REMEMBERING THE FUTURE: TRANSACTIVE MEMORY AND THE EMERGENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY IN NEW ENTREPRENEURIAL FIRMS (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

REMEMBERING THE FUTURE: TRANSACTIVE MEMORY AND THE EMERGENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY IN NEW ENTREPRENEURIAL FIRMS

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Principal Topic

Within new entrepreneurial firms, the emergence of organizational identity is closely related to building an effective team, sharing a strategic vision, establishing the firm’s boundaries and developing social capital networks. Moreover, research suggests that many new entrepreneurial firms quickly develop a strong sense of organizational identity. However, this presents a paradox. Organizational identity typically relies on the accumulation of shared experience and knowledge that the founders of new firms often lack. The following research question therefore suggests itself: how do new entrepreneurial firms quickly develop a strong sense of organizational identity even if the founding members have little shared experience or common knowledge? In my theoretical paper, I propose an answer to this question by integrating insights from three fields of inquiry: autobiographical memory, transactive memory and organizational identity.

Method

Previous research into the emergence of organizational identity has focused on memories of roles, tasks and routines. In contrast, I draw upon recent literature about the feature of autobiographical memory termed “life-story schema,” defined as individuals' understanding of how normative life stories are constructed within culture. Relying on this literature, I firstly propose that founders of new entrepreneurial firms typically possess similar life-story schemas about life as an entrepreneur. Secondly, I propose that these schemas are connected via integrative transactive memory, which is defined as the process whereby individuals identify and retrieve common memories held by others. Thirdly, I propose that such transactive life-story schemas enable founders quickly to develop a sense of collective memory and meaning, and this underpins the emergence of strong organizational identity.

Results and Implications

My paper generates a number of theoretical contributions. Most importantly, it proposes an explanation of how strong organizational identity can rapidly emerge in new entrepreneurial firms, while also suggesting that entrepreneurial life-story schemas are a factor in nascent entrepreneurship. My paper also contributes to research on organizational identity by suggesting a mechanism for the emergence of organizational memory in relation to autobiographical memory. Finally, my paper contributes to memory research by proposing integrative transactive life-story schemas as systems of collective autobiographical memory. I discuss implications for future research on these topics.

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