ROLE OF INCUBATOR IN THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP LEARNING PROCESS (SUMMARY)

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ROLE OF INCUBATOR IN THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP LEARNING PROCESS

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Principal Topic

The entrepreneurial venture involves a learning process which is often neglected and still under studied. Furthermore, we know little about the early phases of the creation of a new venture. Several researches showed that incubators help to identify market and venture capitalists, provide legal advice, offer financial, technical and administrative support, help the start-up team plug into a network, etc (Mansfield and lee, 1996, Hansen and al. 2000, Franflin and al. 2001, Bollingtoft and Ulhoi 2005, Phan and al. 2005). However, the incubators role in the learning process associated to the entrepreneurial one is less explored. We focused on entrepreneurial innovation where learning takes place in adverse conditions: new technologies not fully developed, necessity of wide range of contributions and knowledge, etc. We adopted a framework based on researches in organizational learning (Cyert and March 1963, Argyris and Schön 1996, Nonaka 1994) that distinguishes the behavioural learning from the cognitive or the action one (Lichtenstein and al. 2003).

Method

Our research is based on a qualitative methodology focused on a longitudinal case study. At different development stages, we analysed three venture creations hosted in an incubator. We interviewed the relevant players of both the incubator and the three start-ups.

Results and Implications

We show that the incubator takes a big part in the entrepreneur’s learning process mainly by selecting the internal and the external project’s evaluation at different development stages by preparing the start-up team to business plan competitions. What occurs throughout the evaluation process meets the core definition of both behavioural learning with shifts in actions and cognitive learning with shifts in mental models and causal theories. The incubator’s staff could be considered as learning agents in the knowledge’s creation and transfer between the ventures hosted.

Our research complements the quantitative mainstream research in entrepreneurship as noted by Gartney and Birley (2002) for whom qualitative research is rarely used in the entrepreneurship field. Ravasi and Turati (2205) noted that while the importance of the learning processes is widely acknowledged, empirical studies are still rare. Finally, managerial implications on the incubators’ resources management and evaluation are also considered.

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