CORPORATE ENTREPRENEURSHIP, GENDER, AND CREDIBILITY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Successful corporate entrepreneurship requires resources. In order to obtain these resources, the corporate entrepreneur must enjoy credibility with those who can provide such resources. Little is known about the process by which corporate entrepreneurs go about acquiring such credibility and even less is known about how gender affects this process. Utilizing a sample of 123 college students, the current study addressed the relationship between the corporate entrepreneur's gender and perceptions of his/her credibility. The current study used a multi-dimensional measure of source credibility. Results indicated that females were perceived as more trustworthy and higher in goodwill than males, while there were no significant differences between the two genders when it came to perceptions of competence. The implications of these findings for the corporate entrepreneurship process, as well as the limitations of the current study, are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Practitioner and academic interest in corporate entrepreneurship has been growing over the past decade. This growth has been fueled, in part, by the notion that entrepreneurship in all forms is a good thing; something that positively benefits the economy as well as the society at large. There is evidence that organizations that practice entrepreneurship are more competitive and perform better than those that do not practice entrepreneurship (Zahra and Covin 1995; Zahra and Garvis 2000). According to Ireland, Kuratko, and Covin (2003), corporate entrepreneurship also has intangible outcomes at the individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, those who participate in corporate entrepreneurship develop individual knowledge and skill while making incremental contributions to the implementation of CE strategy. At the organizational level, corporate entrepreneurship can develop organizational learning and competence development while affecting strategic position and domain.

As entrepreneurial-like behaviors and attitudes have become more valued in the workplace, terms like "intrapreneurship" and "corporate entrepreneurship" have been developed to distinguish entrepreneurship within organizations from the more traditional concept associated with the start-up of new businesses. Despite this distinction, the corporate entrepreneurial process is similar to that of the more general case in that at some point the corporate entrepreneur (CE) must acquire the resources needed for goal attainment. In order to acquire such resources, the CE must have credibility with his/her actual or potential constituencies. Little is known about the process by which corporate entrepreneurs go about acquiring such credibility and even less is known about how the gender affects this process. Thus, the goal of this exploratory study is to determine if the gender of the CE impacts perceptions of his/her credibility.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

As organizations continue to be affected by increasing volatile environments, they have turned to their employees as sources of improvement, productivity, and innovation. In other words, many firms are attempting to tap into the "entrepreneurial spirit" of their workforce (Seshadri and Tripathy 2006), sometimes emphasizing concepts and ideas consistent with the attributes of excellence (e.g., autonomy and entrepreneurship; productivity through people) identified by

Peters and Waterman (1982) a quarter of a century ago. Many have argued for the organizational and individual benefits that come from such initiatives (e.g., Holt, Rutherford and Clohessy 2007).

With interest in taking advantage of the employee's entrepreneurial spirit increasing, terms like "intrapreneurship" and "corporate entrepreneurship" have been becoming more common in the management literature. While similar in some ways, many authors distinguish between the two concepts (e.g., Greene, Brush and Hart 1999). Amo and Kolvereid (2005) argue that both concepts are concerned with the same outcome: innovative behavior. The difference, according to Amo and Kolvereid (2005, p. 11), is that source of the innovative behavior resides either within the individual (intrapreneurship) or as a response to an organizational request (corporate entrepreneurship). We are focused on corporate entrepreneurship in the current paper.

One definition of corporate entrepreneurship consistent with the above has been offered by Wolcott and Lippitz (2007). They argued that corporate entrepreneurship is: "the process by which teams within an established company conceive, foster, launch and manage a new business that is distinct from the parent company but leverages the parent's assets, market position, capabilities or other resources" (2007, p. 75). Using the dimensions of primary ownership/responsibility (a single individual/group vs. the whole organization) and resource authority (are there funds dedicated to corporate entrepreneurship or is it funded on a case-by-case basis?) they go on to identify four different ways organizations can build these new businesses. According to Wolcott and Lippitz (2007), the four are the opportunist model (whole organization/case-by-case), the enabler model (whole organization/ dedicated funds), the advocate model (single individual or group/case-by-case) and the producer model (single individual or group/ dedicated funds).

Regardless of the model used, corporate entrepreneurship requires "organizational sanctions and resource commitments" (Kuratko, Ireland, Covin and Hornsby 2005, p. 700). There will be points at which the CE must acquire the resources necessary for the project to begin, continue and ultimately reach its goal. Resources can include adequate financing, staff support, the appropriate equipment and distribution channel, and other key resources (Morris, Kuratko and Schindehutte 2001). However, CEs face severe constraints in the amount of resources available to them. Especially in early stages, projects are vulnerable to rejection and least likely to receive financial support (Morris and Kuratko 2002). Further, CEs can be perceived as internal competitors for resources which might be conceded with "reluctance and lingering resentment" (Morris and Kuratko 2002, p. 180).

