FOUNDERS’ IMPRINTING AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING: THE CASE OF
SCIENTISTS’ ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract

One important reason because innovative new firms (INVs) fail to market innovation is the lack of search breadth; through search breadth – interacting with different types of information sources – INVs have access to the combination of commercial and business knowledge required for commercializing innovations. Adopting the theoretical lens of imprinting we develop a set of hypotheses to explain when and how the involvement of scientists as founders of INVs help to overcome this challenge. We test and find support for our hypotheses on a representative sample of 220 INVs. Our results indicate that INVs founded by scientists search more broadly as compared to other INVs and that this difference becomes larger when the proportion of scientists among INV’s founders increases; however scientists’ contribution to INVs’ search breadth is weakened when the INV does not engage extensively in strategic planning and when it prioritizes non-monetary goals related to innovation and social outcomes rewarded in the scientific community. Our findings contribute to research on organizational learning, founders’ imprinting and scientists’ commercialization activities and allow to formulate managerial and policy implications.

Keywords: scientists, commercialization, search breadth, imprinting, innovative new ventures