6-11-2016

OPPORTUNITIES AND ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING (SUMMARY)

Tadeu F. Nogueira  
_Nord University, Norway, tadeu.f.nogueira@nord.no_

Gry A. Alsos  
_Nord University, Norway_

Tommy H. Clausen  
_Nord University, Norway_

Recommended Citation  
Available at: https://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol36/iss4/4

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Entrepreneurial learning, defined as the process through which experiences are transformed into knowledge during the process of developing entrepreneurial opportunities (Politis, 2005), is seen as crucial to making entrepreneurs more apt to respond to changing circumstances (Holcomb et al., 2009). Although the literature has acknowledged that entrepreneurs learn from experience, there is so far limited understanding of the processes through which entrepreneurs learn and the sources of this learning. Taking an opportunity-based view on entrepreneurship, this paper explores the interplays between entrepreneurial opportunity and the learning processes of the entrepreneur. Opportunities are examined as emerging through continuous shaping and development by contextual and social influences, where entrepreneurs learn through interactions with others. The following research question is thus addressed: How does the development process of entrepreneurial opportunities interact with the learning processes of the entrepreneur?

Methods

This article employs a multiple case study design with the aim to develop theoretical understanding of the interplay between the learning of the entrepreneur and the development process of the entrepreneurial opportunity. Newly established technology-based firms in Norway represent the empirical setting. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews with founders, combined with direct observation and firm documents, providing the necessary triangulation of qualitative data sources. These are analyzed by the categorization and coding of data.

Results and Implications

This article illustrates the importance of entrepreneurs’ prior experiences in the identification and development of entrepreneurial opportunities—for instance, start-up experience. Further, it identifies relevant themes related to the learning processes of entrepreneurs in technology-based firms—among these, the challenges faced by entrepreneurs to secure the competences needed for the development of a given entrepreneurial opportunity. Lastly, the study provides new avenues of research within the topic of entrepreneurial learning, as it illustrates the interactive process through which entrepreneurs learn from opportunity development, and how this learning mutually influences the further development of the opportunity. Hence, the study provides more depth in terms of the nature of learning as well as the nature of opportunity development.

CONTACT: Tadeu Fernando Nogueira; tadeu.f.nogueira@nord.no; (T): +47 7551 7787; Nord University Business School, Universitetsallen 11, 8026 Bodo, Norway.