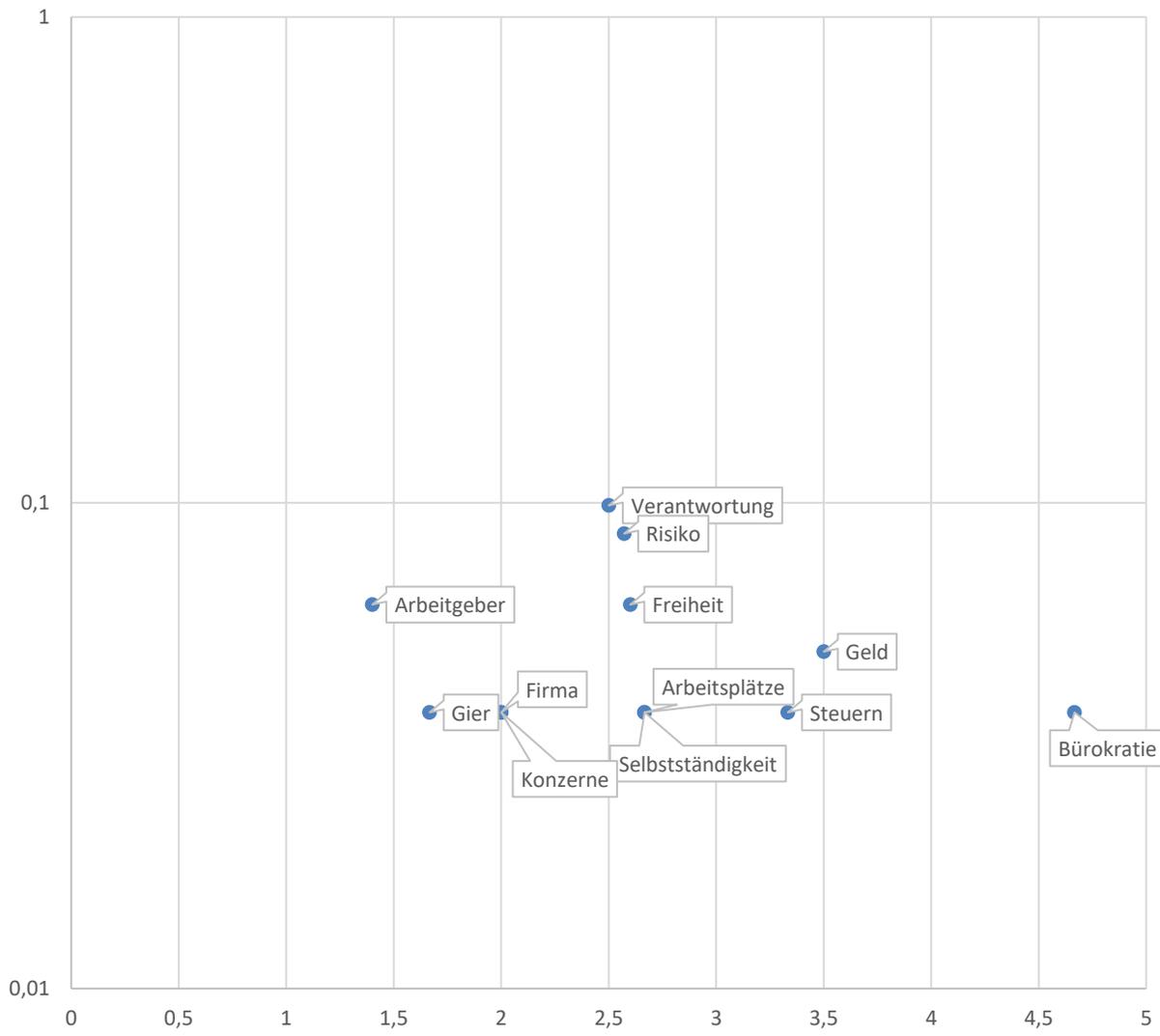


Fig. 4c. Results for civil servants towards entrepreneurship

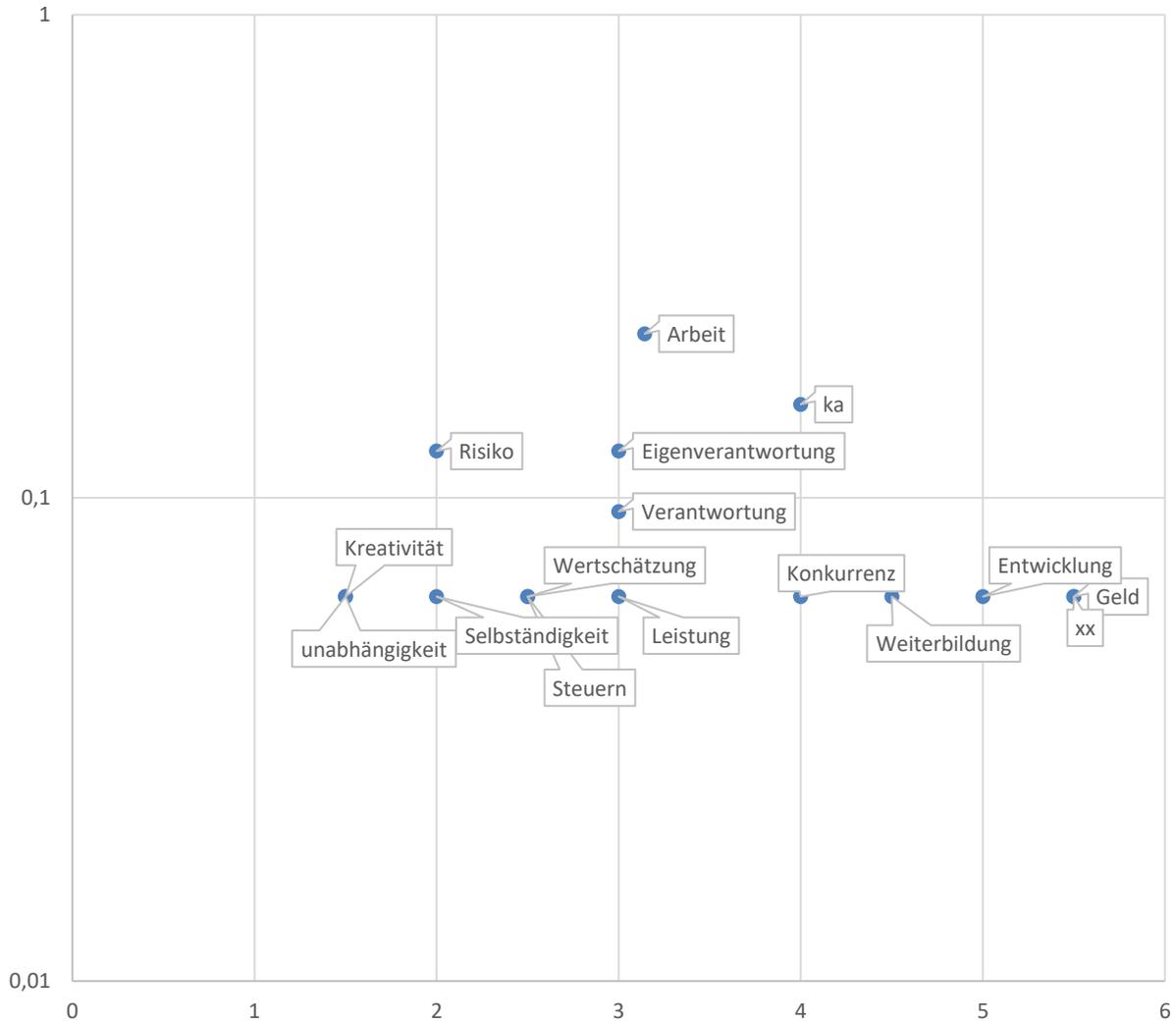


Fig. 4d. Results for self-employed individuals towards entrepreneurship (threshold for relative frequency was elevated to .6)

