ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS: QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE CONFIRMATION OF A MODEL OF ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCE (SUMMARY)

Christophe Loué
École Advancia

Jacques Baronet
Université de Sherbrooke, jacques.baronet@usherbrooke.ca

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SUMMARY

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS: QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE CONFIRMATION OF A MODEL OF ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCE

Christophe Loué, École Advancia, France
Jacques Baronet, Université de Sherbrooke, Canada

Principal Topic

The authors present a model of entrepreneurial competence based on a set of 47 skills and 8 personal or behavioral attributes possessed at different degrees by entrepreneurs from three countries, Canada, France and Algeria.

The concept of entrepreneurs’ competencies emerged in the entrepreneurship literature in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Following Gartner (1988), researchers proposed that new firm performance was explained more by what entrepreneurs do (and their abilities to do it) than by who they were (their personality). In addition to models of entrepreneurial skills proposed by different authors (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; etc.), many educators in schools and universities and professionals in economic development programs and incubators want to make sure that the future entrepreneurs they train acquire the essential skills to succeed at their new ventures. In other words, beyond teaching how to do a business plan, they are asking: “Are we teaching them the right skills, abilities or competencies for success at entrepreneurial ventures?”

Method

To study entrepreneurs’ skills, we first asked without probing a qualitative sample of 10 entrepreneurs each from Algeria, France and Canada to list the skills or competencies they possessed. Then, using a theoretical list of domains of competencies, the entrepreneurs were asked if they possessed certain competencies not yet mentioned to the interviewers.

A list of 96 spontaneously cited competencies as well as 152 others from our theoretical list was discovered. Skills mentioned only once or twice were eliminated and a consensus was established around a set of 47 skills in opportunity discovery and start-up launch, leadership and management, marketing, human resource management, finance, and 8 behavioral attributes such as intuition and self-discipline.

Then a questionnaire built around these 47 skills and 8 attributes was sent to several thousand entrepreneurs in Canada, France and Algeria and received 403 completed questionnaires.

Results and Implications

Exploratory factor analysis revealed 7 factors of entrepreneurial competence all with very good reliability (Cronbach alphas are all above .780). Very few significant differences exist among different types of entrepreneurs, pointing to a somewhat universal characteristic within the dimensions of the model. In addition, the first factor summarizing skills in opportunity recognition and exploitation seems to have the greatest impact on firm performance.

CONTACT: Jacques Baronet; jacques.baronet@usherbrooke.ca; (T): 819-821-8000 ext. 63050.; Universite de Sherbrooke, 2500 boul. de l'Universite, Quebec, Canada J1K 2R1.