THE CHANGING ROLE OF DIFFERENT LEARNING METHODS DURING THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROCESS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

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Principal Topic

Learning is often assumed to be taking place during the entrepreneurship process (Corbett, 2005). We know very little, however, about how individuals learn in the nascent process, yet understanding this process is critical for understanding emergence (Harrison & Leitch, 2005). As Deakins (1999, p. 23) has observed “our limited knowledge and understanding of the interaction of learning and the entrepreneurial process remains one of the most neglected areas of entrepreneurial research, and thus, understanding.”

Individually the role of cognition and prior knowledge (e.g. Corbett, 2005; Corbett, 2007; Shane, 2000; Ward, 2004), networks (e.g. Hills et. al, 1997; Taylor & Thorpe, 2004) and learning-by-doing (e.g. Minniti & Bygrave, 2001; Politis, 2005) have been discussed in relation to entrepreneurial learning; their relationships to each other and the phases of the entrepreneurship process, however, have not been conceptualized. It is these three different influences to learning (cognition and prior knowledge, networks, and learning-by-doing) that we refer to as learning methods.

Method

Synthesizing the identified methods of learning with the stages of entrepreneurship process, a conceptual framework is developed where the importance of each learning mode is assessed in relation to the stage of the entrepreneurship process. Often the entrepreneurial process is divided into opportunity recognition (or something similar) and opportunity exploitation (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Davidsson, 2004; Corbett, 2005). However, for the purposes of understanding the role of different learning methods it is theoretically important to distinguish between opportunity recognition and formal opportunity evaluation as we argue that these two stages often require different methods of learning.

Results/Implications

Based on the developed conceptual framework, we propose that learning through cognition plays the most important role in the identification phase, learning through networks the most important role during the evaluation phase and learning-by-doing the most important role during the exploitation phase. Drawing on the work of Ardichvili et al. (2003) and (Shane, 2000) we propose that prior knowledge moderates the relationship between learning through cognition and opportunity recognition. Prior knowledge can, in turn, be influenced by social networks (Hills et. al, 1997), specifically weak ties (Granovetter, 1973), and learning-by-doing (work experience) Vesper, (1980).

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