MAKERS BY DESIGN? ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE MAKER MOVEMENT (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

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Principal Topic:

The maker movement has been touted by some as the next industrial revolution (Anderson, 2012; Pettis, 2009; Vance 2010) because it seeks to democratize invention (Aldrich, 2014) through providing technology tools in social spaces that lead to “ever-accelerating entrepreneurship and innovation with ever-dropping barriers to entry” (Anderson, 2012). Makerspaces have emerged as shared fabrication facilities, where makers of all types gather to invent, tinker, build, learn, and iterate using a range of manufacturing technologies.

The connection between makers and entrepreneurship is often mentioned and innovation is frequently cited as a desired outcome, but these linkages are mostly underexplored (Aldrich, 2014; Mortara and Parisot, 2016). We build our theory from the social technology literature (e.g. Simon, 1981; Garud and Karnoe, 2003; Pinch and Bijker, 1984) with the makerspace viewed as a community of technological practice (Constant, 1987) where hardware innovation (design and building of tangible artifacts) occurs that sometimes involves or leads to the pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunities. Specifically, this study explores the conditions under which makers actualize their design ideas by prototyping and producing items with commercial potential and ultimately bring them to market.

Method:

This mixed methods study is proceeding in a sequential manner in two main phases. This paper summarizes the findings to date in the first discovery phase, consisting of field observations and semi-structured interviews. This qualitative research is in preparation for the remainder of the discovery phase, which consists of a pilot survey that will be matched with proprietary archival data available on makerspace member activity.

Results and Implications:

This study makes several contributions to entrepreneurship literature. First, we build on the nascent entrepreneurship literature (Reynolds, 2009; Davidsson, 2011) to examine the individual profiles, intentions and activities of the invention and innovation process and the mechanisms that lead to entrepreneurial outcomes. Second, we also examine the effectual processes that maker entrepreneurs engage in (Sarasvathy, 2008), including rapid prototyping, iteration and small-batch manufacturing (Hatch, 2013). Third, we offer a theoretical framework for understanding the characteristics and actions of entrepreneurs within the maker community, providing profiles future studies can leverage to explore generalizations to other forms of innovation and commercialization.

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