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INTERACTIVE PAPER

THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE IN THE INTERNATIONALIZATION PROCESS OF FRENCH NEW VENTURES

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Principal Topic

There is a growing amount of evidence that the former business experience of international entrepreneurs guides both their tendency to form international ventures and the subsequent international expansion of the venture. This line of research has been developed parallel to the top management team literature that asserts that, to a great extent, an organization is a mirror of its top managers. One can argue that this mirror effect is even stronger for new ventures as the impact of the entrepreneur is not balanced through the firm’s history and organization.

Recent literature reviews on international new ventures emphasized several studies that suggest a relationship between internationalization and the experience base of the entrepreneurs (Rialp, Rialp and Knight, 2005; Zahra 2005; Aspelund, Madsen and Moen, 2007). Indeed, this relationship was one of the key findings in McDougall, Shane and Oviatt’s (1994) seminal case studies of INVs and is also reflected in more recent work.

This study investigate to which extent the background and former experience of international entrepreneurs from the Rhône-Alpes region in France influence the pace, direction and extent of international activities of the ventures they form.

Methods and Key Propositions

The study is based upon a sample of early internationalizing new ventures from the Rhône-Alpes region in France. The data stem from three sources. First, 28 interviews were conducted with industry experts from the region (within technology, finance, entrepreneurship and exports). Second, 10 in-depth case studies were performed. Finally, there was conducted a mail survey targeting 450 INVs (111 responses yielding a 24.6 % response rate). OLS and logit regressions seek to unveil the relationship between the entrepreneur’s background, work experience, education, motivation and establishment process and the pace, direction and extent of the international activities of the firm he/she created.

Results and Implications

This study expands our knowledge on the relationship between the entrepreneurs and the traits of the venture they form. The study integrates the top management team literature in the entrepreneurial setting, and specifically on the issue of internationalization of new ventures. In terms of managerial implications we offer new insight for entrepreneurs that seek to put together entrepreneurial teams for their new ventures or investors wishing to evaluate their prospects. Finally, the study offer input to policy-makers that design and manage export support programs.

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