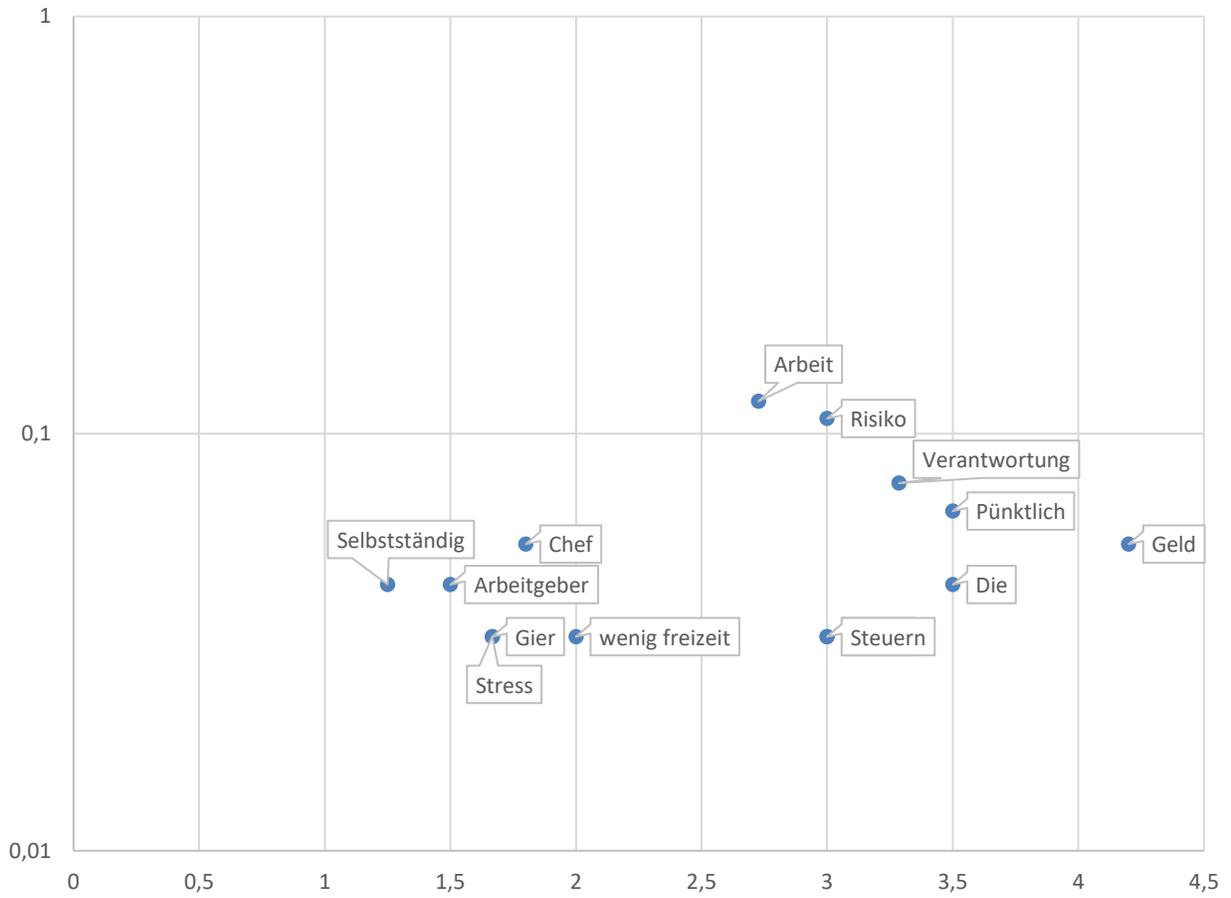


Fig 4e. Results for Generation Y & Z towards entrepreneurship

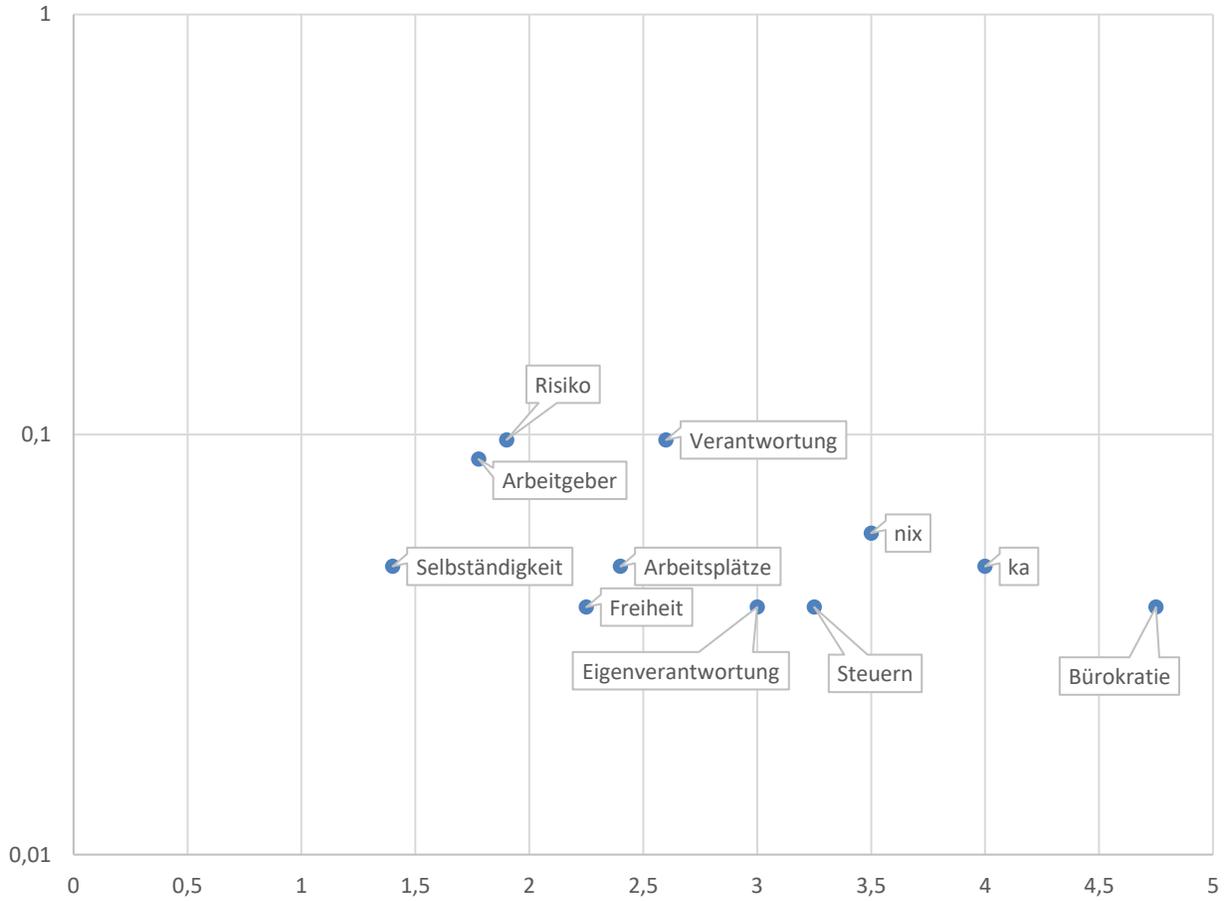