In the description of each model of corporate entrepreneurship, Wolcott and Lippitz (2007) refer to the point at which CEs must acquire resources. For example, when discussing the advocate model, they cite an example from DuPont in which there is a point when the project is presented "to business-unit leadership for approval" (2007, p. 78). It follows that decision-makers evaluate information presented to them by the CE and then decide whether or not to continue corporate support of the project. In these circumstances, it would seem that the decision-makers are dependent on the information given to them by the CE and they must decide if the presented information is accurate, relevant and useful. After all, it is likely that it is the CE who knows the project and its specifics best. This leads to the decision-makers being, at times, dependent on the good intentions of the CE. In other words, the decision-maker must decide how credible the CE is.

While not explicitly discussed in many cases, this dance between the CE and the decision-maker(s) plays itself out again and again in descriptions of the corporate entrepreneurship process (e.g., Welter and Smallbone 2006). As a result, we believe that the source credibility of the CE to be an important variable in this resource acquisition process. McCroskey and his colleagues are well known for their work with the construct of source credibility (e.g., McCrosey and Young 1981; McCroskey 1997). According to McCroskey and Teven (1999), source credibility consists of three dimensions: competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill. These dimensions fit well with the resource acquisition process described above. The decision-maker has to be concerned with the CE's qualifications and intelligence (competence), the CE's character and honesty (trustworthiness) as well as the CE's concern for others and shared interests (goodwill). Described as critical to the success of any persuasive effort, McCrosley and Teven state that "[M]essages are interpreted and evaluated through the filter of the receiver's perception of the message's source. No message is received independently from its source" (1999, p. 90). As a result, it is difficult to imagine the CE being able to acquire resources if his/her source credibility were found to be lacking (e.g., Aldrich and Martinez 2001).

The gender of the CE is the other key variable in this exploratory study. Much has been written on the topic of gender and entrepreneurs (e.g., Knotts, Jones and LaPreze 2004; DeMartino, Barbato and Jacques 2006). Unfortunately, little to no attention has been given to the issue of corporate entrepreneurship, source credibility and the gender of the CE. This is surprising, especially given the amount of attention given to gender differences in the communication literature. In a conclusion that seems most relevant, there seems to be little question that "subjects evaluate the same speech differently based on the gender of the speaker" (Kenton 1989, p. 143). If this is the case, then the relationship between the gender of the source and source credibility in a corporate entrepreneurship situation needs to be explored.

There is a lack of research specific to the relationship between gender of source and perceived expertise of source. One study by Hargett (1999) found that students rated male instructors higher than female instructors on the continuums of trained vs. untrained and bright vs. stupid. However, given the lack of research specific to this issue in the entrepreneurial literature, Kenton's (1989) summary article is a valuable resource when it comes to generating hypotheses. Kenton argued that "receivers will tend to rank men higher on the Expertise dimension" (1989, p. 154). As such, the following hypothesis is offered:

Hypothesis 1. Male CEs will be perceived as more competent than female CEs.

Kenton did not offer a specific proposition relative to the dimension of trustworthiness, although she leaves one with the impression that men will be perceived as more trustworthy than women. Other research offers a mixed bag of results. While some research finds no gender differences when it comes to trustworthiness (e.g., Spector and Jones 2004), Hargett (1999) found men rated higher on the continuum of trustworthy to untrustworthy, and still others have found that women are perceived as more trustworthy than men (e.g., Jones and Kavanagh 1996). As such, the following hypothesis is offered:

Hypothesis 2. There will be no difference in the perceived trustworthiness of male vs. female CEs.

Hastings (2006) found that women still are perceived as being better at traditionally feminine "caretaking skills." Also, the emotional intelligence skills possessed by women may make them better at the negotiation table because they pay attention to what their negotiating partner is feeling (Hastings 2006). Kenton (1989) was very certain that women would rank higher on the dimension of goodwill. Her belief was grounded in the belief that women will be perceived to have a greater "focus and concern for the receiver" (1989, p. 152).

Hypothesis 3. Female CEs will be perceived as having more goodwill than male CEs.

METHOD

Study Design

This study was conducted to examine how gender related to source credibility. To test the hypotheses, a scenario and survey design was used. The independent variable (source gender) was manipulated in a video describing a business ethics class and dependent variables (the three source credibility dimensions) were measured in a survey. The study had a between-subjects design in which subjects heard one voice (male or female) describing the class and then completed the credibility survey.

The stimulus material was two videos describing a proposed ethics workshop developed by university faculty for the purpose of convincing organizations to purchase the workshop as an in-house training and development tool. The overall goal of the project is to generate additional sources of revenue for the area in which the faculty were employed. The idea was to develop different workshops, courses and programs, perhaps using new and different technologies, for organizations that we had previously not been able to reach. Developed by interested faculty, we believe that it fits with the advocate model described by Wolcott and Lippitiz (2007). The videos described the workshop as well as the advantages of the workshop to the workforce and the entire organization. In one video, a male voice pitched the class as an important development tool for ethical decision making. In the second video, a female voice did the same.

The same script was used for both speakers. The male recorded the video first and the female listened to the recording to discern where emphasis was placed and to recreate a similar emphasis in her video.

