

Full length research

Entrepreneurship and organizational structure: Theoretical framework and application to Tunisian case

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The objective of this article is to determine whether SMEs, characterized by a managerial mode, could show any entrepreneurial orientation. In our approach, we present first the conceptual framework of this study with reference to the various works that relate to the specificities of SMEs and entrepreneurship. Then, we discuss our methodological framework to present, finally, the main results.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship; SMEs; Management.

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1990s, mainly due to improvements in empirical research, entrepreneurship could be considered a legitimate field of research. Indeed, the question that springs to mind is: what is entrepreneurship? It is becoming increasingly clear that entrepreneurship cannot be confined within a single definition (Fayolle, 2004; Fayolle et al., 2009). But can we give a real definition to the concept of entrepreneurship?

Miller (1983) and Lumpkin and Dess (1996), used three dimensions to test the behavior of an entrepreneurial business: innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking. In any event, the pursuit of new opportunities and a desirable future can be realized both in the creation of a new entity and an existing entity. As a result, the creation of a business would, then, be a particular form of entrepreneurship.

The fact is that, when combining entrepreneurship with business creation, you can suggest that the concept is much more evident in early life, when the company is still characterized by a simple structure. In this sense, Mintzberg (1989), describes entrepreneurial organization as a simple structure. He noted that most organizations seem to adopt this new configuration, regardless of their industry, because they usually rely on personal leadership to advance.

This should limit the field of entrepreneurship only to organizations with simple structures and in which leaders play a vital role. These limitations encourage us to ask

whether any relationship exists between the size of the organization and entrepreneurship and at the same time about the evolution of SMEs in the current global economic environment today.

Indeed, globalization, information technology and communication and the "Just in Time" could lead SMEs to promote managerial mode and take a greater standardization, formalization and specialization involving their specificities. That is our concern revolves around the question of how to reconcile SMEs' operating mode, managerial and entrepreneurial orientation.

The objective of our approach is to try to determine whether SMEs, characterized by an "organizational mode", could show any entrepreneurial orientation. To do this, we conducted a comparative study targeting Tunisian companies located in the region of Sfax. We interviewed 66 executives in an attempt to test the association relationships between entrepreneurial orientation and the organizational characteristics of these companies, and whether these companies with a strong entrepreneurial orientation had organizational structures whose characteristics oppose the simple structure.

In our approach, we present first the conceptual framework of this study with reference to the various works that relate to the specificities of SMEs and entrepreneurship. We discuss, then, our methodological framework to present, finally, the main results.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Entrepreneurship

In the field of research, usually focused on large structures or 'intrapreneurship, as if some organizations could not, once created small, have an entrepreneurial orientation, although they are constantly and often in search of new opportunities.

Thus Covin and Slevin (1991) and Dess et al. (1999) were interested only in large organizations characterized by a strong entrepreneurial orientation, and suggested, that, these businesses adopt an organic structure to broaden their borders by registering in networks.

In the case of small businesses, the problem is different because these organizations are characterized by their flexibility which facilitates the adoption of entrepreneurial behavior. However, several factors can affect the characteristics of these small businesses, such as the organizational point of view or the greater bureaucratization of their structure.

In this case, we still can argue that these companies continue an entrepreneurial behavior. In this same line of ideas, several studies, including those of Pugh et al. (1969), Bygrave (1993) and Carrier (1994), showed significant differences between companies according to their size. For these authors, the increase in size is always accompanied by further structuring, which translates into greater standardization, formalization and specialization.

In this sense, the development cycles of companies studied by Miller and Friesen (1982), D'Amboise and Muldowney (1988) and Godener (1996) show that firms are characterized, in the first phase, by a simple structure, a local market and family capital. However, it is hard to see that these studies seem to suggest that this phase is only the first step, followed necessarily by others in business development.

However, several studies highlighting the importance of SMEs show that they are not necessarily looking to grow. According to Julien and Marchesnay (1996), a large number of small companies are able to ensure the continuity of their business without registering a growth logic. Marchesnay (1997) adds that the existence of diseconomies of scale, variety and learning are all factors to understand why and how small businesses are able to ensure the continuity of their business. It is thus clear that flexibility is the main advantage of these SMEs as it gives them a greater ability to adapt to a changing environment.