Fig 4f. Results for older generations towards entrepreneurship

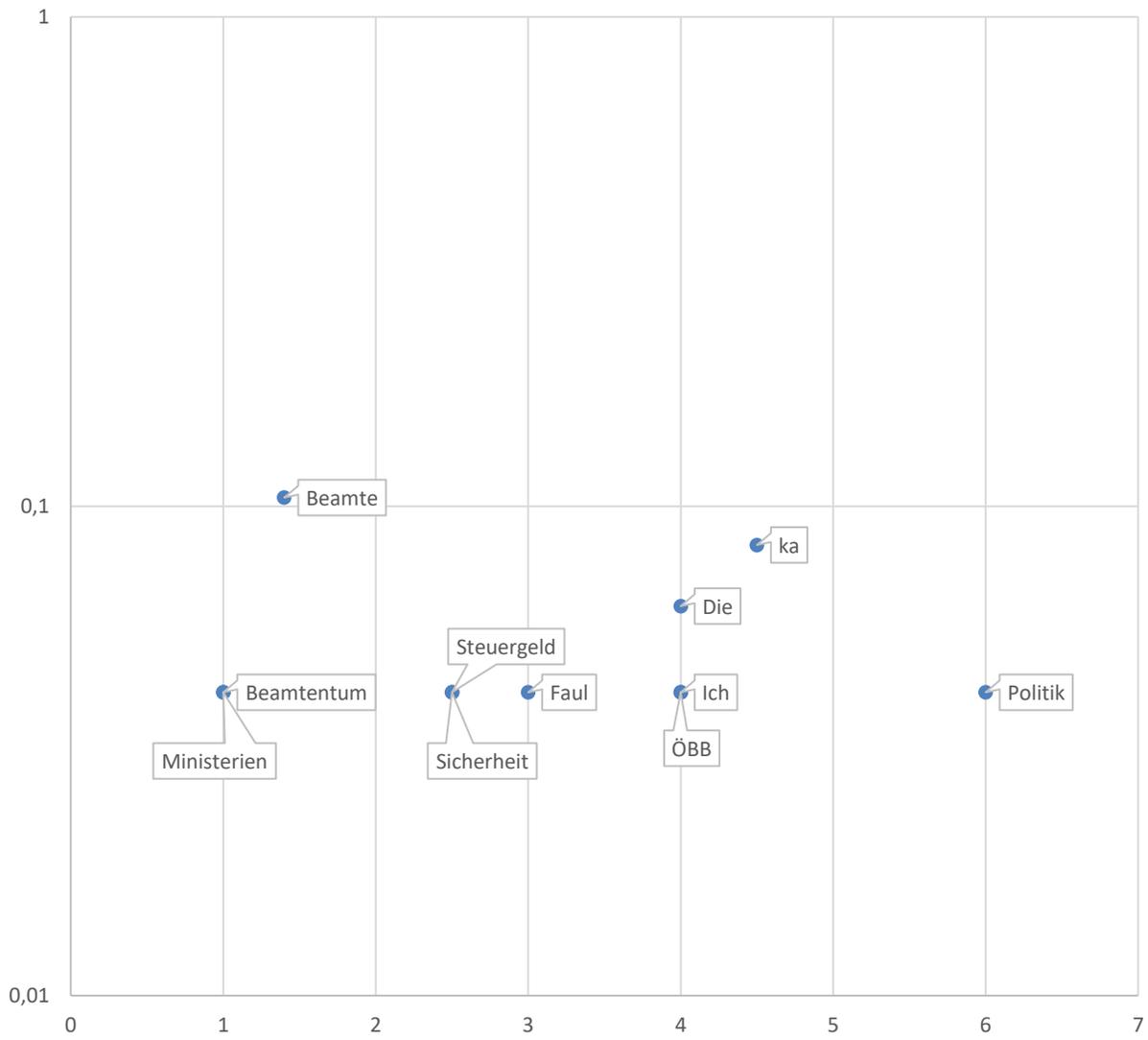


Fig. 5a. Results for employees towards state enterprises

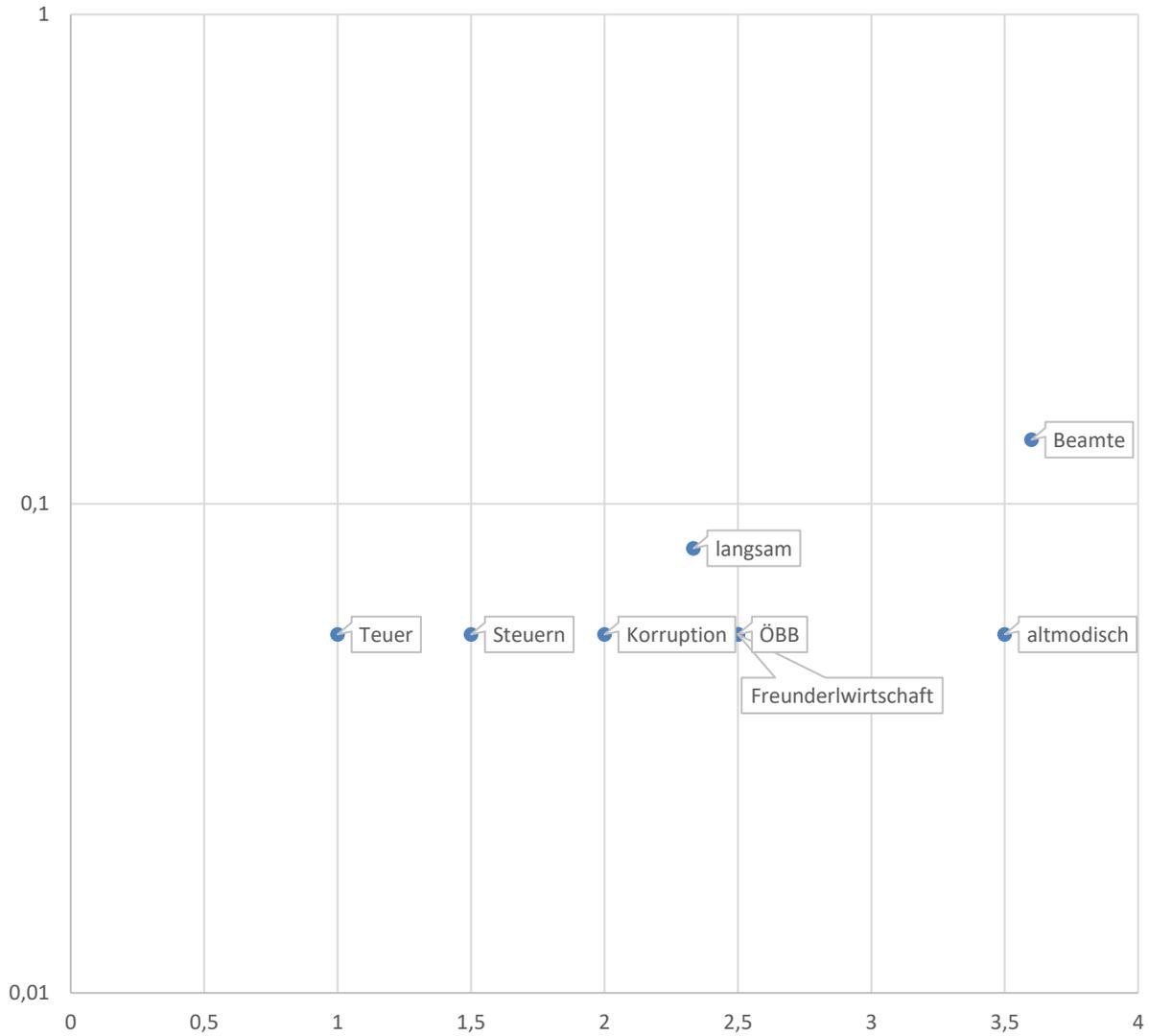


