

SUMMARY

EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE AND ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING: WHEN ORDINARY EVENTS TRIGGER LEARNING

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Principal Topic

This study investigates the entrepreneurial learning (EL) process by focusing on the recognition of events in entrepreneurs' everyday life as a critical phase for learning. Current studies suggest that existing EL frameworks are nebulous in representing how entrepreneurs recognize an everyday event as an experience that might stimulate learning (Lindh and Thorgren, 2016). Our work addresses this gap and explores the experiences of 38 entrepreneurs through in-depth interviews. The aim is to extend current EL frameworks about the nexus experience-recognition and learning.

Method

Following the rationale of previous studies on EL (e.g., Rae, 2006), we adopted a qualitative approach because it supports an in-depth exploration of phenomena while providing a means to build theory (Zosimo, Jack, and Hamilton, 2017). Entrepreneurs were selected through a snowball sampling procedure (Noy, 2008) after a random selection of four entrepreneurs from a complete list of entrepreneurs located in an Italian region. Overall, we interviewed 38 entrepreneurs with an average age of 45.5 years (SD= 10), whose majority were men (87%). Most of their firms have fewer than ten employees (52.63%), and 23.68% have an annual turnover of less than €200.000, while 36.84% have a turnover between €200.000 and €2 million.

Results and Implications

Positive or negative ordinary events become learning events when entrepreneurs feel fear of making mistakes that they believe could have repercussions for the firm. This feeling motivates entrepreneurs to reflect deeply on that events. This process activates a higher level of learning that complements the rapid and autonomous one, in line with the Dual-processes theories (Evans and Stanovich, 2013). The perception that the firm is in a changing phase that requires attention accompanies this feeling.

This study introduces an event-based approach of learning, extending the set of conditions highlighted by Politis (2005) to explain how entrepreneurs learn from experience. Furthermore, it identifies alternative processes to the decrease of the level of confidence to produce desired outcomes, as postulated by Minniti and Bygrave (2000), and to the scarcity of resources devised by Turati and Ravasi (2005).

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