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SUMMARY

AN INFLUENCE OF THE NATIONAL ENTREPRENEURIAL ENVIRONMENT ON ENTREPRENEUR'S NETWORK ACTIVITIES

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Principal Topic

Most of research on entrepreneurial networks adhere to the inter-firm standpoints and focus on firm-level units of analysis. From this viewpoint, entrepreneurial network development is presented as an impersonal process inherent in a network (Johnsen & Ford, 2006; Hite & Hesterly, 2001). However, there is an essential difference between network as such and networking process (Wincent & Westerberg, 2005: 271). In fact, it is a person or a group of individuals that creates new business contacts or terminates them. Thus, when one investigates the issues of network building activities, the unit of analysis should be an individual entrepreneur or a founding team. In addition, numerous studies show that national context has strong impacts on entrepreneurial networking (Minniti, 2008; Jansson, et al. 2007). However, these interdependencies are described quite vaguely saying that a contextual milieu affects entrepreneurial behavior and exchange relations between businesses. Also, findings from these studies lack concrete comparative examples that illustrate the exact differences in networking patterns of entrepreneurs from different national contexts.

This piece of research aims to explore how national entrepreneurial environment influences the process of establishing new business contacts purposefully undertaken by a team of new venture founders through the use of their formal and informal relations.

Method

The research is conducted as the multiple-case study of three Russian founding teams and four Finnish ones. In total, 20 semi-structured interviews were held with the members of these entrepreneurial teams. The cases were interpreted through applying comparative logic of examination and using elements of network analysis, namely graph displays and notations.

Results and Implications

Our study confirms the idea that national entrepreneurial environment has a strong impact on networking activities and business partnering of an individual entrepreneur. The comparison of Russian and Finnish founding teams indicates that this influence mainly refers to the ratio between formal and informal contacts in an entrepreneurial network and their value for business. Thus, our study suggests an important link between macro dynamics on the level of entrepreneurial environment, state innovation policy and business regulations, and micro dynamics on the level of a team of individual entrepreneurs and their networking activities.

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