A POST-HEROIC VIEW ON ENTREPRENEURIAL CREATIVITY: THE UNDERESTIMATED ROLE OF EMPLOYEES AND NETWORK INTERMEDIARIES (SUMMARY)

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A POST-HEROIC VIEW ON ENTREPRENEURIAL CREATIVITY: THE UNDERESTIMATED ROLE OF EMPLOYEES AND NETWORK INTERMEDIARIES

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Principal Topic

Entrepreneurship research is regularly biased by a quite heroic conceptualization of the entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship is seen as a “one man show”, where individual entrepreneurs act as “creative destroyers” (Schumpeter, 1934 [1912]) using their individual creativity (Tang et al., 2012), psychological traits (Cardon et al., 2013) and social capital (Florin et al., 2003) to discover opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) and to create the new.

However, the pertinence of organization in the entrepreneurial process (with executives and employees embedded in networks) has by and large received little attention compared to the entrepreneur as a luminary individual. To provide a counterpoint to this view, we propose a post-heroic perspective. We emphasize that not only leaders and founding teams (Harper, 2008) shape the creative process to end up with something novel and valuable (Amabile, 1996), but that this also applies to the whole entrepreneurial firm as an organization with executives and employees – whereby the creation process takes place across multiple levels within interorganizational networks: At the beginning, new ventures often not only lack internal resources, but also creativity-enhancing network relationships (Stinchcombe, 1965). This is why the initiation of entrepreneurial networks often starts with the help of intermediaries (e.g. business angels, business incubators, transfer offices, VCs; Zhang & Li, 2010). Drawing on the well-established research on the role of intermediaries for entrepreneurial creativity and innovation (Howells, 2006; Zhang & Li, 2010), we assess the post-heroic contribution of employees to this relationship. We furthermore add to the research on intermediaries, as we do not only analyze the mere existence of venture-intermediary relationships, but also the recurring networking practices that manifest and stabilize these relations.

Results and Implications

In a survey-based study, drawing from the data of 101 CEOs and 261 employees in start-ups, multilevel moderated mediation analysis is applied. According to our results, relationships with intermediaries are particularly effective for entrepreneurial creativity if recurring networking practices are in place. Herein, the involvement of employees from lower hierarchical levels turned out to have a stronger mediation effect than the individual efforts by the CEO. We discuss our findings against the backdrop of the proposed post-heroic view.

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