
The role of organizational context on cognitive abilities of corporate entrepreneurs in health sector

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Editor Científico: José Edson Lara
Organização Comitê Científico
Double Blind Review pelo SEER/OJS
Recebido em 16.07.2019
Aprovado em 29.03.2020



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Abstract

Organizational context has a strong role in decisions of entrepreneurs who work inside firms. However, there seems to be a lack of research on the role of organizational context in cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs (Intrapreneurs) and specially the interaction of the individual and context. The main objective of the current paper is to explore the role of organizational context in cognitive abilities of intrapreneurs to identify, evaluate, and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities inside the established firms in health sector. For this purpose, nine intrapreneurs in two Iranian health organizations were selected and interviewed during 2017 and 2018. The results of the in-depth interviews were analyzed and used for suggesting a framework of the role of organizational context in cognitions of intrapreneurs. The findings show that organizational context has a strong influence on many aspects of entrepreneurial cognition which affect identification and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities inside health organizations. The suggested framework shows that regarding cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs, organizational context has three functions: organizational context acts as a source, as a framework, and as a socio/cultural context. The findings of the current paper have implications for researchers in corporate entrepreneurship field, as well as executives and corporate entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Organizational context; Entrepreneurial cognition; Entrepreneurial opportunities; Corporate entrepreneurship; Health sector

O papel do contexto organizacional nas habilidades cognitivas dos empresários corporativos no setor da saúde

Resumo

O contexto organizacional tem um forte papel nas decisões dos empreendedores que trabalham dentro das empresas. No entanto, parece haver uma falta de pesquisas sobre o papel do contexto organizacional nas cognições de empreendedores corporativos (Intraempreendedores) e, especialmente, na interação entre indivíduo e contexto. O principal objetivo do presente trabalho é explorar o papel do contexto organizacional nas habilidades cognitivas dos intraempreendedores para identificar, avaliar e explorar oportunidades empresariais dentro das empresas estabelecidas no setor de saúde. Para esse fim, nove intraempreendedores em duas organizações de saúde iranianas foram selecionados e entrevistados durante 2017 e 2018. Os resultados das entrevistas em profundidade foram analisados e usados para sugerir uma estrutura do papel do contexto organizacional nas cognições dos intraempreendedores. Os resultados mostram que o contexto organizacional exerce forte influência sobre muitos aspectos da cognição empresarial que afetam a identificação e exploração de oportunidades empresariais nas organizações de saúde. A estrutura sugerida mostra que, em relação às cognições dos empreendedores corporativos, o contexto organizacional tem três funções: o contexto organizacional atua como fonte, como estrutura e como contexto sociocultural. As conclusões do presente trabalho têm implicações para pesquisadores no campo do empreendedorismo corporativo, bem como para executivos e empreendedores corporativos.

Keywords: Contexto organizacional; Cognição empreendedora; Oportunidades empreendedoras; Empreendedorismo corporativo; Setor de saúde

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is "the process by which individuals – either on their own or inside organizations – pursue opportunities without regard to the resources they currently control" (H. H. Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990, p. 23). Entrepreneurship inside the existing firms takes two forms: first, corporate entrepreneurship in a firm level and as an exercise to achieve innovation and growth, second, intrapreneurship which is an individual-level act and is done by employees to realize their entrepreneurial vision (Amo, 2006). In current paper, the both concepts of intrapreneurship and corporate entrepreneurship were used for all the entrepreneurial behaviors of the employees in corporates interchangeably.

Entrepreneurship might be in individual form or be done in a team form (Mitchell 2002). However, opportunity discovery is a cognitive act not a collective one (Shane, 2003). So, the role of individuals in entrepreneurship inside firms is so strong that in at least the opportunity discovery, the entrepreneur is the main axis of the phenomena. There is a strong linkage between thinking and doing in entrepreneurs (R. K. Mitchell et al., 2007). Therefore, cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs determine the boundaries and degree of the entrepreneurship in organizations. Many factors affect cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs. However, regarding the particular features of the environment in which corporate entrepreneurs act, the role of context and its effect on cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs seems more important. However, there is not much research about the role of context in cognitions (R. K. Mitchell et al., 2007) or the interaction of individual (corporate entrepreneur) and the organizational context (A. Corbett & Neck, 2006). So far, the role of individual as well as opportunities have been ignored in research on corporate entrepreneurship (Cuervo, Ribeiro, & Roig, 2007; Hill & Birkinshaw, 2010). Therefore, exploring the different aspects of the effects of context on cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs sets the stage for the next step, which is the intervention of the context and the cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs.