S.M.E. and entrepreneurial orientation

Several works are devoted to the subject of entrepreneurial orientation. This abundance is accompanied by a great diversity in the guidelines.

Entrepreneurship has emerged as a field of research having a different form of entrepreneurial orientation. Specific capabilities of animation and mobilization characterize entrepreneurship.

We find that in the last few years, research has focused on the process of innovation in entrepreneurship studying the role of entrepreneurs through their behavior and their strategic visions. Still, the significant progress in the area of knowledge and technology have transformed the organizational structures of the industrial, commercial and organizational.

Innovation, knowledge and globalization are the main characteristics of the new economic environment where competition, based on knowledge, transformed the traditional structures of business and gave birth to a new economy (as opposed to traditional economy), based on knowledge, research, information and learning which are the core values of the process of wealth creation.

New industrial structures are moving more and more towards knowledge-based industries and high-tech in which competitive advantage in innovation and creative ideas are the foundation of the new economy (Becker, 1964).

To play its role as a factor of success and the engine of growth of SMEs (Vincent et al., 1999), innovation policy must be part of a recurrent interaction with other functional policies in a systemic perspective (Chesbrough and Teece, 1996).

The process of innovation is no longer limited to technology alone, as a defined product or process, it is also interested now, in marketing, distribution, financing, after sales management so as to give the company the opportunity to adapt to the new competition rules.

Thus, to survive, companies need to organize themselves to facilitate the development of these strategic processes and improve efficiency. In this perspective, the concept of entrepreneurial orientation proposes three dimensions to test and characterize the behavior of an entrepreneurial business: innovativeness, proactiveness and risk taking.

The first reflects a tendency to engage and support the process of generating ideas, creativity, development opportunities that can lead to the emergence of new products, new services or new technologies.

Proactivity is found at high levels in companies which behave as a leader rather than a follower. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) suggest to see passivity as the opposite of proactivity. It is defined as indifference or an inability to assess opportunities and to act as a leader in a market.

Risk is an essential characteristic of entrepreneurial behavior. Multiple meanings of risk coexist depending on the context in which this concept is used. Moreover, the risk can be seen through the filters of preference or aversion, perceptions and behavior. This refers to the many ways to explore this notion. Proactivity refers to the notion of taking the initiative, but in a sense that the

Table 1. Size of sample firms

	n<50	50<n<100	n>100
Low entrepreneurial orientation	50% (18)	39% (14)	13% (4)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	40% (12)	40% (12)	20% (6)
Total	45% (30)	39% (26)	15% (10)

initiative is part of an anticipation and a vision of a desirable future.

It appears quite conceivable that organizations characterized by a managerial mode can adopt and pursue an entrepreneurial orientation.

Thus, the overview of the literature on entrepreneurship has enabled us to conceive that SMEs generally characterized by an organizational mode can manage to take an entrepreneurial approach. This is what we will try to verify empirically below.

METHODOLOGY

Collection and use of data

Our survey was conducted from the annals of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Sfax which brought us the help needed. We have identified only companies with fewer than 200 employees (13 companies). 100 among 150 business leaders were contacted by telephone, 34 did not wish to participate in this survey, one third of the sample.

We targeted the textile and clothing industry. We sought to find in our sample the firms characterized by a strong little entrepreneurial orientation. So we opted for the "old economy" which combines highly innovative enterprises and other more traditional ones where the pursuit of new opportunities is not necessarily a priority. The 66 companies that responded are formed of small businesses with fewer than 50 employees (30) and medium-sized companies (36), see table 1. We specifically targeted SME operating in this sector, to investigate whether, given the pressure of the current economic environment, these companies do not tend to favor a managerial mode since, as emphasized by Dubost (1994), external control can promote bureaucratization of SMEs.

We conducted the empirical method based on the questionnaire survey (usinier, 2000). Great care was taken in the selection of questions so as to prevent evasiveness and difficulties in interpretation, for the sake of scientific integrity and in order to draw conclusions closer to reality. We used a single questionnaire in which entrepreneurs described their practices in terms of management, their decision making, their strategic options and their long-term visions, skills in entrepreneurship, and the role of innovation in the general policy of the company.

