DETERMINING THE CULTURAL ELEMENTS OF STRATEGIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP (SUMMARY)

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Principal Topic

Strategic Entrepreneurship (Ireland, Hitt & Sirmon, 2003) represents an important framework for integrating entrepreneurship (opportunity-seeking) and strategic (advantage-seeking) perspectives. In this context, entrepreneurial culture (EC), which consists of shared values and beliefs within an organization that support entrepreneurial behaviors, has been viewed as strategically instrumental; that is, mainly as an antecedent dimension towards sustainable competitive advantage. However, our assessment of entrepreneurs and the culture of entrepreneurial firms suggested there may be other, non-strategic aspects and motivations that characterize EC. In this paper we present a study that explored EC and revealed characteristics that supported and extended existing views on the concept.

Method

We utilized a qualitative, case-study based methodology, involving 11 Canadian entrepreneurial firms. We followed the organizational development of these firms for the period between 2006 and 2010. The primary data was collected through a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the founding entrepreneurs or owner/managers. A typical interview lasted 1.5 hours. The qualitative analysis consisted of an iterative procedure of processing, selecting, and sifting the transcript data to look for emergent themes, adapted from the work of Gersick, Bartunek, and Dutton (2000).

Results and Implications

Our study revealed nine emergent themes that help us to better understand how entrepreneurs view EC, as well as some of the mechanisms and motivations involved in supporting and perpetuating EC. We found that EC consisted of traditional views towards opportunity-seeking, innovation, and creativity. However, maintaining firm independence, building strong inter-firm relationships, and the founders role in driving culture were also characteristic of EC. EC was supported and perpetuated in our case firms by the desire to compensate and reward early investors and employees, in the hiring and selection processes oriented around culture fit, and through high participation expectations of employees. The entrepreneurs we studied were motivated to pursue EC by a desire to care and provide for their employees, and to prevent cultural erosion over time. The results from our exploratory study suggest that there are important cultural elements at play in EC not directly associated with strategy.

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