

The ability to innovate in international entrepreneurship

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RESUMO

A capacidade de inovar no empreendedorismo internacional

Neste artigo, teve-se o objetivo de analisar a capacidade de inovar no empreendedorismo internacional. Para tanto, um estudo qualitativo de múltiplos casos foi desenvolvido. Os dados foram coletados principalmente por entrevistas semiestruturadas com 30 sujeitos sociais, e o *software* ATLAS.ti apoiou a análise de conteúdo. Observou-se que as ações de inovação dos empreendedores estavam voltadas para o produto e a produção. Com isso, identificou-se que a presença da capacidade de inovar foi intermitente ao longo do processo de internacionalização, com exceção em apenas uma das empresas, na qual ocorreu continuamente.

Palavras-chave: empreendedorismo internacional, capacidade de inovar, empreendedorismo.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Even though there are several definitions of entrepreneurship, generally, it is associated with the creation of companies and innovation. The manager guides the organization in order to create more opportunity to consolidate the position of the company within the market.

Entrepreneurship is defined as the process in which something new (creative) and different (innovative) is performed, aiming to generate wealth for the individuals and to aggregate value for society (Filion, 1999; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). This is the classic understanding presented by Schumpeter (1988).

Innovation is also relevant in international entrepreneurship (IE), since it is one of the aspects that characterize IE as an area of study. Therefore, it allows determining the configuration of the supply chain, selects areas to be internationalized, defines unique paths to provide value to the consumer, and contributes to the identification of opportunities in the process of This is an Open Access article under the [CC BY](#) license.

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internationalization (Zahra & George, 2002). This point of view is also shared by Mtigwe (2006). On the other hand, Oviatt and McDougall (2005) understand innovation as focusing on products and services, since these are determinants of international business.

In Brazilian studies regarding IE, the role of innovation is mainly defined as being attached to the development of software (Sohn, Lenzi, & Kiezel, 2004; Galimberti & Fracasso, 2008). Moreover, creativity, ideas (Silveira & Alperstedt, 2007), and innovative attitudes are part of the construct of innovation associated with entrepreneurship, as well as international entrepreneurship (Freitag Filho & Amal, 2008).

From the initial bibliographical study, it was possible to identify that the ability to innovate is related to different essential dimensions of international entrepreneurship. At the same time that propensity toward risk (Dimitratos & Plakoyiannaki, 2003; Freitag Filho & Amal, 2008) and network relationships promote innovation and the use of technology (Galimbert, 2009; Ferreira, Santos & Serra, 2010), the ability of the entrepreneur to innovate affects the exploration of international opportunities (Dimitratos & Plakoyiannaki, 2003) and the propensity to adaption (Welch & Welch, 2004; Dib, 2008). Therefore, the following research question is proposed: what are the characteristics of the ability to innovate in international entrepreneurship?

Based on the relevance and potentialities of innovation in the actions of the international entrepreneur, the present study analyzes the ability to innovate in international entrepreneurship. It consists of five sections. Following the introduction, a theoretical background regarding the ability to innovate in international entrepreneurship is presented. Then, the methods section highlights that the research was performed based on a qualitative, multiple case study perspective. In addition, the data collection involved the analysis of documents, bibliographical material, and semi-structured interviews. In the results section, the findings are discussed with the presentation of each of the four studied companies, and a cross analysis of the cases, before the study concludes.

2. ABILITY TO INNOVATE

The ability to innovate allows entrepreneurship and for an individual to materialize ideas that add value to the company. It belongs to the individual, but also to the company (Schumpeter, 1988; Chandler, 1998). The materialization of ideas in something innovative makes a difference in the conception of a business (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). A similar idea is expressed by Porter (1999, p. 174): “The companies achieve competitive advantage by innovative initiatives. They involve innovation in its wider meaning, encompassing new technologies and new ways of doing things”.

In the studies conducted in 54 countries by the Global Entrepreneur Monitor, innovation is evaluated in terms of

products and services (Kelley, Bosma, & Amorós, 2010). Hage (1999, p. 599) explains that

[...] organizational innovation has been constantly defined as an adoption of an idea or a behavior that is new to the organization [...]. Innovation can be a new product, a new service, a new technology or a new business practice.

In addition, the fact of entering a new market is also an innovation (Schumpeter, 1988).

The initial proposition of Oviatt and McDougall (1994) presents advances in the field of knowledge regarding IE. It is recognized that organizational opportunities, technology, and innovation facilitate new companies within the international context. Therefore, innovation is identified as a key component in order to understand internationalization.

In approaching innovation as a social system, Fuglsang and Sundbo (2005, p. 335) propose three methods of managing innovation. The first method concerns the entrepreneur, in which innovation depends on the actions of individuals and of the creation of businesses. The second is the functional method, which is related to technology and determines change. The third is the strategic reflexive, whereby “[...] the process of change is based on the interpretation of the environments and of the internal resources that the company obtains or can obtain” (p. 335). These types of innovation management can be studied through international entrepreneurship. It is possible that a hybridism between two or three methods exists. Primarily, it is observed that the actions of the entrepreneurs (first method) and the strategic treatment (third method) more strongly influence innovation in international entrepreneurship, while the functional method may not have much relevance to IE. Technology is important, but is not a condition for the existence of IE.

Innovation is also discussed by Kay (1996), with architecture and reputation being considered sources of differentiation. However, innovation can be linked to technology; in order to achieve a competitive advantage, it needs to unite with another distinctive ability, such as innovation and reputation, or innovation and architecture. Therefore, innovation is suggested as a distinct ability.

The strategic abilities gain status and attention in order to favor the exchange between the external reality and the organization. In this approach, multinationals are motivated to execute an efficient transference of domestic innovations and expertise to operations abroad. The internal environment must be analyzed and explored. Therefore, the Resource Based View (RBV) helps in identifying and developing resources that allow the internationalization of the company (Sharma & Erramilli, 2004).

Innovation is one of the aspects that characterize IE as an area of knowledge. It allows the identification of international opportunities, determines the configuration of the supply chain,

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