ACCESSING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT: EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF NETWORK AGENCY AND ROLE-RELATIONS (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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Principal Topic

In this study, we combine a network agency explanation (e.g. Baron and Tang 2009) with a relational explanation of role expectations (Montgomery 1998) to gain insight into the circumstances under which network agency matters for accessing emotional support. Two new insights are added to the limited literature focusing on the notion human agency in entrepreneurial networks. First, the notion of ability as a component of human network agency is extended by the idea that a motivation component reflecting individuals' impetus to interact purposefully with others also plays an important role in entrepreneurs accessing emotional support. Second, the notion of a universal influence of network agency is extended by the idea that network agency may be moderated by culturally defined expectations associated with role-relations (Biddle 1986; Montgomery 1998). That is, individuals arguably take on social-psychological roles (e.g., as a family member, friend, or businessperson) that moderate the effect of network ability and network motivation.

Method

A mixed method approach combining qualitative interview data with quantitative survey data is used to develop and test six hypotheses. Specifically, quasi-structured interviews are first employed to interview a stratified sample of individuals in the process of starting businesses (N=18) to identify the ideal type expectations associated with three types of role-relations: family, friends, and businesspersons (Doty and Glick 1994). Next, hypotheses are developed and formally tested using quantitative survey data from a randomly selected sample of Danish nascent entrepreneurs (N=741).

Results and Implications

Preliminary results support four of our six hypotheses. Specifically, empirical results suggest network agency is more than an ability to effectively interact with others as previously assumed. It also involves a motivation element (Ahuja et al. 2012) that translates into an individuals’ sense of comfort for engaging and using their networks (Wanberg 2000). We also find that the influence of network ability and network motivation on accessing emotional support is dependent on the culturally defined expectations associated role-relations rather than universal in nature. Collectively, the results provide important insight into the complexity of social interactions in the emergence of entrepreneurial activity and outcomes, meaningfully addressing the central theoretical issue of social aggregation in entrepreneurship (Barney and Felin, 2013).

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