The main objective of the current paper is to explore the role of organizational context in cognitive abilities of corporate entrepreneurs to identify, evaluate, and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities inside the established firms in health sector. To answer the question of how the organizational context does influence the cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs, nine corporate entrepreneurs from two Iranian health organizations were selected and the qualitative, interpretive phenomenological analysis method is used to capture the lived experiences of the

impacts of organizational context on cognitive abilities which influences the perception, evaluation, and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities inside organizations.

The structure of the current paper is as follows: the next section reviews the literature and the theoretical background of the development of cognitive and metacognitive abilities of corporate entrepreneurs and the contextual factors in organizations. The third section is dedicated to the methodology and the details of the used method. The fourth section discusses the findings of the study and the sixth section concludes and suggests a model of the different effects of the organizational context on cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs. The implications of the study for researchers, entrepreneurs, and managers in organizations are also suggested.

2. Literature Review

Corporate entrepreneurship has been defined in the literature in different forms. For instance Sathe (1989) acknowledged corporate entrepreneurship as the process of organizational renewal. Sharma and Chrisman defined corporate entrepreneurship as “the process where by an individual or a group of individuals, in association with an existing organization, create a new organization or instigate renewal or innovation within that organization” (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999, p. 18). It seems that the concept of corporate entrepreneurship has been evolved in past decades. There are definitions of corporate entrepreneurship which highlights the role of individuals in entrepreneurship and the behaviors of pursuing opportunities inside firms. Busenitz and Lau (1996) states that the primary level in the study of entrepreneurial cognition is the individual level.

According to Amo (2006), corporate entrepreneurship takes two forms: first, in a firm level and as an exercise to achieve innovation and growth and, second, intrapreneurship in individual level by employees to realize their entrepreneurial vision. On the other hand, Stevenson & Jarillo defines entrepreneurship as “the process by which individuals – either on their own or inside organizations – pursue opportunities without regard to the resources they currently control” (H. H. Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990, p. 23). Following Antoncic and Hisrich (2001), by corporate entrepreneurship, this study means intrapreneurship. Therefore, entrepreneurship inside firms can be counted as an individual-level act to pursue opportunities inside and related to the line of work of a firm. To operationalize intrapreneurship, Bosma, Stam, and Wennekers (2012), differentiate between two phases of idea development, preparation, and exploitation. They also differentiate between supporting and leading roles. They conceive a broad and a narrow definition of intrapreneurship. According to their broad

definition “intrapreneurs are employees who, in the past three years, have been actively involved in and have had a leading role in at least one of these phases” (Bosma et al., 2012, p. 3)

The cognitive processes enable entrepreneurs to identify, recognize, and discover opportunities (Gregoire, Barr, & Shepherd, 2006). “Entrepreneurial cognitions are the knowledge structures that people use to make assessments, judgments, or decisions involving opportunity evaluation, venture creation, and growth” (Mitchell et al., 2002, p. 97). As Shane proposed ‘the process of opportunity discovery is cognitive and cannot be collective act...therefore, individuals, not groups or firms, discover entrepreneurial opportunities’ (Shane, 2003, p. 45). Consequently, in organizational context, regardless of the participation of other people (in form of supporting roles) in development and implementation of an idea, intrapreneur has an important role in identification (and exploitation) of opportunity. Therefore, organizational context might have effects on the entrepreneurial cognitions of intrapreneurs.

Context has been defined as “The surroundings associated with phenomena which help to illuminate that phenomena, typically factors associated with units of analysis above those expressly under investigation” (Cappelli, 1991, p. 56). Johns (2006, p. 386) defined context as “situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables”. Context has many manifestations (Johns, 2006) in the organization and might be considered as: 1- the salience of situational features. 2- as the situational strength. 3- as a cross-level effect. 4- as a configuration or bundle of stimuli. 5- as the shaper of meaning. 6- as an event.

