

Chapter 5

Is There Entrepreneurship Within the Public Sector? A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Because of its importance as a key factor to economic development, the study of entrepreneurship has been considerably developed in the past decades. Entrepreneurship is broadly diversified, which is associated with, for example, studies in the field of business, social, female, and young entrepreneurship. If, on the one hand, it is a fact that entrepreneurship and its study are mainly associated with the private initiative, there is, on the other hand, a question to be asked: Is there entrepreneurship in the public sector? Though still incipient, the study of entrepreneurship applied to the public sector and the acts of the public managers as entrepreneurs have revealed themselves to be themes with increasing interest. To contribute to a better conceptual understanding of this theme, namely its questions, ideas, and current debate, this work presents some theoretical reflexions and a relevant literature review on entrepreneurship in a public sector context.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6942-8.ch005

INTRODUCTION

The theme of entrepreneurship, as a field of research and investigation, has seen, in the last decades, a remarkable growth in its study and application. There has been considerable interest in the contribution of entrepreneurship to economic development (Stought, 2016). Entrepreneurship (and the activity of entrepreneuring) are key factors for economic growth and development insofar as they are considered sources of innovation and thus contribute to increased productivity and efficiency (Acs & Szerb, 2007; Stephens, Partridge & Faggian, 2013; Trettin & Welter, 2013).

While the literature that addresses the theme of entrepreneurship in the context of the private sector is vast, with regard to its application to the public sector, and to the performance of public managers as entrepreneurs, literature is still scarce, although it is a subject of growing interest (Diefenbach, 2011; Klein, Mahoney & McGahan, 2010; Matthews, 2014; Zampetakis & Moustakis, 2007; Zerbinatia & Souitarisb, 2007).

Considering the challenges faced by today's societies, which inevitably require a creative response / approach from national, regional and local governments, several researchers recognize the need for more research on this subject in order to better understand the relevance entrepreneurship (and entrepreneurial activity) in the context of the public sector and its organizations.

Thus, the main goal of this work is to discuss the concept, raise theoretical reflections and review the literature on entrepreneurship (intrapreneurship) in the context of the public sector, in order to contribute to a better conceptual understanding of this theme, namely its issues, ideas and current debate. We begin, in section I, by reviewing the concept of entrepreneurship and its application in the context of the public sector. Next, and in order to have a perception of the "state of the art", we present a literature review, namely, the main contributions of literature specifically applied to local / regional public (political) entrepreneurship. Finally, we present some final considerations.

BACKGROUND

Entrepreneurship: What Does It Mean?

Stought (2016, p. 130), refer that "The interest in entrepreneurship and its contribution to economic development has seen a great development in the last two decades". In fact, the theme of entrepreneurship, as a field of research and investigation, has seen an exponential growth in its study and application. There are several terms to describe and characterize entrepreneurship. The works of Diefenbach (2011) and

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