Measures

Credibility was measured using the ethos/ source credibility scale developed by McCroskey and Teven (1999). The scale

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Coefficients

	Mean	S.D.	Gender Voice	Credibility	Competence	Trustworthiness	Goodwill
Gender Voice			---	---	---	---	---
Credibility	5.41	.823	.164	---	---	---	---
Competence	5.57	.819	.008	.832**	---	---	---
Trustworthiness	5.78	.962	.180*	.873**	.683**	---	---
Goodwill	4.89	1.12	.200*	.845**	.516**	.566**	---

N = 123
* p < .05

consists of three subscales that measure competence (Cronbach's alpha: 0.85), trustworthiness (Cronbach's alpha: .91), and goodwill (Cronbach's alpha: .92). All the subscales were measured using six bipolar adjective items. Example items from each subscale include: Untrained-Trained (competence subscale); Dishonest-Honest (trustworthiness subscale); and Insensitive-Sensitive (goodwill subscale). Cronbach's alpha for the overall source credibility scale was 0.93.

Subjects

Participants were 123 U.S. undergraduate students enrolled in three sections of an upper-division management course at a northwestern U.S. university. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The experiment was conducted during class time. The course instructor, who also is one of the researchers, offered students a small amount of extra credit in return for their participation. In the sample there were 67 male students and 56 female students.

Procedure

The video was introduced as a promotion of a new workshop that the university is considering marketing to Fortune 500 organizations around the country. Students were asked for their honest feedback about the workshop based on the opinions they formed from the watching the video.

RESULTS

Hypotheses were tested using analysis of variance techniques. Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations among the independent and dependent variables.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the male voice would be perceived by the subjects as more competent than would the female voice. The means on the measure of competence were very similar, but in the opposite direction predicted (M= 5.56 for the male voice; M = 5.58 for the female voice). This difference was not statistically significant and the hypothesis was rejected. Hypothesis 2 predicted that there would be no difference between the male and the female voice when it came to perceived trustworthiness. In fact, the female voice was perceived as more trustworthy $F(1,121)=4.05$, $p < .05$. Hypothesis 3 predicted that the female voice would be perceived as higher in goodwill than would the male voice. The hypothesis was supported, $F(1,121)=5.02$, $p < .05$. Table 2 shows sample sizes, means and standard deviations for the male and female voices on credibility, competency, trustworthiness, and goodwill.

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std Dev
Credibility-Male Voice	61	5.28	.804
Credibility-Female Voice	62	5.54	.826
Competence-Male Voice	61	5.56	.752
Competence-Female Voice	62	5.57	.887
Trustworthiness-Male Voice	61	5.61	.987
Trustworthiness-Female Voice	62	5.95	.913
Goodwill-Male Voice	61	4.66	1.18
Goodwill-Female Voice	62	5.11	1.01

An examination of the differences between perceptions of the male vs. female voice based on the gender of the listener revealed no statistically significant differences except on trustworthiness. The difference between female listeners' ratings of the male voice were different at a statistically significant level than the other combinations of voice and listeners, $F(1,121)=6.49$, $p<.05$. The mean rating that female listeners gave the male voice was 5.37 versus the mean for other voice/listener combinations of 5.90. Broken down by combination, the mean for female listener/ female voice was 5.96; for male listener/female voice was 5.96; and for male listener/male voice was 5.79.

DISCUSSION

The source credibility of the CE is an important variable in the process of acquiring resources for corporate entrepreneurial ventures. While there is some research on the differences between male and female entrepreneurs (e.g., Kepler and Shane 2007), we did not find any research on the differences in the process of male and female entrepreneurs' resource acquisition. This study attempted to determine how gender might affect source credibility. Of the three dimensions of source credibility defined by McCroskey and Teven (1999), there were no gender differences in perceptions of the CE on competence, but there were statistically significant differences in trustworthiness and goodwill. Specifically, the female CE was rated higher than the male CE on trustworthiness and goodwill. The largest difference in all the comparisons was in how female listeners rated the male CE on trustworthiness. While mean ratings of the female CE's trustworthiness were the same across male and female listeners and the male CE's trustworthiness was rated lower by both male and female listeners, it was the female listeners who rated the male CE lowest.

Implications

Results from this study suggest that male CEs be aware that they may not be perceived as trustworthy and caring as female CEs. While the first two minutes of any presentation are critical for the establishment of credibility (e.g., Simons 2005), they may be especially critical for male CEs seeking to establish trustworthiness and goodwill. Future research might examine what strategies will be most effective for male CEs to increase those dimensions of credibility. A search of the literature found many references to the importance of increasing trust and rapport with an audience, but little in the way of rigorous research on how to do so.

Limitations

There are two major limitations of our study. The first is the use of a college student sample. While students are certainly used to considering the credibility of the source of their classes, their perceptions may not be generalizable to the larger population. Second, the sample size for the study was small. Though there were more than 60 subjects in each condition, a larger sample size would offer more reliability in the results. Thus, further research is need to confirm the findings of this exploratory study.

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