Fig. 5b. Results for managers towards state enterprises

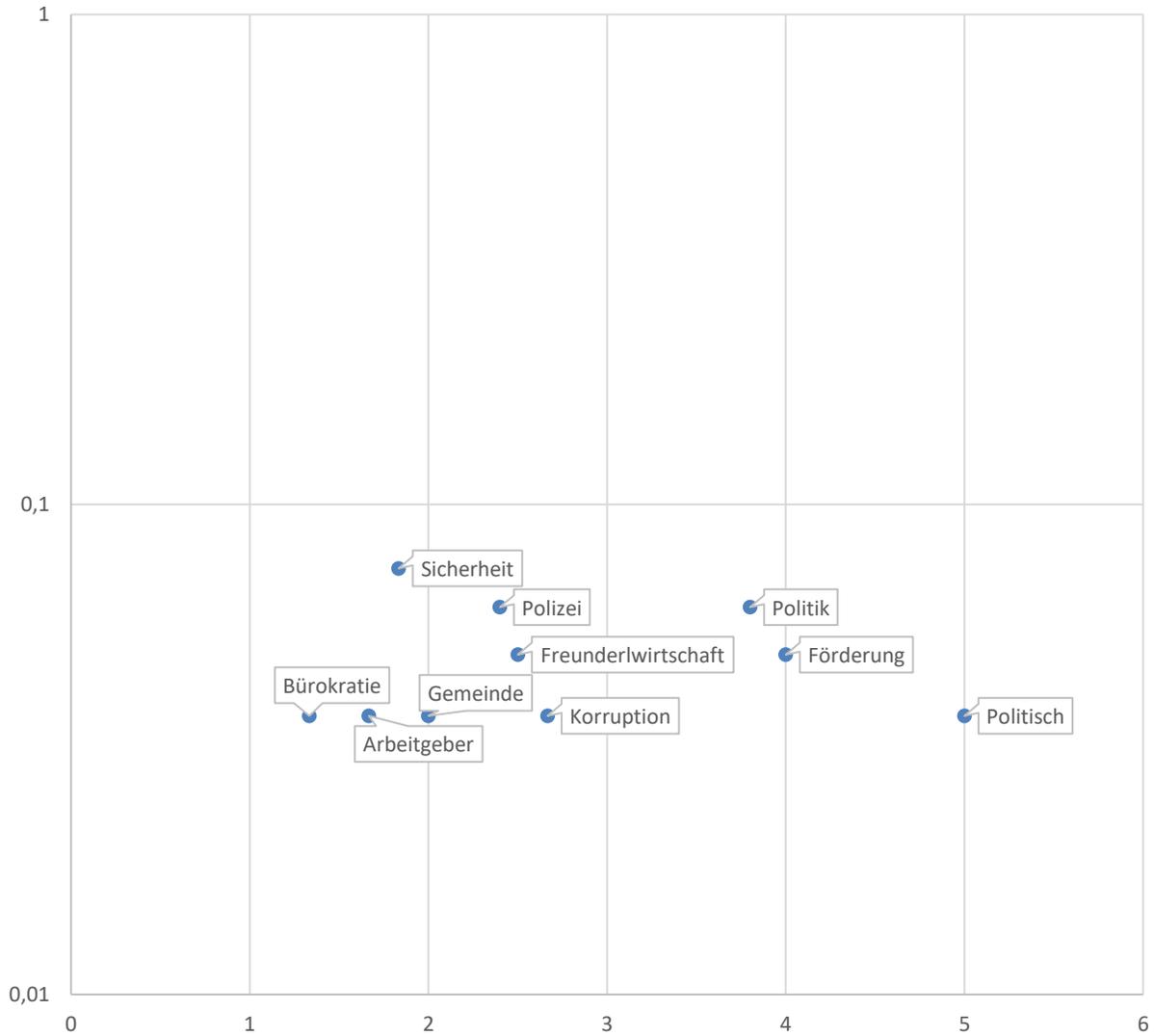


Fig. 5c. Results for civil servants towards state enterprises