Our questionnaire scales are mainly from the literature on entrepreneurship. Kalika's work (1995) allowed us to assess the characteristics of the organizational structure of SMEs to the information system, we used the scales proposed by Leo (1993).

The use of methods of descriptive statistics allowed us to process the collected data. We classified our sample into two groups of firms, the first, unlike the second, is characterized by a strong entrepreneurial orientation. To highlight significant differences between these two groups in terms of their organizational structures, we used the chi-square test which allows one to analyze the relationships between organizational structure and entrepreneurial orientation.

Research hypotheses

The validity of a questionnaire according to Contandriopoulos et al. (1990), is the ability to measure the phenomenon of interest, that is to say, the adequacy between the selected variables and the theoretical concept to measure. It is also defined as the quality of an instrument actually measures what it purports to measure. The internal validity of an instrument, generally, is the correspondence between the questions asked and the variables and research hypotheses of the study.

If we take the main characteristics of simple structure, the following hypotheses concerning the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and organizational characteristics are:

- Hypothesis 1: SMEs with high entrepreneurial orientation are characterized by a standardization
- Hypothesis 2: SMEs with high entrepreneurial orientation are characterized by high formalization
- Hypothesis 3: SMEs with high entrepreneurial orientation are characterized by a high degree of specialization
- Hypothesis 4: SMEs with high entrepreneurial orientation are characterized by low centralization
- Hypothesis 5: SMEs have strong entrepreneurial orientation of a system of planning and control complex
- Hypothesis 6: SMEs with a strong entrepreneurial orientation have a formalized external information system.

Table 2. Crossing the quality approach and entrepreneurial orientation

	Companies engaged in a certification process	Companies outside approach
Low entrepreneurial orientation	22% (8)	78%(28)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	65% (19)	35%(11)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After presenting the main characteristics of the target companies, we tested the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and organizational characteristics.

The characteristics of the firms surveyed

To conduct our quantitative study on managerial practices of the traditional economy and the new economy in Tunisia, and to assess the entrepreneurial orientation of the firms that we have targeted, we had in-depth interviews with their leaders in order to identify all the factors that may have an impact on the management of their businesses. Through their vision, an analytical framework was built that allows us to identify the most indicative of the entrepreneurial orientation they are likely to adopt. The interest is so great in Tunisia that a proportion of firms are increasingly beginning to change in this new economy. These companies tend to be young and small, their dynamism contributes greatly to the current economic growth. It is also apparent that what characterizes the entrepreneur in the new economy, is both his mastery of management tools to create value and performance as well as his ability agility of mind conducive to a flexible and innovative ways (techniques) in a changing environment.

We have noticed that the young entrepreneurs of the new economy are serene actors, more flexible and have risk appetite. Moreover, collaboration, cooperation, work and team management are often critical to the resolution of the problem. Management is more collegial than in traditional economy companies. Our interviewees adopted an emerging culture of innovation and change in a number of SMEs, especially those related to the new economy. SMEs in the traditional economy cannot imagine the creation of value as a mission.

In an approach to describe the quality of the companies we targeted, we investigated whether their leaders are part of a certification program. The results we obtained showed that businesses with strong entrepreneurial orientation were those who committed the most in a certification process, since 65% of them adopted this approach, as against 22% for SMEs with low entrepreneurial orientation (See table 2).

Guidance entrepreneurial activities and structure

Regarding the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm structure, six variables were used to characterize the structure:

- The Standardization
- The formalization
- The specialization
- Centralization which reflects the degree of structuring of activities and the level of bureaucratization, and then: - The system of planning and control
- The information system

The standardization

For Kalika (1995), standardization refers to the existence and importance of procedures in the organization. These can be defined as rules which are an expression of expertise and which do not necessarily have a written translation. We conducted our research by type of activity of the targeted SMEs, and we concluded that companies that have a strong entrepreneurial orientation tend to use more procedures. Activity analysis highlights the differences mainly concern the production and quality management, even in companies whose activities encourage a greater use of procedures. The results presented in Table 3 show that Hypothesis 1 holds.

