CATALYZING SOCIAL INNOVATION: IS ENTREPRENEURIAL BRICOLAGE ALWAYS GOOD? (SUMMARY)

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CATALYZING SOCIAL INNOVATION: IS ENTREPRENEURIAL BRICOLAGE ALWAYS GOOD?

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Principal Topic

To address intractable social problems, social entrepreneurs can engage in bricolage enabling the creation of innovations within resource-constrained environments (Desa, 2008). Scholarship in bricolage (Venkataraman, 1997; Garud et al., 2003; Baker et al., 2005) has mostly explored its usefulness in the entrepreneurial process. However, social entrepreneurs may encounter “bricolage-induced inertia” (Senyard et al., 2012) in which an over-reliance on bricolage may hamper their ability to look for new resources crucial to bring social change. Our study examines the complex relationships between social entrepreneurs’ bricolage behavior and “catalytic innovations,” a form of disruptive innovation (Christensen et al., 2006).

Christensen (2003) distinguishes between “low-end disruption” and “new-market disruption.” In “low-end disruption,” the disruptor is focused on “good enough” solutions. We argue that bricolage assists social entrepreneurs to use novel approaches to combine resources at hand, and to create products and services that are simpler and less costly than existing alternatives in the marketplace. In addition, social entrepreneurs can also enter markets that are often ignored by existing players for whom the business model is unprofitable or unattractive—“new market disruption.” However, an over-reliance on bricolage may lead social entrepreneurs to disregard such new opportunities and markets. We argue that there is a curvilinear relationship between bricolage and catalytic innovations of “new market disruption” such that social entrepreneurs exhibit greater catalytic innovations when their bricolage behavior is at intermediate levels than at lower or higher levels.

Method

Using Steffens et al. (2009) and Christensen’s (2003) scales, we tested our hypotheses on 75 social entrepreneurs by means of hierarchical regressions (controls include firm age, firm size, cash-flow status).

Results and Implications

We found a positive linear relationship between entrepreneurial bricolage and “low-end disruption” and negative marginal returns of higher levels of entrepreneurial bricolage on “new market disruption.” This first empirical study examining the role of bricolage and its differential implications on different kinds of catalytic innovations aims to contribute to a better understanding of the social entrepreneurship process by which resources at hand are utilized to achieve “low-end” catalytic innovations, whereas too much bricolage might hamper the development of disruptive innovations on new markets.

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