

6-12-2010

EVEN A BLIND SQUIRREL SOMETIMES FINDS A NUT: CAN A DEFICIT IN PRIOR KNOWLEDGE ENHANCE OPPORTUNITY RECOGNITION? (SUMMARY)

James M. Haynie

Syracuse University, jmhaynie@syr.edu

Alex McKelvie

Syracuse University

Recommended Citation

Haynie, James M. and McKelvie, Alex (2010) "EVEN A BLIND SQUIRREL SOMETIMES FINDS A NUT: CAN A DEFICIT IN PRIOR KNOWLEDGE ENHANCE OPPORTUNITY RECOGNITION? (SUMMARY)," *Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research*: Vol. 30: Iss. 6, Article 9.

Available at: <http://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol30/iss6/9>

This Summary is brought to you for free and open access by the Entrepreneurship at Babson at Digital Knowledge at Babson. It has been accepted for inclusion in Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research by an authorized administrator of Digital Knowledge at Babson. For more information, please contact digitalknowledge@babson.edu.

SUMMARY

EVEN A BLIND SQUIRREL SOMETIMES FINDS A NUT: CAN A DEFICIT IN PRIOR KNOWLEDGE ENHANCE OPPORTUNITY RECOGNITION?

James M. Haynie, Syracuse University, USA

Alex McKelvie, Syracuse University, USA

Principal Topic

Can the success of novice entrepreneur without prior, domain specific knowledge be written-off to the old saying that “sometimes even a blind squirrel finds a nut” - or can it be argued that in some contexts, or for some individuals, a lack of prior knowledge might represent a competitive advantage? In this study we focus on investigating the question, can a blind squirrel still find a nut? Alternatively, when [under what conditions, for which individuals] is prior domain specific knowledge a disadvantage when performing an entrepreneurial task? The general proposition that drives our study is that being blind is an advantage for a squirrel when the nut is not where you look – that is, when visual cues made salient by prior knowledge would otherwise direct the squirrel’s focus and action ‘up the wrong tree.’

We ground our study in the literature on analogical reasoning (cf. Gick & Holyoak, 1980), and test hypotheses that suggest prior knowledge *works to impede* analogical reasoning based in seeking structural alignment, as a basis for evaluating the attractiveness of emerging opportunities.

Methods

Two samples of entrepreneurs (distinguished based on ‘categories’ of domain specific knowledge) participate in this experiment. Vignettes that describe opportunities situated in one or the other category of domain specific knowledge are presented, and participants evaluate the attractiveness of the opportunity. We hypothesize that those with domain specific knowledge that ‘matches’ the context of the vignette will be ‘blinded’ to the opportunity by the superficial ‘mismatches’ between the opportunity vignette and his/her prior knowledge (experimental manipulation); conversely, we hypothesize that those whose domain specific knowledge is not closely related to context of the vignette will engage structural analogy to reveal the true nature of the opportunity as highly attractive.

Results and Implications

Our findings suggest that in some cases prior knowledge impedes opportunity recognition; conversely a deficit in prior knowledge may motivate individuals to ‘see beyond’ superficial mismatches to reveal the true nature of an opportunity. This research opens the door to a more structured understanding of why and how some individuals are more adept at discovering, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities than others.

CONTACT: Mike Haynie; jmhaynie@syr.edu; (T): 315-443-3392; (F): 315-443-1449; 721 University Ave., Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244.