Organizational context is “the management processes, organizational culture, and organizational systems that exist within a parent organization” (Doolen, Hacker, & Van Aken, 2003, p. 286). Management processes are the processes used to meet organizational objectives. Organizational culture is a set of values, beliefs, and behavioral norms that act as a working guide for members of the organization. Organizational systems are the human resource management processes and arrangements which are used in organization (Doolen et al., 2003). It seems that there is no consensus about the aspects of organizational context. Some scholars seek the common elements of organizational context: industry and technological context, organizational context, Institutional and policy contexts, social context, temporal context, and spatial context (Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, & Wright, 2014). There are also studies which mention culture/climate, goal/purpose, people/composition, processes, and state/condition

(Autio et al., 2014), and other elements like age, size, resources, and competitive strategy (Entrialgo, Fernandez, & Vazquez, 2001) as the elements of context of organization. Many aspects of opportunity exploitation are cognitive. Development of entrepreneurial cognitions are viewed through many theoretical lenses like effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001), biases and heuristics (Busenitz & Barney, 1997; Simon, Houghton, & Aquino, 2000) entrepreneurial expertise (Mitchell, Smith, Seawright, & Morse, 2000), perceptions (Gaglio & Katz, 2001), entrepreneurial intentions (Bird, 1988) and so on (Randolph-Seng et al., 2015). However, each approach has its constraints and none of them has been able to get a big picture view of the whole process. In fact, in entrepreneurial area, there is no coherent, integrated model of cognitive infrastructure and the evolution of these infrastructure throughout the entrepreneurial sequence (Sánchez, Carballo, & Gutiérrez, 2011). This in turn highlights the importance of the focus on the development of cognitive factors and their origins (Grégoire, Corbett, & McMullen, 2011). Furthermore, some studies (e.g., Corbet, Neck, & Detienne, 2007) suggest that the most important aspect of studying cognitions in context is cognition-environment nexus.

Hekmatpour et al. has worked on environmental issues regarding to some religion concepts. In this study, by using a qualitative approach, it has attempted that the primary causes of the stigma be discovered. A secondary data analysis was conducted to provide the necessary data for grounded theory. This method provided a theoretical model, in which, the causes, the context, confounders and mediators, consequences and strategies of action and interaction about the phenomenon of diseases related stigma are discovered and shown (Hekmatpour et al. 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019).

Recently, the field of entrepreneurial cognition has realized the importance of using dynamic approaches (Ronald K Mitchell, Randolph-Seng, & Mitchell, 2011; Randolph-Seng et al., 2015). Many scholars in entrepreneurial cognition literature emphasize the influence of social situation on cognitions of entrepreneurs. A new movement in psychology is situated cognition (E. R. Smith & Semin, 2004). There are opportunities in using more dynamic lenses like socially situated cognition (E. R. Smith & Semin, 2004) in entrepreneurial cognition research (Randolph-Seng et al., 2015). Cognitions in context of situated cognition is an adaptive process that is the result of the both physical and the social interaction of an agent and the world (E. R. Smith & Semin, 2004). Four factors in socially situated cognition approach have been described as influencing factors of cognitions. Adaptiveness, embodiment, situatedness, and distributedness. (Randolph-Seng et al., 2015). Cognition is adaptive or action-oriented because

positive or negative evaluation of the individual affects it. Embodiment points to the influence of physical brain and body on thinking. Cognition is situated because it happens in an interactive conversational situation and, the distributedness of cognition points to the dissemination of cognition across many other social tools and actors (E. R. Smith & Semin, 2004).

One of the most influencing theories which relates to the cognitions of entrepreneurs inside firms is observational learning. Environment is both the product of behavior of people and the producer of it. The knowledge and skills of Individuals develops on the basis of information which is received through interactions with other individuals in the environment. Therefore, behaviors of individuals is modeled based on what is seen as demonstrated in the environment. This modeling is through the observational learning. Four processes determine the observational learning: Attentional, representational, behavioral production, and motivational (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Attentional processes refer to the ongoing activities that individuals observe. Representational processes are the representation of the activity which has been seen by individuals in the environment. Behavioral production processes are the processes in which symbolic conceptions is transformed into actions. Finally, motivational processes are related to those factors which affect the selection of whether do or not do anything observed or learnt (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

There are examples of studies which have used context with entrepreneurial cognition as their focus. According to Terjesen and Sullivan (2011), Structural, relational, and cognitive embeddedness are likely to transfer from the previous corporate workplace of individuals to the new ventures. Many studies highlight the call for investigating the role of cognitive and organizational factors in entrepreneurial actions in firms (Phan, Wright, Ucbasaran, & Tan, 2009). A. Corbett and Neck (2006) suggested that changes in environmental factors influence the cognitions and behaviors of individuals who work inside those environments. According to A. Corbett and Neck (2010) individuals model their behavior based on what they have seen to be demonstrated in the environment. The act of modeling is governed by observational learning (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Everything around Entrepreneurs and everybody can be a source of learning for entrepreneurs (A. C. Corbett, Neck, & Detienne, 2007; Smilor, 1997). In other words, observing successes or failures of others in the environment is a source of learning for corporate entrepreneurs. There are indications in the literature which implies that cognitive style relates with the environment and the context of organization (Brigham & De Castro, 2003).

