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ENTREPRENEURIAL AMBIDEXTERITY (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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ENTREPRENEURIAL AMBIDEXTERITY

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Principal Topic

March (1991) originally referred to organizational ambidexterity as the tension between exploration and exploitation, while more recent ambidexterity publications focus more on alignment versus adaptation strategies. Are entrepreneurs ambidextrous, or do they tend to favor exploitation or exploration? While much of the entrepreneurship literature conjures up notions of highly creative and innovative entrepreneurial efforts, recent empirical evidence, particularly from PSEDI and PSEDII, paint a much different picture – a picture of small business pursuits characterized by an emphasis on self-employment and exploitation.

Many researchers of ambidexterity suggest that mastery of both adaptability and alignment are necessary for long term success, but for the period of start-up and new venture management, is ambidexterity appropriate? This study examines the ambidexterity of entrepreneurs versus managers of SMEs, and explores the relative performance of strategies based on ambidexterity, exploitation, and exploration.

Method

Using a 37-item survey, data was collected from 811 entrepreneurs and 1,388 managers of small to medium sized businesses in California. The entrepreneurs had started their new ventures within the prior three-year period. The managers had no ownership interests in the company for which they were employed. Age, gender, education, experience, and size are controlled for.

Results and Implications

Entrepreneurial ventures in this sample more often pursue an exploitation strategy than one of exploration; and contrary to what was hypothesized, entrepreneurs in this sample were not ambidextrous. Results further indicate that SME managers are more ambidextrous than their entrepreneurial counterparts. In addition, the evidence suggests that firms that employ exploitation strategies outperform firms that employ exploration or ambidextrous strategies. Regarding ambidexterity there was no significant difference between gender or organization size.

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