ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES AS SITUATED CONCEPTS: TOWARD BUILDING COGNITIVE FOUNDATIONS FOR CAPTURING THE CONTENT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND LINKING CONTENT TO ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTION (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

Hamid Vahidnia  
*Texas Tech University, USA, hamid.vahidnia@ttu.edu*

Ronald K. Mitchell  
*Texas Tech University*

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ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES AS SITUATED CONCEPTS: TOWARD BUILDING COGNITIVE FOUNDATIONS FOR CAPTURING THE CONTENT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND LINKING CONTENT TO ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTION

Hamid Vahidnia, Texas Tech University, USA
Ronald K. Mitchell, Texas Tech University, USA

Principal Topics

Researchers are increasingly focusing on the content of entrepreneurial opportunities. One promise is that capturing the properties of opportunities help better explain entrepreneurial action. Still, extant research mostly “has regarded opportunities in a largely undifferentiated manner, giving little attention to distinguishing between different features of opportunities” (Hill & Birkinshaw, 2010: 86). Given opportunities “are cognitive and non-material” (Davidsson, 2015: 684), here, I take a situated cognitive approach and build a theoretically- and empirically-informed framework to help capture the content of opportunities and linking content to action.

The notions of conceptual system and concept are important here. A “conceptual system represents an individual’s knowledge about the world” and is composed of several inter-related concepts, where a concept “is the accumulated information in memory extracted for a category via selective attention, where a category is a set of things perceived as the same type for one of many possible reasons” (Barsalou, 2008: 213). Concepts can be generic (situation independent) or situated (contain properties related to the salient features of each situation). Situated concepts permit one to take situated action. The content of a situated concept can be captured by viewing the concept as: “a collection of category representations, with each category representing a different component of experience. Knowledge of these components includes categories for agents, objects, locations, times, events, actions…” (Barsalou, 2008: 220). Thus, to capture the content of an opportunity, as a situated concept, one can use: \{Entrepreneurial Opportunity (at time $n$)\} $\sim$ \{(related-agents$^n$), (related-objects$^n$), (related-locations$^n$), (related-times$^n$)\}.

Methods

Given in entrepreneurship research situated views are only emerging, we used a case study research design (Yin, 1984) and collected interview data to enrich the above conceptions of entrepreneurial opportunities as situated concepts. We collected, over a period of one year, information about a nascent entrepreneur. We also relied on archival data and site visits.

Results and Implications

The framework that emerged provides a foundation that helps explain how the content, and properties of an entrepreneurial opportunity, is formed and changes, how content helps in interpreting a setting to direct action, how it can be manipulated to manage positive and negative emotions and experiences as well as to handle various courses of entrepreneurial action.

CONTACT: Hamid Vahidnia; hamid.vahidnia@ttu.edu; (T): 408-981-3230; Rawls College of Business, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, 79409.