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LEARNING STYLES AND OPPORTUNITY RECOGNITION: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF HETEROGENEOUS ENTREPRENEURIAL TEAMS (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

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THE CRITICAL ROLE OF HETEROGENEOUS ENTREPRENEURIAL TEAMS

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Principal Topic

A critical consideration for entrepreneurs is their ability to identify and evaluate viable opportunities based upon knowledge stores and the way in which information is acquired. The identification and exploration of opportunities leads to the discovery of new businesses. New business discovery is a central component of entrepreneurship. Equally important is the notion that opportunity discovery is primarily idiosyncratic and relies heavily on the unique informational assets that entrepreneurs possess. Hence, the unique information resources that entrepreneurs possess and the way in which they are acquired and utilized to evaluate opportunities highlight the notion that entrepreneurship is a learning process.

Team level research suggests that heterogeneity among teams is associated with improved performance through increased productive conflict, which may inform opportunity recognition. Individuals who bring different backgrounds are expected to offer unique insights as members critically evaluate alternative choices of action. These critical evaluations of members with heterogeneous backgrounds should lead to productive cognitive (i.e. task-oriented) conflict. Differences in the way entrepreneurial team members learn according to Kolb’s learning styles may lead to this type of productive conflict.

In this study, we examine the extent to which differences in the learning styles of teams is associated with the rigorous evaluation of opportunities resulting in viable opportunities. Differences among the ways in which individual team members learn should result in greater amounts of cognitive conflict.

The central hypothesis is that entrepreneurial teams comprised of members with heterogeneous learning styles are likely to generate more rigorously evaluated opportunities.

Method

Hypotheses are tested using a sample of university students. The students attend or have attended an entrepreneurship course in which they formed teams for the purpose of introducing a new product. Data is collected through surveys using Kolb’s scale to test hypotheses with hierarchical linear models and regression analysis.

Results and Implications

The preliminary results of this exploratory study suggest that the heterogeneous nature of learning among entrepreneurial teams may help them recognize and evaluate opportunities more effectively. However, the data reflects the difficulty of gathering group level data about learning and opportunities from a sufficient number of entrepreneurial teams. Moreover, future analysis should examine a broader sample.

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