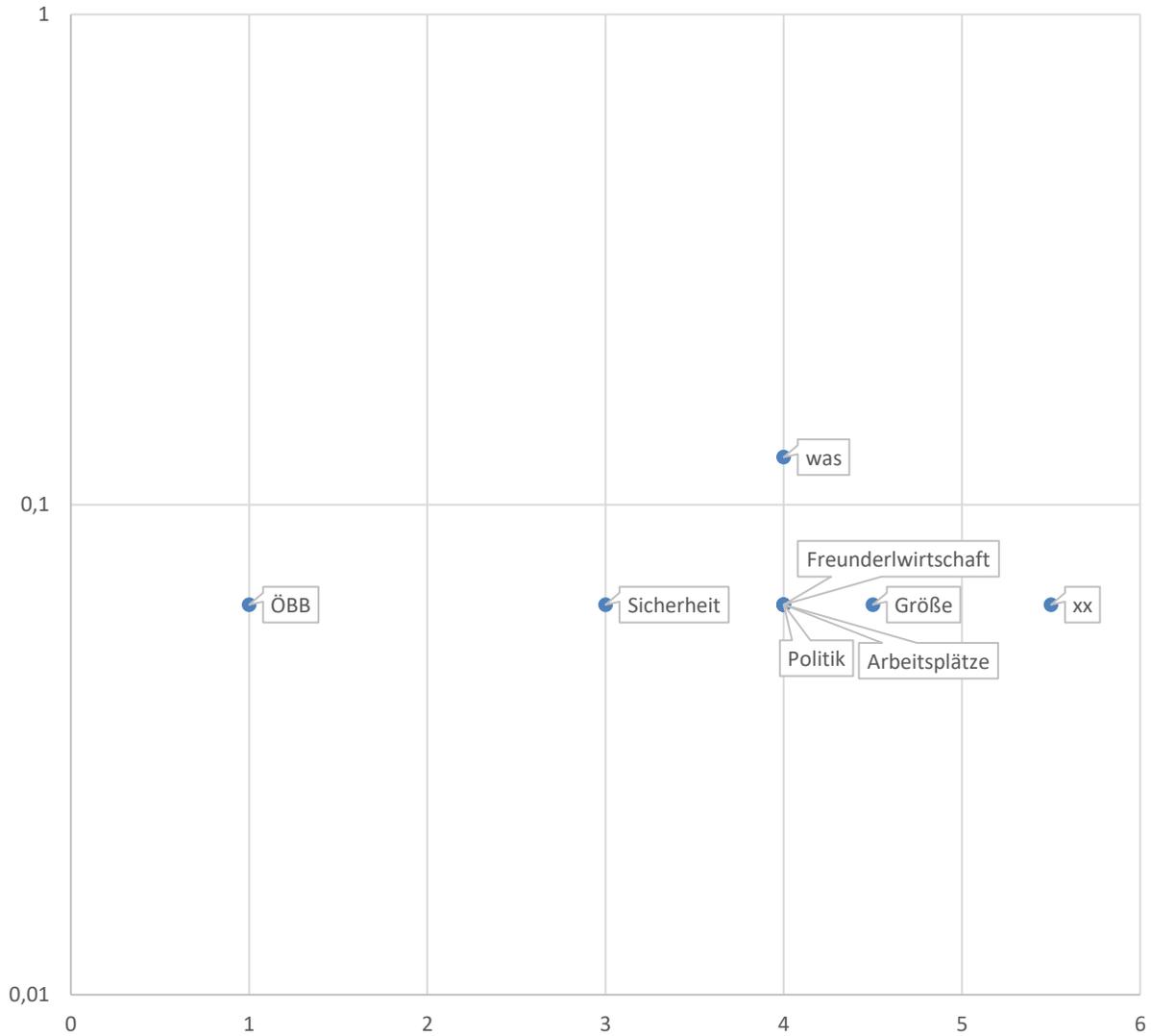


Fig. 5d. Results for self-employed individuals towards state enterprises (threshold for relative frequency was elevated to .6)

