ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING: PAST RESEARCH AND FUTURE CHALLENGES (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING: PAST RESEARCH AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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Principal Topic

Entrepreneurial learning has emerged as a promising area of research at the interface between learning and the entrepreneurial context (Harrison & Leitch, 2005). Central to entrepreneurial learning research are issues pertinent to not only what entrepreneurs should, or do learn during the creation and management of entrepreneurial ventures, but more importantly, the specific processes of learning that occur in this context (Cope, 2005). The literature is incongruous on many aspects of entrepreneurial learning and the role of learning in the entrepreneurial process has not been well understood (Deakins, 1996; Minniti & Bygrave, 2001; Cope, 2005; Harrison & Leitch, 2005). In this study, we aim to synthesize existing research in this area, define and articulate what entrepreneurial learning is in the organizational context, and accordingly direct future research efforts to build our understanding in this area.

Method

We carried out an in-depth review of the literature on entrepreneurial learning. Following a systematic literature search and article inclusion and exclusion criteria, we built a comprehensive database of articles on entrepreneurial learning that resulted in a total of 26 academic journal articles. We recorded detailed information on each article and analyzed it across 13 themes, including: (1) publication distribution; (2) definitions of entrepreneurial learning; (3) methods and unit of analysis; (4) types of learning; (5) stages of the entrepreneurial process; and (6) theoretical perspectives.

Results and Implications

We find that research on entrepreneurial learning is far from reaching a critical mass of knowledge, resulting in a weak foundation for theory building. In particular, we find several areas are under-researched. For example, existing literature has largely focused on individual and experiential learning, and more research is required to understand learning within entrepreneurial teams and organizations. We contribute to the entrepreneurship literature in three ways. First, we provide a comprehensive review of the literature on entrepreneurial learning. Second, we conceptualize the domain of entrepreneurial learning by differentiating what it is from what it is not. Third, we draw attention to several specific areas for future research. Our findings have implications for the theoretical and empirical advancement of entrepreneurship research.

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