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Technology entrepreneurship : a process framework

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

Part 1 The emergence of initial idea and becoming entrepreneurs

1. Could please give me a brief description of your founding team's
 - a. Education experience
 - b. Working experience
 - c. Entrepreneurial experience
 - d. If there is a founding team, then how was this team is formed
2. Tell me about your initial idea that triggered you to launch this start-up
 - a. What was the idea?
 - b. How and when did the idea occur to you?
 - c. What were you thinking about and how did you feel?
3. How did you become passionate about and convinced of the idea?
 - a. Who was involved?
 - b. How did you interact with them? Does it help?
 - c. How did you know it was a good idea?
 - d. Have you tested your idea?
4. The funding of start-up
 - a. When was this company is launched?
 - b. Initial funding structure?
 - c. What were the initial challenges when you launched the company?

Part 2 The implementation

1. Could you please describe the status quo of the company
 - a. Product development
 - b. First sale
 - c. Marketing strategy
 - d. What are the challenges regarding marketing?
 - e. Who are the firm's main (planned/potential) customers?
 - f. Did the number of customers change?
 - g. How did you get or how do you plan to get access to these customers?
 - h. What are the challenges at the moment and do how you plan to manage that?

2. Did you receive external financing or do you plan to get external financing?
 - a. How many times did you receive external financing? And when?
 - b. What are the financing sources?
 - c. Why they invest?
 - d. How did these external financing occur?
3. How do you know you hired good people?
 - a. What are the most important requirements for new employees
 - b. What is the main source for new employees
 - c. How do you keep your employees (staff turnover)
 - d. What are/were the key challenges of the HRM and how do/did you manage that?
4. Could you please provide an brief introduction on the business environment
 - a. Who are the firm's main (potential) competitor?
 - b. How do/did you learn about the competitors' behaviors?
 - c. How did/do you respond to their behaviors? And when was that?
5. How do you see the relationship with external partners? The business relationships are formal and information relationships that are or have been, important to the company. This may be a business partner, or an individual or organization important for the company to acquire resources, knowledge, and information.
 - a. Who are the partners?
 - b. The motivation?
 - c. How these cooperation take place?
6. Were there any big changes since the firm started its operation?
 - a. Product/ customer?
 - b. Financing?
 - c. Infrastructure/ technology?
 - d. When were the changes?
 - e. What are the sources for these changes?
 - f. What does entrepreneur learn from these changes?

Part 3 Technology environment, legal and administrative environment

1. Were there any significant changes in technology or knowledge base since the firm started its operations? Give examples
 - a. Was the firm involved in these changes?
 - b. How does the firm learn about these changes?
2. How do you see the local entrepreneurial environment?

- a. Are the national/local regulatory requirements clear to you?
- b. Are there any preferential policies that your firm also benefits from?
- c. Do changes in national/local requirements/policies occur often?
- d. How do you keep following the policies and requirements?
- e. Are there any policies that inhibit the development of your firm? Give example
- f. What do you have in you mind to improve the local entrepreneurial environment?

Coding book

Code	Description	Example
Initiating factors		
Initial idea	The initial trigger of the entrepreneurship process	To develop a technical solution for a deficiency in the existing chemical treatment approach in manufacturing Integrated Circuits (IC). (HERO)
Sensing initiating factors		
Sensing via experiencing	Knowledge accumulated bears a close connection to the initial idea, and the knowledge accumulation efforts occurred before the ambition was formed	“...The founder has been working for the R&D department in an industrial company and at the university full time for almost 15 years. This allows him cutting edge knowledge regarding mapping, sensor and image processing technologies...he thought about a smart driving solution out of the knowledge accumulated...”(TRAVEL)
Sensing via observing	Knowledge accumulation has a close connection to the initial idea, but the knowledge accumulation is instead driven by the ambition of becoming an entrepreneur;	“...My business partners and I had been working in the USA for quite some time. We had long been thinking of doing something together. Actually before setting up this business, I had one start-up in the field of wireless communication since 2004 in Beijing, but the business there has nothing to do with this one I’m running...this idea emerged from my scanning of the market and network. I identified the surging solar panel market in China, and I see the connections between this market demand and the expertise from my network...” (WIND)
Sensing via envisioning	The link between knowledge accumulation efforts and the initial idea was not obvious. The entrepreneur is mainly driven by the ambition of becoming an entrepreneur and other endogenous factors such as one’s hobby, for example.	“...It’s our hobby. I think almost every boy is fascinated by aircraft models just like when we were young boys. But my family couldn’t afford it at that time. Now we have time and some money that could be invested in our hobby...” (HOBBY)