The formalization

It reflects the existence and importance of the written word and the presence of a retrieval system in an organization. Still, we have found that firms with low entrepreneurial orientation were characterized by an oral and informal culture (See tables 4 and 5).

Specialization

To further deepen our investigation, we tried to understand the horizontal and vertical specialization across the range of services and hierarchical levels. We noted that companies with high entrepreneurial

Table 3. Crossing the standardization and entrepreneurial orientation

	Strong standardization	Standardization average
Production procedures (chi2=6,79 significant at 5%)	34.84% (23)	30.30% (20)
Low entrepreneurial orientation	44.44% (16)	33.33% (12)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	20% (6)	36.66% (11)
Production procedures (chi2 = 7.75 significant at 5%)	22.72% (15)	31.81% (21)
Low entrepreneurial orientation	38.89% (14)	30.55% (11)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	10% (3)	30% (9)
Quality control procedures (chi2=7.81 significant at 5%)	28.78% (19)	31.82% (21)
Low entrepreneurial orientation	38.89% (14)	27.78% (10)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	10% (3)	30% (9)
Use in quality assurance procedures (chi2=7.01 significant at 5%)	46.97% (31)	24.25% (16)
Low entrepreneurial orientation	55.56% (20)	22.22% (8)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	23.33% (7)	26.67% (8)

Table 4. Crossing the flow of information and The entrepreneurial orientation

	Never writing	Sometimes writing	Forever writing
<i>Low entrepreneurial orientation</i>	72.22% (26)	13.89% (5)	13.89% (5)
<i>Strong entrepreneurial orientation</i>	33.33% (10)	23.33% (7)	43.33% (13)
Total of firms	54.55% (36)	18.18% (12)	27.27% (18)

However, we did not observe significant differences in the nature of the retrieval system.

Table 5. Documentation system and entrepreneurial orientation

	Yes	No
Procedures manual	45.45% (30)	54.55% (36)
Display of company policies	39.4% (26)	56.06% (40)
Quality Manual	43.94% (29)	56.06% (37)
Organization chart	60.60% (40)	39.40% (26)

More than 36 companies use documentation system.

orientation have a greater number of services and have more hierarchical levels. The division of responsibilities is greater. However, we can hardly say that this specialization is always accompanied by decentralization because in SMEs in our sample, the leaders continue to play a decisive role in the decision making process (See tables 6 and 7).

Centralization

For Weber, centralization can be an explicit dimension of bureaucracy. Thus Child (1972) noted that if Weber

refers to the existence of a hierarchy, it does not mean that there is no delegation of decision-making power. For other authors, as Pugh et al. (1968), there is not necessarily a relationship between centralization and bureaucratic structure. According to Mintzberg (1982), this can be explained by the heterogeneity of the samples comprising both mechanical bureaucracies that centralized bureaucracies and decentralized professionals.

Others conclude a negative relationship between these two dimensions and the resumption of Aston study by Child (1972) led to the conclusion that the bureaucracy tends to use decentralization and there is a negative

Table 6. Crossing the functional specialization and Entrepreneurial Orientation

Number of services	One or two	Three or four	Five or more
<i>Low entrepreneurial orientation</i>	25% (9)	58% (21)	17% (6)
<i>Strong entrepreneurial orientation</i>	23% (7)	27% (8)	50% (15)
Total	24.2% (16)	43.9% (29)	31.8% (21)

Table 7. Number of hierarchical levels and entrepreneurial orientation

	One or tow	Three
Low entrepreneurial orientation	55.5% (20)	44.4% (16)
<i>Strong entrepreneurial orientation</i>	43.3% (13)	56.6% (17)
Total	50% (33)	50% (33)

chi 2 = 6.41 (significant at 5%); 50 % of companies have at least One or two hierarchical level.

