

Chapter 67

Students' Creativity and Entrepreneurial Learning for Developing Corporate Entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

The chapter aims to contribute at the discussion on the role of creativity in sustaining corporate entrepreneurship development by focusing on entrepreneurial learning in the context of incumbent enterprises. Empirical evidences coming from the case study of “Mimprendo” project (www.mimprendo.it), an initiative promoted by the Italian Conference of the University Colleges and the Italian Association of Young Entrepreneurs, are presented. Findings provides insights about the collaborative entrepreneurial learning as happening in the community composed by University students, entrepreneurs, and researchers to solve relevant managerial and entrepreneurial innovation's needs. Those evidences are at the basis of an integrated framework aimed to provide a coherent and a systematic view on the collaborative entrepreneurial learning processes to nurture, select, and implement creative ideas of universities students for sustaining the corporate entrepreneurship in incumbent companies.

INTRODUCTION

In the scenario of the entrepreneurial economy (Audretsch & Thurik, 2001), creativity and entrepreneurial learning are two fundamental processes of entrepreneurship (Drucker, 1985): they serve each other and dynamically shape a learning environment and a mindset for growth and value creation in corporation. Entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as a process, which leads to a number of important outcomes for individuals and businesses that are engaged with it, including the creation of new ventures (Shane,

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2000; Lumpkin, 2005; Politis, 2005), strategic renewal and restructuring of corporations (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000), innovation and adoption of new technologies (Rae, 2006), new product development, diversifying markets, and new business alliances (Hinrichs et al. 2004). Defined in a schumpeterian perspective, as the ability to respond to the creative processes of change, the Innovative Entrepreneurship has been characterized, in several studies, as a virtuous combination of intellectual capital and market's opportunities, as the capacity of managing under uncertainty, to assume the risk of a new venture, to be able to identify and exploit previous unexplored opportunities (Byers et al., 2011; Venkataraman, 2004; Romano et al., 2014). Due at the knowledge intensive nature of entrepreneurship, more and more driven by technologies innovation and creativity, the entrepreneurship implies the importance of the ability to cope with the problems and uncertainty and to learn from those problems. As consequence the entrepreneurship arises as a learning process (Cope & Watts, 2000; Minniti & Bygrave, 2001; Rae, 2006; Gemmell et al., 2011) that needs to be sustained continuously at individual and organisational level. As Minniti and Bygrave (2001) state, "entrepreneurship is a process of learning, and a theory of entrepreneurship requires a theory of learning" (p. 7).

Research today highlights to need to move beyond the individual entrepreneur perspective toward a collective learning experiences involving other actors (internal and external to the company) (Politis, 2005; Lumpkin, 2005; Rae, 2006). All those processes require the "generation and implementation of novel, appropriate ideas to establish a new venture or to renew an existing one (Amabile, 1997, p. 20): this capacity is known as entrepreneurial creativity. Amabile (1997) claims that entrepreneurial creativity doesn't occur just in start-up firms, but it can be exhibited in established organisations, which implies that creativity is related to a more integrated concept of entrepreneurship. Zhou and Shalley (2003) argue that entrepreneurship research and creativity are connected in some way: all entrepreneurs need some level of creativity, whether it is in identifying new opportunity, coming up with new ideas, or pitching their ideas to potential investors. They can be defined as "Entrepreneurial human capital" interpreted as catalyst of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial human capital come in all shapes and forms. They possess the capacity, competence and attitude to transform new ideas, technologies and inventions into commercially viable products and services to create economic and social value, through innovative business models (Byers et al., 2011; Allen, 2009; Polczynski & Jaskolski, 2005). A key challenge for incumbent companies can be so identified into the conditions and strategies allowing them to remain entrepreneurial. However despite the centrality of creativity and learning for innovative entrepreneurship, there are still very few studies investigating the entrepreneurial learning dynamics involving the creativity of University's students for sustaining the continuous development of corporate entrepreneurship, or to use Rae's (2000) words, how individuals learn to work in entrepreneurial ways. To cover this gap, this chapter aims to demonstrate how collaborative entrepreneurial learning processes can increase the chances of effectively identifying, evaluating, and exploiting new opportunities deriving from the creativity of university's students (Minniti & Bygrave 2001; Cope, 2005; Politis, 2005; Rae, 2006) so enhancing corporate entrepreneurship.

The remaining of the chapter is structured as follows:

- Section 2 details the literature background in terms of corporate entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial learning process and students' creativity;
- Section 3 describes the methodological design;
- Section 4 describes the findings; and
- Section 5 discusses and concludes the study by providing implications for theory and practice.

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