

≈ SUMMARY ≈

ENTREPRENEURS AS KNOWLEDGE LEADERS

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Knowledge leadership

Knowledge management has become one of the most discussed topics in the business literature during the last decade. It is promoted as an essential corner stone for enterprises to develop competitive advantage in rapidly changing environment. The challenge for many small enterprises is especially demanding because of their limited resources. Thus, almost all the discussions on knowledge management and its related issues have centered on large organizations (Wong and Aspinwall 2004).

Additionally, in knowledge management literature it is often admitted that the leader's role as facilitator of learning is crucial in all companies. Nevertheless, only a limited amount of published research has examined the role and tasks of a leader in knowledge management. It is speculated that they should assume roles those of coaches and facilitators but these roles and tasks have not been empirically specified. Research on entrepreneurs as knowledge leaders is so far lacking.

In an enterprise, learning takes place interactively between all three levels: individual, team or group and organization (Lippit, 1982, p. 43; Woolner, 1991). Nonaka & Takeuchi (1998) have described the circulative new knowledge-creation process between tacit and explicit knowledge via four phases: socialization, articulation, integration and internalization. Among others Crossan, Lane and Hildebrandt (1991) deepens our understanding of learning processes on the schematic level of an organization. Organizational learning depends on the interpretative capabilities of individual schemas and their sufficient integration in order to form organizational schemas. Interpretations of competitive surroundings and organizational phenomena should be shared if not in all, at least in those matters crucial for the competitiveness of an enterprise. Collective schemas are associated with common concepts and language. Interpretation and integration processes take place especially in the articulation phase of new knowledge creation (Nonaka & Konno, 1998). An important means of this is dialogue (Argyris 1999, p. 229–238; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Senge, 1990). According to Oswick, Anthony, Keenoy, Mangham and Grant (2000) it is just a dialogue that connects individual learning and organizational learning.

This study is one of the first steps in conceptualizing and empirically examining knowledge leadership among small business area and entrepreneurs.

Comparative analysis of entrepreneurs and managers as knowledge leaders

This article reports some findings of a series of research that was designed to create a framework to understand a leader's role and tasks in his/her community of work as facilitator of continual learning according to organizational goals. The goal of this particular study was to gain more understanding of entrepreneurs as knowledge leaders. Knowledge leadership is closely connected with the broader theme of knowledge management. The processes of organizational learning and knowledge creation are those in which the entrepreneur takes part and those the entrepreneur is supposed to support.

The main question in this research was: how do entrepreneurs act as knowledge leaders. We are especially interested in the active and passive knowledge leadership behaviors of the entrepreneurs studied. We used a comparative research design in order to find out possible differences of entrepreneurs and hired managers as knowledge leaders. The knowledge leader's roles and tasks were specified through 29 variables, which formed four distinct dimensions on knowledge leadership (Viitala 2002). The sample consists of 2329 filled questionnaires, where subordinates evaluated their leaders. Those were managers and entrepreneurs from enterprises of different size and on varied industries in Finland.

Results and Implications

A very practical question gained some answers in this research: "What should entrepreneurs actually do when they want to support learning in their units which contributes to the capability of the organization?" According to David McClelland (1961) and Collins and Moore (1970) entrepreneurs are tough, pragmatic people driven by needs of independence and achievement. They have a strong "urge to build", but seldom are willing to submit to authority. If this is true, there is an obvious challenge for entrepreneurs to learn to lead in a new way that helps also other people in their enterprises to continually learn.

Preliminary results indicate that entrepreneurs differ from managers as knowledge leaders. The differences emerged in between company size and the status of the leader. In some areas of knowledge leadership the entrepreneurs were more passive than the hired managers.

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