Table 8. Crossing centralization and entrepreneurial orientation

	Not at all agree	Somewhat agree	Strongky agree
The leader takes all decisions	30.3% (20)	15.1% (10)	54.5% (36)
Important decisions after consulting employees	9% (6)	10.6% (7)	80.3% (53)
Employees refer to the leader to make decisions	27.2% (18)	7.5% (5)	65.1% (43)
Employees have full authority to make decisions that affect only their functions	45.45% (30)	15.15% (10)	39.4% (26)

relationship between structured activities and centralization. Mintzberg (1982) concluded that the lack of agreement between the different results shows that bureaucracies can accommodate centralization or decentralization according to the selected mode of coordination.

Our investigation revealed that while companies that opt for entrepreneurial behavior are characterized by a strong structuring of business, they do not differ from others in terms of centralization. Leaders still cling to play the lead role, whatever the orientation of the company (See table 8).

SMEs in our sample are rather characterized by a strong centralization irrespective of the orientation of the latter. This lets us conclude that the strong structure of entrepreneurial firms is not accompanied by a strong decentralization. The fourth hypothesis is therefore refuted.

Planning and control

To Mintzberg (1994), Strategic planning is not strategic thinking, which implies that strategic planning is a

formalization of the strategy which favors the deliberate dimension and can not clear the side of the emerging strategy. It is, however, obvious that planning is an excellent indicator of the degree of formalization strategy. The literature tells us that small businesses rarely use planning systems and control (Bouchiki et al., 1994; Matthews and Scott, 1995; Shane et al., 2002). Keats and Breaker (1988), showed that leaders characterized by a strong entrepreneurial orientation tend to use strategic planning more sophisticatedly than (non-entrepreneurs).

In contrast, Matthews and Scott (1995), in a survey of 130 companies belonging to different sectors of activity, showed that entrepreneurs do not differ from other leaders regarding planning within a context of high uncertainty. Table 9 shows that SMEs develop plans for more than one year, especially in the fields of business, education and quality.

Companies with strong entrepreneurial orientation differ significantly in these areas, since 60% of SMEs reported having targeted planning for more than a year of training and quality. SMEs in the new economy use more training of their employees than small businesses of the traditional sphere.

Table 9. Crossing Planning and entrepreneurial orientation

	Yes	No
Production plan more than one year	N	68.5%
Supply plan for one year or more	28.6%	71.4%
Marketing plan for one year or more	63%	37%
Training plan for one year or more (chi2=6.48 significant at 5%)	54.5%	45.5%
<i>Low entrepreneurial orientation</i>	44.4% (16)	55.6% (20)
<i>Strong entrepreneurial orientation</i>	66.67% (20)	33.33% (10)
Plan de qualité à un an et plus (chi2=6,57 significant at 5%)	54.55% (36)	45.45% (30)
<i>Low entrepreneurial orientation</i>	44.44% (16)	55.56% (20)
<i>Strong entrepreneurial orientation</i>	66.67% (20)	33.33% (10)

Table 10. Cross Compliance and the entrepreneurial orientation

	Yes	Percent
The use of computers to control production (chi2=5.57 significant at 5%)	(35)	53.03%
<i>Low entrepreneurial orientation</i>	(15)	41.67%
<i>Strong entrepreneurial orientation</i>	(20)	66.67%
Computer control of quality (chi2=6.51 significant at 5%)	(20)	30.30%
<i>Low entrepreneurial orientation</i>	(5)	13.89%
<i>Strong entrepreneurial orientation</i>	(16)	53.33%
Computer control costs	(43)	65.16%
Computer control stock	(44)	66.67%

Our fifth hypothesis holds as companies that have a strong entrepreneurial orientation are characterized by a more developed planning system.

As for the control system, its implementation suggests that the company has adopted a planning system. It aims to verify the adequacy of targeted results. In this sense, the use of IT is an index of the degree of formalization of the control system. The fact is that, in our sample, all of the targeted SMEs gladly use control, particularly in inventory management, cost analysis and commercial activity.

No significant difference was revealed between the two categories of firms. However, it should be noted that SMEs with high entrepreneurial orientation use more control in production and quality (See table 10).

It follows that companies with a strong entrepreneurial orientation are characterized by a system of planning and more developed control, particularly in the areas of quality, production and training.

