HOW THE LEAN STARTUP METHODOLOGY AFFECTS ENTREPRENEURS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS: THE CASE OF A SWEDISH STARTUP ACCELERATOR (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

Yashar Mansoori
Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden, yashar.mansoori@chalmers.se

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol36/iss16/18

This Interactive Paper 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 editor of Digital Knowledge at Babson. For more information, please contact digitalknowledge@babson.edu.
INTERACTIVE PAPER

HOW THE LEAN STARTUP METHODOLOGY AFFECTS ENTREPRENEURS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS: THE CASE OF A SWEDISH STARTUP ACCELERATOR

Yashar Mansoori, Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden

Principal Topics

It has been widely acknowledged that entrepreneurship should indeed be seen as a complex and emergent process. However, we suggest that to make sense of these complex entrepreneurial processes, it is important to complement the process perspective with an explicitly normative perspective that focuses on the micro-foundations, i.e. the mechanisms “that explain the events of an entrepreneurial journey” (Selden and Fletcher 2015: 603; cf. Neck and Green 2011; Venkataraman et al. 2012). In line with the recent interest in entrepreneurship as a prescriptive method, among both practitioners (Ries 2011; Furr and Alstom 2011; Blank and Dorf 2012) and academics (McGrath and MacMillan 1995; Fiet 2007; Sarasvathy 2001), we focus our attention on entrepreneurial methods, defined as coherent sets of principles of thought and action that guide entrepreneurial action and interaction and thereby the entrepreneurial process (cf. Neck and Green 2011). In particular, this paper focuses on the lean startup methodology (Ries, 2011) due to its explicit prescriptive ambitions in combination with its widespread popularity among incubators, accelerators and as part of entrepreneurship educations. Besides exploring the micro-foundations of entrepreneurial processes, an investigation of how such prescriptive entrepreneurial methods are enacted in real life situations will begin to provide some much needed academic evaluation of this popular phenomenon.

Therefore, this paper explores how entrepreneurs enact and adhere to the instructional guidelines of the lean startup as part of an accelerator program. Through semi-structured interviews with 11 founding teams, we probed into the mechanisms by which instructions of the method are understood and therefore internalized. The coding of the interviews and additional sources of data resulted in identification of changes leading to the modification of their governing variables and action strategies. By employing Argyris and Schön's (1978) theory-in-use model, we then analyzed the results in an effort to explain how the lean startup principles influence entrepreneurs and their organizations. We contribute to the literature by complementing Argyris and Schön's theory-in-use and present a model which helps explain the process of internalizing entrepreneurial instructional methods. Moreover, our results show that in contrast to the commonly understood lack of double loop learning among entrepreneurs (cf. Cope, 2003) the introduction of the lean startup did result in changes in entrepreneurs underlying assumptions.

CONTACT: Yashar Mansoori yashar.mansoori@chalmers.se +31 772 1911 Division of Entrepreneurship and Strategy, Chalmers University of Technology, Vera Sandbergs allé 8B, 41296, Gothenburg, Sweden.