Cognitive style is a preferred and habitual approach of an individual to organize, represent, and process information (Streufert & Nogami, 1989).

The role of organizational context in entrepreneurial cognitions and its importance has been mentioned by some scholars (A. C. Corbett et al., 2007; Doolen et al., 2003; Fini & Toschi, 2016; R. K. Mitchell et al., 2007). However, so far, the context and its effects have been underappreciated (Johns, 2006). It seems that there is not much research about this role of context in cognitions (R. K. Mitchell et al., 2007) or the interaction of individual (corporate entrepreneur) and the organizational context (A. Corbett & Neck, 2006).

3. Methodology

Non-linearity of the relations and the mutuality of causality and existence of complexities make it difficult to use customary methods to study entrepreneurial phenomena (H. Stevenson & Harmeling, 1990). A qualitative research which is conducted well is able to illuminate contextual effects. This potential has two reasons: First, the qualitative researchers' alertness and sensitivity to the contextual levers and their interactions which can influence behavior in a situated setting. Second, researchers' sensitivity to the effects which context has on behaviors and attitudes (Johns, 2006). Instead of overlooking the paradoxes and the challenges of entrepreneurship researches, qualitative methods like phenomenology seeks to illuminate these paradoxes and the challenges and to get the lived experiences of the entrepreneurs (Berglund, 2005). Besides, measuring metacognition as an important part of cognition is very difficult because of the complexity of the construct and impossibility of direct observation.

Nine intrapreneurs of two Iranian health organizations were selected and interviewed during 2017 and 2018. The results of the in-depth interview were analyzed and used for suggesting a framework of the role of organizational context in the cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs. Intrapreneurs are employees between the ages of 18 and 64 years of age, who in the past three years have been actively involved in and have had a leading role in at least one of the phases of development or preparation and exploitation of an idea (Bosma et al., 2012).

The purposeful sampling method (Kruger & Welman, 1999) was used in the study according to which the samples must have the experiences about the phenomenon under study. The sample size and number of interviews were determined following the recommendations of Smith et al (A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and with regard to the level of theoretical saturation (Brinkmann, 2013). The interviews were performed during 2017 and 2018. The analysis of interview data was performed after transcription using supplemental materials like

notes which had been taken during interviews and the observation. After several readings of the text of each interview and taking notes, extracting meaning units, and clustering the emergent themes, finding the relations between themes as super-themes was done. The same procedure was performed for the next interviews and the common patterns among interviews were extracted. For ensuring the validity of results, the researchers used three interview structures recommended by Seidman (2013). Two interviewees were interviewed again and the results were compared with final model extracted from the initial interviews results; finally, audio recordings, transcripts, and notes, altogether were used for final concluding.

4. Findings

Table 1 shows the results of the analysis of interviews. The table shows the themes, super-themes, and the meaning units.

Table 2. Extracted themes, super-themes, and meaning units

Super-themes	Themes	Meaning units
Context as a source of...	Knowledge and information	Observing the actions of other people, learning from other people, having critical look about other people, comparing context in different times/ages, receiving technical knowledge, possibility of building network of colleagues
	Opportunities	Seeing opportunities inside the boundaries of organization, seeing opportunities outside of organization
	Motivation	Being directed by work environment, influence of authorities, encouragement by other colleagues, receiving social support
Context as a framework for...	What (or not) to do	Policies of the organization, bureaucracy, constraints (time, space, financial), authority
	How to do	
Context as a society for...	Group/team	Group norms, finding teammate, aligning with the band
	Cultural factors	Risk-taking/conservativeness, values
Intrapreneur-context	Legal relation	Shares of the sides, ownership of the yield, commitments of sides, responsibility
	Trust	Past experiences of cooperation between sides, the clarity of ideal relations

As table 1 indicates, the extracted themes of the interviews in the study can be clustered around four central themes. These themes are context as a source, context as a framework, context as a society, and the relation between corporate entrepreneur and firm (individual-context interaction).

