REGIONAL DISADVANTAGE: THE ROLE OF HUMAN CAPITAL BRICOLAGE TO OVERCOME RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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Regional Disadvantage: The Role of Human Capital Bricolage to Overcome Resource Constraints

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Principal Topic

Resource based theory (RBT) shows that entrepreneurs gain and sustain advantages through certain resources (Barney, 1991). Many entrepreneurs, however, not only lack any discernable resource-based advantage (Alvarez & Barney, 2007) but are also physically distant from critical resources: suffering geographical disadvantage. We follow recent research in human capital bricolage (HCB), defined as “making do by applying combinations of the human resources at hand to new challenges” (Baker, Pollock & Sapienza, forthcoming) to explore overcoming regional disadvantages and generating resource-based advantages for specific firms. HCB may be a particularly important pathway to the resources core to RBT owing to novel combinations and networks of people that may produce socially complex resources. Moreover, because of the entrainment of previously disconnected actors (Garud & Karnoe, 2003) and embeddedness that bricolage often generates (Baker & Nelson, 2005), it may also aid in the construction of the social networks (Granovetter, 1985; Uzzi, 1997) and cultural dynamics (Saxenian, 1994) that often underlie regional advantage.

Method

Our research context is two viticulture regional settings: North Carolina, USA and Queensland, Australia. Each has grown tremendously in the past ten years despite being geographically remote to important resources. The settings are comprised of entrepreneurial firms, many of which are family-owned and operated and represent ripe terrain for investigating HCB, as family obligations and HR issues are seen as critical influences in regional development (Gammack, 2006).

We employ theoretical sampling to conduct in-depth comparative case study analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). Since HCB is an emergent theme in the literature, we inductively develop theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) concerning its role in resource-constrained firms in overcoming regional disadvantage. We account for differences between family-founded and other wineries based the presumption that altruism and family ties will affect the ability to recruit and retain talent (Karra, Tracey & Phillips, 2006).

Results and Implications

We are beginning to identify patterns of successful entrepreneurship under significant resource constraints by focusing on human capital bricolage. Our early findings are encouraging as we develop theory to explain how HCB may contribute to overcoming constraints and regional disadvantages.

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