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DELIBERATE PRACTICES AND EXPERT PERFORMANCE IN ENTREPRENEURS—FICTION OR FACT? (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

DELIBERATE PRACTICES AND EXPERT PERFORMANCE IN ENTREPRENEURS—FICTION OR FACT?

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Principal Topic

At best, many venture start-ups contain accidental actions while theory suggests they are methodically scouted, planned and pursued. Baron & Henry at this conference in 2006, proposed deliberate practice research as an avenue to identify effortful, directed actions of relevance, associated with expert performance of entrepreneurs, similar to those found in successful sportsmen and medical specialists. If deliberate practices bring about expert performance associated with success for these individuals, the following question could be posed: Can such deliberate practices be identified clearly for entrepreneurs? If so, what are they? If deliberate practices can be identified then there would likely be a difference between novice and established entrepreneurs. Past research with regards to deliberate practice has been done in a laboratory setting and thus, should the concept be applicable to entrepreneurs, a range of more volatile external factors are at play. Despite these factors, it is deemed necessary to explore the applicability of the concept to entrepreneurs.

Method

This study explores deliberate practices of entrepreneurs through a triangulation of three approaches. In total 52 entrepreneurs have been interviewed. Firstly open interviews were conducted with experienced and established entrepreneurs identified through a reference and snowball identification process. Secondly a “post mortem” technique was applied with focus groups of novice entrepreneurs from a high tech incubator. Thirdly, based on the results, structured interviews were conducted with experienced entrepreneurs. A mix of survey and demographical information has been analysed using descriptive and qualitative techniques.

Results and Implications

Comparison of experienced and novice entrepreneurs show contrasting responses for: 1) Activity description length, 2) Richness of the description of activities, 3) Specificity of the activities and variables, 4) Focused versus generic content, 5) Insight of connectivity to results, 6) Differentiation between personality traits and entrepreneurial activities. Novice entrepreneurs predominantly identified personality traits rather than entrepreneurial activities that are denoted by verbs whereas experienced entrepreneurs only referred to one personality trait namely: innovativeness and further all activities listed were specific, detailed actions. These results create opportunity for alternative training focuses as well as the creation of a deliberate practice framework. These findings have important implications for entrepreneurship education and potentially for screening of venture “jockeys” by venture capitalists.

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