A FUZZY SET APPROACH TO EMPIRICAL TYPOLOGIES IN SUSTAINABILITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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Principal Topic

Descriptions of sustainability entrepreneurs have involved various characteristics such as motivation, knowledge, orientation, cognition, and ways of organizing their ventures, yet none of these are by themselves distinguishing features of sustainability entrepreneurs. A key research task in driving forward research in this area is the development of operational definition that reflects the complex constellation of characteristics that collectively distinguish sustainability entrepreneurs. In tackling this task, this paper seeks to empirically identify sustainability entrepreneurs using criteria that go beyond an overall commitment to sustainability and involve a more complex set of conditions; and to organize the potential heterogeneity of sustainability entrepreneur into coherent typology.

Method

The development of the typology of sustainability entrepreneurs was conducted using fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis. This analytical technique focuses on and allows for the possibility that the same outcome can follow from different combination of conditions. The outcome measure, entrepreneurial sustainability, evaluates the degree to which an entrepreneur incorporates four dimensions of sustainability in the process of opportunity development. I applied these characteristics to three units of analysis: the generation of the venture idea, the formulation of actions in its pursuit, and exchange relationships. Reflecting potential conditions for entrepreneurial sustainability, five independent measures were considered: mindfulness, sustainability orientation, self-efficacy, sustainability contribution belief and prior knowledge. Data was collected in a survey format from 44 ventures that have taken part in sustainable business plan competitions in the last 3 years. 289 firms from 12 competitions in the USA and the UK were invited to participate.

Results and Implication

The fsQCA permits to identify four configurations of conditions, necessary and sufficient for the outcome: (1) ~mindfulness * efficacy * ~knowledge * contribution; (2) ~mindfulness * orientation * efficacy * knowledge; (3) orientation * efficacy * knowledge * contribution; and (4) mindfulness * ~orientation * ~efficacy * ~knowledge * contribution. This empirical assessment provides a systematic characterization of entrepreneurial efforts and offers a basis for identifying sustainability entrepreneurs. This paper makes a broader contribution to both theorizing and research design in the study of entrepreneurial processes and outcomes. It provides refined knowledge on complex causation that facilitates the construction of arguments based on the logic of necessary and sufficient conditions.

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