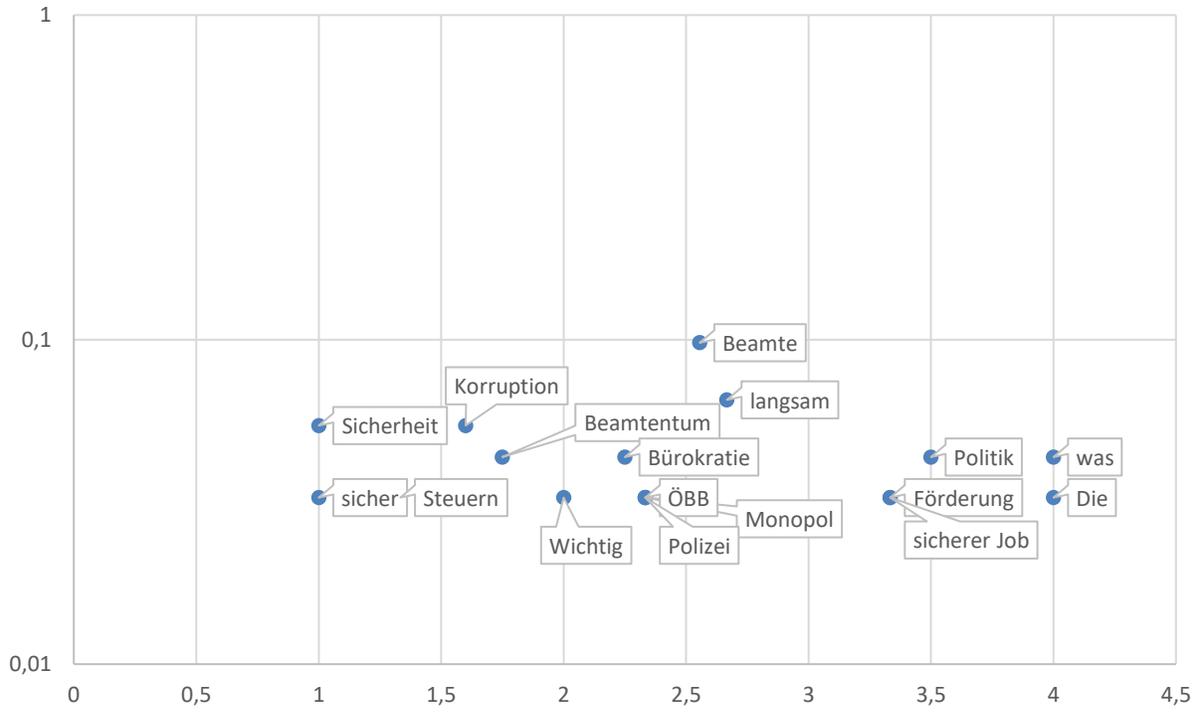


Fig 5e. Results for Generation Y & Z towards state enterprises

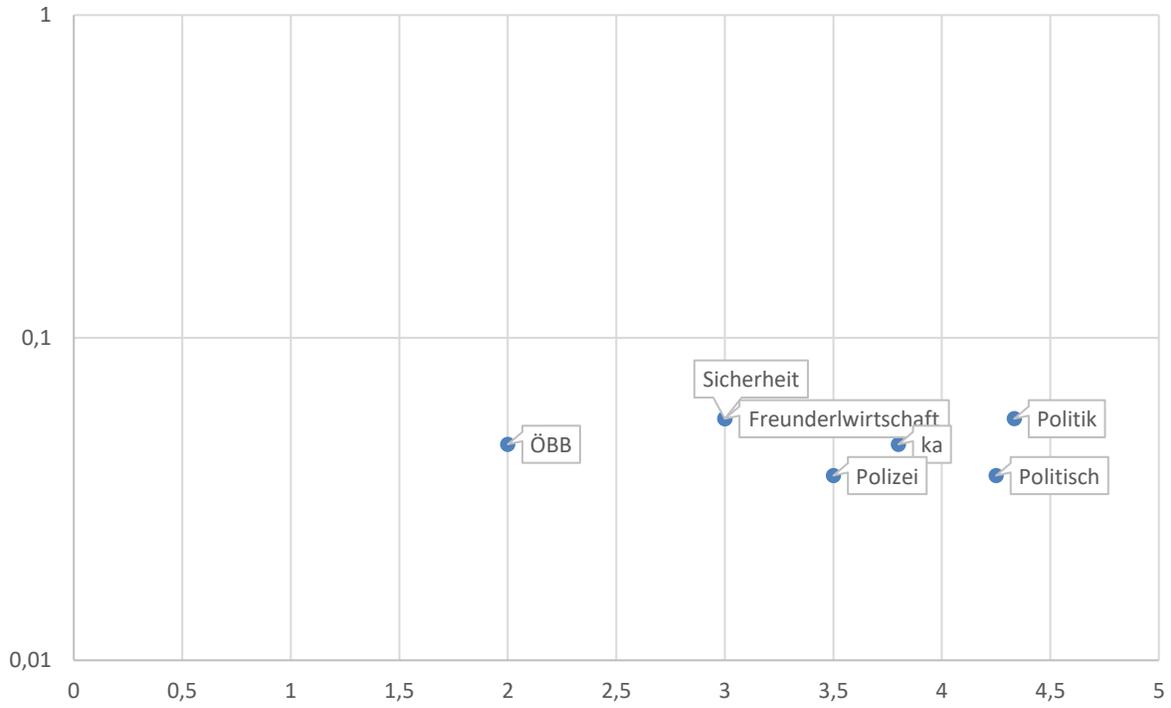


Fig. 5f. Results for older generations towards state enterprises

Appendix B

List of Figures

Fig. 1: Example of response in the questionnaire if no answers were given.....	11
Fig. 2: Example of how core-peripheral elements could be arranged in the coordinate system...14	14
Fig. 3: Associations of the complete sample for the stimulus work.....	20
Fig. 3a: Results for employees towards work.....	45
Fig. 3b: Results for managers towards work.....	46
Fig. 3c: Results for civil servants towards work.....	47
Fig. 3d: Results for self-employed individuals towards work.....	48
Fig. 3e: Results for Generation Y & Z towards work.....	49
Fig. 3f: Results for older generations towards work.....	50
Fig. 4: Associations of the complete sample for the stimulus entrepreneurship.....	23
Fig. 4a: Results for employees towards entrepreneurship.....	51
Fig. 4b: Results for managers towards entrepreneurship.....	52
Fig. 4c: Results for civil servants towards entrepreneurship.....	53
Fig. 4d: Results for self-employed individuals towards entrepreneurship.....	54
Fig. 4e: Results for Generation Y & Z towards entrepreneurship.....	55
Fig. 4f: Results for older generations towards entrepreneurship.....	56
Fig. 5: Associations of the complete sample for the stimulus state enterprises.....	25
Fig. 5a: Results for employees towards state enterprises.....	57
Fig. 5b: Results for managers towards state enterprises.....	58
Fig. 5c: Results for civil servants towards state enterprises.....	59
Fig. 5d: Results for self-employed individuals towards state enterprises.....	60
Fig. 5e: Results for Generation Y & Z towards state enterprises.....	61
Fig. 5f: Results for older generations towards state enterprises.....	62

List of Tables

Table 1: <i>Sample description</i>	10
Table 2: <i>Difference of associations</i>	16
Table 3: <i>Polarity and neutrality of the stimuli</i>	17
Table 4: <i>Post hoc analysis of the polarity</i>	19
Table 5: <i>Summary of the frequency of associations for the stimuli</i>	20
Table 6: <i>Interrater reliability</i>	27
Table 7: <i>Categories for work</i>	27
Table 8: <i>Categories for entrepreneurship</i>	28
Table 9: <i>Categories for state enterprises</i>	29

List of Abbreviations

ANOVA.....	Analysis of variance
MANOVA.....	Multivariate analysis of variance
MANCOVA.....	Multivariate analysis of covariance
ÖBB.....	Österreichische Bundesbahn; <i>Austrian Federal Railways</i>

Abstract