Coding book (Continued)

Code	Description	Example
Conceptualization		
Informal interactions	Short conversation or verbal exchange.	Talking to friends and family members
Formal engagements	Formal ways of testing and developing initial ideas	Participating in business plan competition
Implementation		
Conveying claims	Point-to-point contacting	“...In the year of 2009, right after we developed our facial recognition computation solution, I was planning to build a pilot market. The biggest challenge for me is that the concept of facial recognition has been used like a buzzword that has been overused by some opportunists. People knew it, but also held heavy doubts about the solutions that are connected to this buzzword. To relieve their concern, what I did was to visit potential customers one by one, explain my solution to them again and again. If you don’t do it, they ignore you...” (VENUS)
	Presenting at professional events	“...The main channel for accessing the potential customer is solar panel exhibitions and relevant industrial fairs. We usually attend twice every year. One trip to a domestic one within China, and make another one to an international one...” (WIND)
	Leaning on media channels	“...In 2009, we got two contracts with two large industrial customers...as to the question of how they got these two contracts, I would say we were well known in China in this field in terms of technology development. The reputation is partly due to media articles. We are good at disseminating by articles. Just as an example, before we reached the stage of prototype, Chinese Forbes Magazine spent two and half pages introducing our company. Quite a number of companies (potential customers) found us through this article. In addition, we also have a good relationship with large portal websites in China, for example Sina, Tecom...” (CAPITAL)

Coding book (Continued)		
Code	Description	Example
Legitimizing	Achieving interim accomplishments	“...Indeed, IPR does help an organization to protect their knowledge to some extent. However, it doesn’t mean that much for new ventures in China...it takes time and money to for the filing, and you never know if it will work out or not...you might ask then why I still apply for IPR? The answer is quite simple, it helps you to get external resources...just for example, if you want to apply for government support, patent matters a lot...” (VENUS)
	Networking with legitimized partners	“...Disseminating information on the frequent networking activities like participating in the industrial exhibition, organizing academic seminars, help in attracting more attention from a broad ranges of participants, for example, the venture capitalist, and potential customers...” (THUNDER)
	Harness the third parties “neutrality”	“...To deliver a speech at the top 10 potential innovative start-ups in China, does not really make sense, in my eyes. It’s just a title. There are quite a few ‘awards organizing’ organizations, they charge the attending organizations and make money out of that...people believe that title matters...in my case, of course, I’m not going to pay for it. It’s an award ceremony organized by one of the most influential magazines, <The Founders>. It might be a good opportunity to espouse my company in the flashlights...” (WIND)
Adaptations		
Sensing new idea components	A new plan that reinforces the implementation of the existing idea.	Regarding the potential applications, the founder thought the product could be applied in the field of soilless agriculture. (THUNDER)
Abandoning idea components	Suspending the implementation of actions, or giving up plans that are yet to be implemented.	The initial idea for the VENUS was to develop facial recognition to blur faces for digital video. But later, the founders abandoned the ideas because the market is too small in their eyes. (VENUS)

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About the author

Zhao Zhou (1982) was born in Zhejiang, China. In 1996, he attended Dalian University of Technology to study thermal engineering with a focus on refrigeration and cryogenics. After graduating in 2003, he continued his studies in a different subject – management science and engineering at the same university. In 2006, he graduated with an MSc degree. From September 2006, he spent one year in Shanghai, at Fudan University, School of Management. His work concerned the business model innovation and innovative enterprise and he was planning to complete his Ph.D. research there. In 2007, he got a chance to go to Leiden University with a 4 year grant from the Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC) and started working as a researcher for the Center for Technology and Innovation Management as a PhD candidate at Leiden University. During his PhD training, he has been involved in the execution of EU FP7 projects, and participated in teaching activities related to the course of Managing Innovation. His Ph.D. dissertation focuses on a process perspective of technology entrepreneurship. A number of his articles have been published in conference proceedings and academic journals.

