Chapter 2
The Dimensions of Organizational Entrepreneurial Learning: A Model of the Opportunity-Oriented Interactive Learning

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ABSTRACT

It is more than two decades that the concept of Entrepreneurial Learning (EL) has emerged by combining Entrepreneurship and Business Learning and its researchers have mostly focused on individual entrepreneurs as the unit of analysis. But EL can be observed in many entrepreneurial activities that take place in established organizations. This chapter aimed to clarify the main characteristics of Organizational Entrepreneurial Learning (OEL) which makes it distinct from Individual Entrepreneurial Learning. As OEL is related to how an established organization learns about the entrepreneurial opportunity, and because of the main role of the interaction between organizational members in its process, this kind of learning can be considered as the opportunity-oriented Interactive learning in organizational context. Through literature review, three relevant dimensions have been identified for OEL, namely: Cognitive Learning Skills, Behavioral learning skills, and Action learning skills. This Model can be a platform for studying EL in organizational level.

The Dimensions of Organizational Entrepreneurial Learning

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurial learning (EL) has emerged by combing Entrepreneurship and Business Learning and its researchers have mostly focused on individual entrepreneurs as the unit of analysis. (Harrison and Leitch 2005). Developing knowledge about entrepreneurial learning is becoming a feature of study in entrepreneurship (Wang, 2014) and organizational learning in small firms has also been explored (Tan, 2011). Research on learning processes in entrepreneurial ventures is still in an early stage (Minniti & Bygrave, 2001). Past studies of entrepreneurial cognition tended to focus on issues such as risk-taking or opportunity recognition (Ravasi & Turati, 2005). An opportunity is a favorable set of circumstances that creates a solution, a new product, service, business or experience in line with needs. Scholars have classified opportunities into two types, namely incremental opportunities and radical opportunities. Incremental opportunities are situations that emerge from a narrow change in external or internal circumstances, for example, any modest advance in the technology field or variation in customer needs and desires may entail this kind of opportunities for presenting minor developed product or services (Benner & Tushman, 2003). On the other hand, radical opportunities emerge from a broad change in technology or market direction which encompass introducing significantly different product and services (Henderson & Clark, 1996).

More recently, researchers shifted their attention to the learning processes that occur as entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial organizations accumulate and organize knowledge and information within and across developmental efforts (Minniti and Bygrave, 2001). EL research has flourished two decades ago, and existing studies have been originated from different theoretical insights, such as organizational learning (e.g. Argyris and Schön, 1978; Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Pisano, 1994; Senge, 2010), population ecology (Henan and Freeman, 1977), experiential learning (e.g. Cope, 2005; Rae, 2011; (Minniti and Bygrave, 2001). Although numerous studies have addressed issues dealing with EL, there is still scope for a more focused examination of EL in the organizational context. The literature of entrepreneurial learning can be classified into two major areas based unit of analysis of studies: some studies have focused on the individual entrepreneurs as the unit analysis, and others have focused on the established organizations as the context of EL. The first part of studies has investigated personal learning experiences and cognitive processes while learning about opportunities of the "entrepreneurial individual,” while the latter part has studied entrepreneurial learning in collective activity (Erdélyi, 2010). This chapter focuses on the collective activities related to opportunity exploration and exploitation. EL is often described as a continuous process that facilitates the development of necessary knowledge for being effective in starting up and managing new ventures (Politis, 2005).
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