Context as a source theme points to those meaning units which describe the role of context as a source of three critical items for corporate entrepreneurs. These are knowledge and

information, opportunities, and motivation. Most parts of the contents of interviews were related to the acquisition of information and knowledge from organization. This information and knowledge were achieved through a network of colleagues, receiving technical information formally or informally, and observation and criticism of the behaviors of other people or their organization. This information, to be discussed in the next section, is used to form means-end frameworks to form the perception (or belief) of opportunity. Most of the opportunities which have been perceived by corporate entrepreneurs are the situations which have been formed inside organizations. In addition, in terms of exploitation of the opportunities outside the organization, the opportunity is closely related to the current line of work of the organizations in which corporate entrepreneurs work. In addition to aforementioned items, the context of organization is the source of motivation. The authorities, colleagues, and other people inside organization might increase (or decrease) the motivation of corporate entrepreneur to pursue opportunity.

Context as a framework points out that organizational context determines the span of practices in organization. These are in the forms of procedures or extremes which define what to do, what not to do, and how to do for corporate entrepreneur. These frameworks might be formal/clear or informal/covert.

Organizations act as a social community in many ways. Participants in the current study pointed to many factors which are socio-cultural in nature. The most important factor related to socio-cultural context relates to values. Some organizations have a culture which encourages conservatism and others might encourage risk-taking. In addition, almost all the participants pointed out that the culture in general, and their organization in particular, has a paradoxical orientation toward their innovation. The culture encourages entrepreneurship verbally but when it comes to support the idea legally and financially, there is nothing to count on. In such an organization, corporate entrepreneurs are distinguished from others because of the difference in their thinking and actions. However, as time passes by, the tendency to align with others increases. Another important part of socio-cultural factors is group work. Participants in many parts pointed out that the group in which they work is very important for them. For instance, having to choose team members who are not compatible with the skills and personality of the corporate entrepreneur leads to passivity and withdraw.

The individual-context interaction or the relation between corporate entrepreneur and the organization has two faces. One is the legal and the clear relation and the other is the informal and covert aspects of the relation between the two sides. In many parts of the interviews,

participants pointed to the problems they have experienced in pursuing entrepreneurship inside the organization. For instance, when the idea development phase was finished and it came to the exploitation phase, the organization wanted more share than what was expected. The informal and covert part of the relations points to the aspects like trust. The experiences of the past relations between the organization and corporate entrepreneur determines the degree of trust between the two sides. In case of having a good experience of cooperation, trust guarantees the continuation of the relation. However, in case of bad experience, especially of organization, entrepreneurial behavior has no chance to be continued.

5. Discussion

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model of the study. As was discussed above, the organizational context influences cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs through three important determining factors. Pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities inside the firms includes three phases of opportunity discovery (perception), opportunity evaluation, and opportunity exploitation. Cognitive processes have a strong role in all these phases. Organizational context through the individual (corporate entrepreneur)-context interaction has effects on cognitions which actualize these three phases.

