ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES: BRICOLAGE, ART, CRAFT, ENGINEERING, AND BROKERAGE (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

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Principal Topic

The theoretical debate regarding the degree to which opportunities and resources are social constructions risks becoming tiresome because it is difficult to argue that opportunities, for example, are completely constructed or completely objective. Thus, what is needed is empirical research that begins to identify the boundary conditions associated with the respective theories.

We begin to address this debate by introducing some overlooked aspects of the work of Levi-Strauss (1967) who first introduced the concept of bricolage into contemporary thinking. Bricolage, defined as making-do with resources at hand, has been used to show how certain entrepreneurs define resources in ways radically different from rational models of entrepreneurship (Baker & Nelson, 2005). However, Levi-Strauss (1967) originally contrasted bricolage with three other ways of thinking about and intervening in the social and physical world - art, craft, and science (a.k.a., engineering). As such, our original research objective was to validate the existence of Levi-Strauss’ (1967) modes of action within the context of entrepreneurship.

Method

We used grounded theory techniques as an inductive method to understand patterns of behavior and activity in order to develop new theory. The 23 entrepreneurs were selected by identifying those cases that have the greatest potential to illustrate Levi-Strauss’ (1967) four modalities; however, during the study a fifth category, brokerage, emerged.

Results and Implications

We found that based on the entrepreneurs’ actions and behaviors, they can be grouped into one of five categories, art, craft, engineering, bricolage, and brokerage. Although the success of each entrepreneurial venture is closely related to the entrepreneurs’ categorization, the most interesting results reveal that the way in which entrepreneurs behave towards opportunities, viewing them as objective or subjective, is closely related to their categorization.

The validation of the various Levi-Strauss (1967) categories provides empirically observed dimensions that can be used to help differentiate the ways in which entrepreneurs view opportunities and resource acquisition and how those views impact entrepreneurial action and entrepreneurial success. This approach contrasts with the more traditional entrepreneurship literature that relies on individual trait differences as a way to differentiate entrepreneurs and predict entrepreneurial behavior.

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