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SUMMARY

RE-STORYING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY: EDUCATION, EXPERIENCE AND SELF-NARRATIVE

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Principal Topic

In this paper, I consider the potential impact of entrepreneurship education on identity. Over the past twenty years, there has been fervent interest in the prevalence, content, and outcomes of entrepreneurship education programs, but very little attention on the effect of entrepreneurship education on participants' identities. However, the impact of entrepreneurship education on identity would seem to be a fruitful line of research because, as scholars have noted, entrepreneurship education is different in kind from other types of management education, in that it deals with uniquely personal issues such as the emotions of grief and loss from failure (Shepard, 2004, 2003), individual initiatives geared toward channeling resources and stakeholders to the developing organization (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2008), ethics around the "face" that entrepreneurs present to potential investors (Brenkert, 2009) and the ways in which entrepreneurs deal with both exogenous and endogenous contingency (Honig, 2004, Harmeling, 2009).

Method

This paper first describes in detail three key experiential elements of entrepreneurship education. The first is exposure to "other worlds," meaning to entrepreneurial projects, ventures and actors new to participants who, through narrative, enter these worlds "vicariously." The second is access to "bridges" or tools that connect the participant's current world or state of being with the other world which they seek in some measure to enter. The last element is holistic entrepreneurial experience where the participant is actually given the opportunity to take entrepreneurial action. These three elements correspond with Kolb's two dimensions of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). The first two (other worlds and tools) relate to acquisition (grasping) through experience and the last (entrepreneurial action) to transformation through experientially acquired knowledge. The carrying out of this cycle: exposure to other worlds, tools/bridges and entrepreneurial action, in turn leads to an iterative process where the self is actually re-storied into a more complex, entrepreneurial identity. This process is reflected in the literature on self-narrative (Linde, 1993, Ibarra, 1999) and identity transformations (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2009).

Results and Implications

While the model presented here is theoretical in nature, I test it with empirical data. The paper's main contributions are threefold: First, it further strengthens the already-established link between experiential learning and entrepreneurship education theory. Second, it helps to underscore the unique nature of entrepreneurship education by showing its potential effect on individual identity, and also adds to the literature in identity work by showing how exposure to new contexts and new tools, followed by actual experience, leads to a revision of the actor's self-narrative. Third, the model highlights the link between experience and identity, and shows concretely how taking directed action impacts self-image and identity. Each of these contributions provides helpful insights into both the study and practice of entrepreneurship education.

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