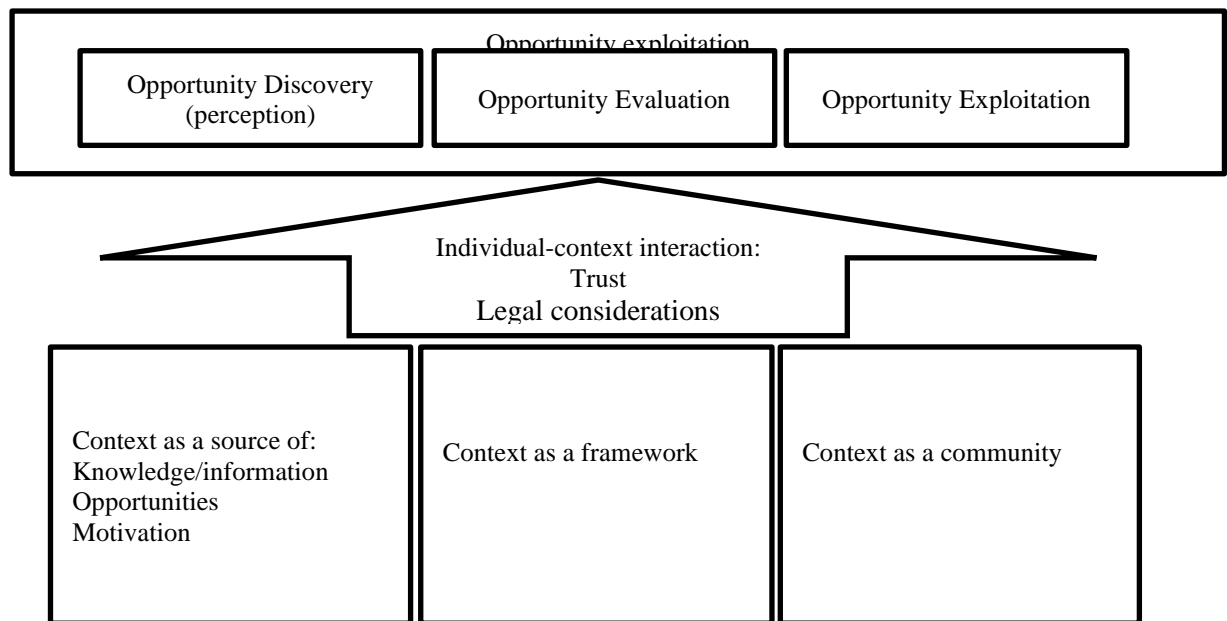


Figure 1. The conceptual model of the role of context on cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs.

As was discussed above, Johns (2006) defined context as situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior. This statement is compatible with the findings of the current study which indicates that the context of organization acts as a source of opportunities as well frameworks which determines the constraints of entrepreneurs inside corporates. Corporate entrepreneurs often perceive opportunities for their organizations. This means that they are generally able to recognize/perceive opportunities which are exploitable for their organizations. In some cases, the recognized opportunity is pursued outside the organization. But, in this case too, the nature of the opportunity is compatible with the line of work of the organization in which the corporate entrepreneur works. Access to the information and the way this information is interpreted affects the process of opportunity recognition and the type of the opportunities recognized (Shane, 2003). Because the source of information/knowledge and the source of mental frameworks to interpret these information/knowledge is organization, the nature of the opportunity is compatible with the line of work of the organization.

Findings are also compatible with the exiting literature in that organizational context acts as a social context with cultural forces. Organizational culture is a set of values, beliefs, and behavioral norms that act as a working guide for members of the organization (Doolen et al., 2003). In the literature there are studies which point to the cultural differences (.e.g., Hamid, Everett, & O’Kane, 2018) as factors which have a strong influence on exploiting opportunities.

The findings also highlight the role of the context as a source of motivation and a social context which shapes the meaning which might form the belief of opportunity inside organization.

As has been proposed in the previous studies (e.g., Corbet et al., 2007) , this study also suggests that the cognition-environment nexus is the most important aspect of studying cognitions in context.

This study similar to the other studies which have focused on the cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs inside firms (.e.g., Garrett & Holland, 2015; Terjesen & Sullivan, 2011) indicate the role of some cognitive factors in transferring from the previous workplace of the corporate entrepreneurs to the new venture or firm. For instance, as was discussed in the findings section, some corporate entrepreneurs brought some habits related to the cognitions from the previous firms which they have worked for.

6. Conclusion

Despite being a very influential factor which forms and affects the different aspects of cognitive abilities of corporate entrepreneurs, organizational context has not get necessary attention by scholars in the research fields of entrepreneurial cognition and corporate entrepreneurship. The purpose of the current paper was to fill a small part of this gap and to explore the effects of organizational context on cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs to identify, evaluate, and exploit the entrepreneurial opportunities inside the established firms in health sector. The findings showed that organizational context has a strong influence on the cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs. The suggested framework showed that regarding the cognitions of corporate entrepreneurs, organizational context acts as a source, as a framework and as a social context.

Firms which want to improve the process of corporate entrepreneurship must prepare intrapreneurs with necessary information and knowledge, clearly determine and declare the limits and procedures in their organizations, decrease the hurdles of the processes of acquiring knowledge and access to procedures, give necessary authorities to the corporate entrepreneurs to choose their teammates and colleagues, work hours, work place and conditions, and enhance the cultural values. Context is the first and the foremost environment in which corporate entrepreneurs act. It is not surprising that organizational context can enhance or hinder the course of progress in corporate entrepreneurship. Corporate entrepreneurs are faced with the constraints which enforce limitations to the process of exploiting opportunities. The richness of context in terms of knowledge and information has a positive impact on corporate entrepreneurship; if not, the intrapreneur should find another source(s) to acquire necessary knowledge which is the input of cognitive processes. As a framework, context determines the boundaries and the frame of the acts to be done. These limitations are the frameworks for judgment and limit the decisions to be made.

One of the limitations of the current study is that the conceptual model which is suggested is a general model and the many details of the model as well as the dynamics of the interaction of corporate entrepreneur-context nexus needs more research.

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