This thesis investigates individuals in the private sectors (n = 117) and public sectors (n = 81) and their social representations of aspects regarding their work life as part of a cooperative study between the University of Vienna and the University of Havana. The study was conducted in August 2017 in Austria with the help of a polling institute. Following a mixed-methods approach, the participants completed a free association task where they were asked to give and evaluated spontaneous associations to *work*, *entrepreneurship*, and *state enterprises*. A multivariate analysis of covariance indicated no significant difference in implicit attitude if controlled for age. A core-periphery analysis indicated slightly different core-elements for single subsamples (e.g., money) but an overall consistency for most core-elements (e.g., stress). The social representations mostly reflected certain stereotypes towards entrepreneurship and state enterprises. A similar result for the correspondence analysis showed differences between the value system of, for example, employees and civil servants towards entrepreneurship. The results indicated that the Austrian work force may not be that heterogenous in their implicit attitudes and younger generations do not seem to differ as strongly from older generations as claimed by the media. Nevertheless, further research is needed to compare the results to other cultures as well as to gain a deeper insight into the attitudes of the Austrian work force.

Keywords: Social representation theory, work, entrepreneurship, state enterprises, work force, mixed-methods approach, generations

German Abstract

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit untersucht die Sozialen Repräsentationen sowohl von Menschen in der Privatwirtschaft, als auch Beamten, im Zuge einer kooperativen Untersuchung zwischen der Universität Wien und der Universität Havanna. Die Studie wurde im August 2018 in Österreich mit Hilfe eines Meinungsforschungsinstitutes durchgeführt. Mit einem gemischten Methodenverfahren wurden zuerst durch freie Assoziationsaufgaben spontane Assoziationen und emotionale Einstellungen zu drei Stimuli (Arbeit, Unternehmertum und staatliche Betriebe) untersucht. Die Ergebnisse einer multivariaten Analyse der Kovarianzen zeigten keine signifikanten Unterschiede in der impliziten Einstellung, wenn für Alter kontrolliert wird. Die Kern-Peripherie Analyse zeigte weiters, dass es zum Teil leichte Unterschiede in manchen Kernelementen (z. B. Geld) einzelner Untergruppen, aber überwiegend einen Konsens zu den Kernelementen gibt (z. B. Stress). Die Analyse spiegelte auch bekannte Stereotypen zu Unternehmern und staatlichen Betrieben wider. Ähnliche Ergebnisse zeigten sich bei der Korrespondenzanalyse: Dort werden zum Beispiel leichte Unterschiede im Wertesystem von Beamten und Mitarbeitern im Bezug auf Unternehmertum sichtbar, große Unterschiede konnten jedoch nicht gefunden werden. Die Resultate zeigen zusammenfassend, dass die arbeitende Bevölkerung in Österreich, speziell unterschiedliche Generationen, nicht so unterschiedlich sind, wie durch Medien suggeriert wird. Zukünftige Forschung sollte jedoch darauf fokussieren, die gefundenen Ergebnisse mit anderen Ländern zu vergleichen und die Generalisierbarkeit für Österreich zu überprüfen.

Schlüsselwörter: Soziale Repräsentations Theorie, Arbeit, Unternehmertum, Staatliche Einrichtungen, Generationen, gemischtes Methodenverfahren