I THINK THEREFORE I LEARN? ENTREPRENEURIAL COGNITION, LEARNING AND KNOWING IN PRACTICE (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

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Principal Topic

In observing recent theoretical developments in the field, it is apparent that two distinctive and yet relatively separate areas of study have emerged—entrepreneurial cognition and entrepreneurial learning. Scholars have begun to appreciate how the transformation of experience, through a learning process, creates valuable entrepreneurial knowledge that impacts on venture performance (Politis, 2005). Corbett (2005) emphasises that cognition is the utilisation and application of knowledge, and learning a social process by which knowledge is created. Corbett provides a convincing argument that the “cognitive mechanisms” through which we acquire, store, transform, and use information are the product of an individual learning process. Whilst Corbett (2005) acknowledges that entrepreneurial learning is a social process, we maintain that his theorising remains under-socialised. Our objective therefore is to connect cognitive mechanisms more robustly to socialised notions of entrepreneurial learning.

This conceptual paper locates itself within a wider movement towards the social in entrepreneurship (Downing 2005; Goss, 2005), in which entrepreneurs are embedded in networks of social relations (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Jack and Anderson, 2002). This socialisation of entrepreneurship theorising has also impacted on entrepreneurial learning, which is increasingly being articulated as a negotiated and socially constructed process (Rae, 2004).

Results and Implications

In contributing to both the entrepreneurial cognition and entrepreneurial learning literature, we seek to develop a more socialised conception of entrepreneurial cognition through the application of influential social-practice perspectives of knowing and learning (Brown and Duguid, 2001). We argue that such theoretical integration and adaptation is long overdue. Significantly, we forge stronger links between entrepreneurial knowledge—that which is known by entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurial learning—the process by which knowledge is generated (Harrison and Leitch, 2005).

The paper makes two vital contributions. First, it takes an interdisciplinary approach to developing more explicit links between entrepreneurial cognition and learning, drawing on practice-based learning theory to appreciate the interactive dimensions of the entrepreneur's cognitive schema. Hence, we conceptualise cognition as inextricably linked to contextualised entrepreneurial practice. Furthermore, we propose that how entrepreneurs think and learn is deeply enmeshed with how they conceive themselves and how they construct their entrepreneurial identity (Down, 2006). Second, it develops a new socially situated theoretical framework that builds stronger links between the outcomes of learning (information, knowledge, expertise) that impact on the entrepreneur's cognitive frameworks and the processes by which these socio-cognitive resources are acquired.

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