

Företagsledares arbete och tillväxt

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Entrepreneurial work and growth

The overall aim of this study is to contribute to knowledge about the relationship between what entrepreneurs do and firm growth. This aim have been translated into three research questions: (1) What characterizes the work of entrepreneurs in small and medium-sized businesses?; (2) What affects the design of entrepreneurial work? (3) How does the work of entrepreneurs relate to business growth?

In order to develop knowledge about how entrepreneurs work to create growth interviews with 60 entrepreneurs were made. The interviews were analyzed with an inductive approach, inspired by grounded theory. Based on their descriptions of who they involve in their work, where the work is done and how it is carried out, entrepreneurs can be classified into four different groups. These differ in whether they involve few or many other actors, if these actors are primarily internal or external, if the arena in which the entrepreneur primarily interacts is production-oriented or distant from production and if the practices tend to be informal or formal. All four types were represented among companies with both growth and positive profitability. Thus, entrepreneurial work is a heterogeneous and complex phenomenon that leaves room for great variation.

However, the entrepreneurs have in common that they do not interact with the external environment in general, but based on individual preferences, they interact with specific actors in particular arenas with varying practices. Together, these actors, arenas and practices constitute what I call, the entrepreneurial learning space, which mediates his or her development of an understanding of the business situation and available growth opportunities.

This study has both theoretical and more practical contributions regarding entrepreneurial work and growth. One contribution is the introduction of the concept of entrepreneurial learning space, a concept that includes the actors, arenas and practices through which the entrepreneurs understanding of the business situation is mediated. Another contribution is the typology of entrepreneurial learning spaces developed in this study, which is a tool to further analyze entrepreneurial work. The typology also implies a more practical contribution by offering entrepreneurs an tool to reflect on their own work as it can be used as a starting point for discussing, thinking and possibly changing their practical work. An additional contribution is the multifaceted description of entrepreneurial work.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial work, SMEs, Growth, Entrepreneurial learning, Strategic learning, Strategy as practice, Learning spaces, Working contexts.

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