Information system

Torres (1998) and Daval (2002) reported that in a small business, personal relationship allows, in most cases, to keep a little external information system formalized.

For this research, we focused on the nature and terms of the information collected to achieve the result that SMEs with a strong entrepreneurial orientation, stand in relation to the nature of the information sought. They follow to identify opportunities, developments of various kinds (legislative, technological, etc.).

They also search for ideas more, new ideas from anyone who may be the source (customers, suppliers, etc.). In any event, SMEs with strong entrepreneurial orientation are more interested in diversifying their sources of information, not hesitating to use market research and assistance from consultants (See table 11).

It appears from table 12 that SMEs with high entrepreneurial orientation are characterized by a complex information system, which confirms our sixth hypothesis.

It appears, therefore, that companies that cultivate strong entrepreneurial orientation, values innovation more than others. These are companies that are open to the outside and listen to the suppliers, customers and competitors.

Conclusion

We aimed in our approach to show that small firms may have an entrepreneurial orientation while having a

Table 11. Crossing the nature of information collected and entrepreneurial orientation

	Not at all agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Finding information about the price	9.09% (6)	15.15% (10)	75.76% (50)
Low entrepreneurial orientation	38.89% (14)	33.33% (12)	27.78% (10)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	16.67% (5)	26.67% (8)	56.66% (17)
Finding information about the supplier (chi2=7.58 significant at 5%)	12.12% (8)	37.88% (25)	50% (33)
Low entrepreneurial orientation	16.67% (6)	52.78% (19)	30.55% (11)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	10% (3)	30% (9)	60% (18)
Finding information about the competition	21.21% (14)	31.82% (21)	46.97% (31)
Finding information on technology (chi2=6.51 significant at 5%)	25.75% (17)	31.81% (21)	42.42% (28)
Low entrepreneurial orientation	38.89% (14)	33.33% (12)	27.78% (10)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	10% (3)	33.33% (9)	60% (18)

Table 12. Sources of information and entrepreneurial orientation

	Never	Regularly	Often
Market research (Chi2=7.59 significant at 5%)	45.45% (30)	30.30% (20)	24.24% (16)
Low entrepreneurial orientation	55.55% (20)	22.22% (8)	22.22% (8)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	26.67% (8)	46.66% (14)	26.67% (8)
Participation in trade fairs (chi2=8.31 significant at 5%)	27.27% (18)	22.73% (15)	50% (33)
Low entrepreneurial orientation	41.67% (15)	22.22% (8)	36.11% (13)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	10% (3)	33.33% (10)	56.67% (17)
Use of consultants (chi2=8.37 significant at 5%)	60.60% (40)	31.82% (21)	7.58% (5)
Low entrepreneurial orientation	66.67% (24)	27.78% (10)	5.55% (2)
Strong entrepreneurial orientation	46.67% (14)	36.67% (11)	16.66% (5)

managerial mode. The literature review has revealed that SMEs in the current economic environment, are faced with difficult situations that promote greater bureaucratization of their structure.

The literature also confirms that large companies can also arrange to decide and act in an entrepreneurial manner, complex and changing environments (Fayolle and Legrain, 2006; Byrne, Fayolle, 2009). This suggests that the structuring of activities is not an obstacle to entrepreneurial behavior, especially when adjustments are made.

In our approach, we a priori distinguished companies with strong entrepreneurial orientation from others. We then attempted to cross this variable with different organizational characteristics. We then, could deduce that SMEs with high entrepreneurial orientation are characterized by highly structured activities, information systems, planning and more developed control. It is clear from this research that for SMEs, entrepreneurial and managerial dimensions are completely independent and compatible.

In the end of the results of this research, we highlight the major role of the mobilization of human capital as a key competence of the contractor engaged in a process of entrepreneurial action. Today, the human dimension of organizations challenges researchers with new bases. We entered a knowledge economy where the economic success map is redrawn around the competence of people. In this case, management science play a more crucial role by placing people at the heart of organizational systems.

However, this research does not claim to have provided definitive and complete answers to the issues raised, since several factors limit its scope, particularly its small size which can not generalize our findings so stated. From this point of view, further validation of our results to other populations will be needed.

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