HOW MATERIAL ARTIFACTS IMPACT ENTREPRENEURIAL NETWORKING PROCESS? (SUMMARY)

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Principal Topic

A number of studies confirm the important and varied role that networks play in influencing entrepreneurial outcomes. Entrepreneurs consistently use networks to get ideas and gather information as well as resources and problem solving. A recent interesting development in network research is the growing number of organisational scholars who acknowledge the ‘inherent inseparability’ of social and material aspects of organizational work (Orlikowski, 2008). While the management literature has considered the role of Material Artefact (MA), in the field of entrepreneurship few researchers have empirically examined the artefact/social networking dynamic. In this paper, we use Actor-Network Theory (Callon, 1986) as a theoretical lens to investigate the interaction dynamic of MA and a nascent entrepreneur’s network. In addressing this aim, the research question considered is: How do material artefacts constrain and/or enhance the entrepreneurial networking process?

Method

In this study, we draw on three qualitative cases of technological entrepreneurial projects and we have opted for multiple-case study approach. Within each case, the level of analysis is the entrepreneur and the unit of analysis being the entrepreneurial network. The study was conducted over a period of four years. To further enhance the validity and reliability of our results we used the triangulation approach in data sources and collection methods. In addition, we opted for a sociotechnical analysis of the entrepreneurial process to plot graphs that reflect the impact of artifact on each project trajectory.

Results and Implications

The comparative studies of different cases confirm the relevance of the MA’s role in networking dynamics as well as its complementarity with the human role in the entrepreneurial process. The results confirm that entrepreneurial network is not only composed by human actors but it is instead socio-material; wherein artifacts mediate ongoing social interactions. Indeed, artifacts represent existing states of knowledge and entrepreneurial capability; more are at the heart of social associations between human elements. This study reveals that MA may impact entrepreneurial networking processes in several ways: 1) mediating the ongoing relationship; 2) structuring the social ties, 3) representing the entrepreneur-project dyad, 4) decreasing the information asymmetry and 5) accelerating the rhythm of the entrepreneurial activities realization. Finally, we conclude with theoretical implications to guide future scholarly research as well as pragmatic suggestions.

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