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LONELY RANGERS TOGETHER: THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRUST AMONG ENTREPRENEURS IN LEARNING NETWORKS (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

LONELY RANGERS TOGETHER: THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRUST AMONG ENTREPRENEURS IN LEARNING NETWORKS

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Principal Topic

We know most people now and then need an outsider’s perspective, but incorporating other people and exposing oneself involves considerable risk. Scholars have recently shown that temporally formed learning networks can be relevant arenas where entrepreneurs can learn about an outsider’s experiences and perspective on sensitive strategic issues and overcome their loneliness (Florén, 2005; Jones & Macpherson, 2006; McGovern, 2006). In this paper, we argue that there are at least two broad areas that are in need of further elaboration in relation to how entrepreneurs can learn when working together in a network based upon collective sharing of experiences and joint engagement in learning activities. The first concerns a better understanding of the initial conditions needed to facilitate trust among the entrepreneurs and what kind of trust building processes are particularly prominent in such learning networks. The second relates to the importance of trust for attaining learning outcomes and what particular learning outcomes are evident.

Method

This paper is based on an in-depth, longitudinal study of a learning network using interviews, participant observation and video-recording during meetings and get-togethers.

Results and Implications

This analysis of how entrepreneurs learn from each other in a network based upon collective sharing of experiences and joint engagement in learning activities demonstrates how the development of trust reduces the entrepreneurs’ perceptions of opportunism, facilitates the learning process and ultimately supports different learning outcomes when working together with other entrepreneurs. This study shows that trust building in a group of lonely entrepreneurs can transform them into a community of effective problem solvers and/or “competence developers.” These processes were evidently supporting the learning process, but the degree of trust experienced by the entrepreneurs changed over time. Different activities and situations set up in the learning network and actions undertaken by the participants acted to impede or facilitate the trust-building processes in the learning network.

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