ABSTRACT

Despite the importance of entrepreneurial knowledge in encouraging strategic behavior of SMEs, there is a dearth of literature examining this link. A sample of 50 SMEs owner managers in Badulla Divisional Secretariat was investigated with the aim of identifying the difference between level of entrepreneurial knowledge and strategic orientation in terms of gender. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. There were no difference has been identified in level of entrepreneurial knowledge and strategic orientation in terms of gender of the studied sample. This study informs the provincial level policy makers the direction they should take in designing and delivering the training programmes for future entrepreneur development initiatives for male and female entrepreneurs.

Keywords - Entrepreneurial Knowledge, Strategic Orientation, SMEs Owner Managers, Gender

I. INTRODUCTION

The strategic behaviors targeting continuous superior performance of the business is known as strategic orientation (Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997) and it motivates and directs on the approach a firm should take in relation to innovation (Murray, 2012). This strategic gesture of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is encouraged by entrepreneurial knowledge (Hearth & Mahmood, 2013). Moreover, SMEs have their own specific way of operations where demographic, psychological and behavioral characteristics and skills and technical competencies of the entrepreneur have been cited frequently as most influential factors of performance (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2008).

However, entrepreneurial and strategic management perspectives jointly contribute to explain the strategic orientation needed to achieve and sustain competitive advantages (Esteve, Peinado & Peinado, 2008). Recently researchers has focused on investigating internal moderators of the strategic Orientation and performance relationship (Convin et al. 2006; Lumpkin & Dess 1996; MaMahon, 2001). According to the Esteve, Peinado & Peinado (2008), knowledge level of the managers has identified as internal factor. However, according to the Esteve, Peinado & Peinado (2008), research has not found a moderator effect of the knowledge level of top managers on the strategic Orientation and performance relationship while Hitt & Tyler (1991) and Wiersema & Bantel (1992) found that the type of academic degrees held by executives influenced their strategic decisions.

Further, when considering the situation of Sri Lanka, half of the population is contributed by female (52%) although there is a lower participation rate (33%) of female to labor force than men (Labour Force Survey - Annual Report 2012). However, the rate of starting new business by women is poorer when compare with the men since of various factors (Attygalle et al., 2014). They are more opposed to exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities irrespective of age and their levels of education and it has been caused to low level of influence on their management perspective, strategic thinking, entrepreneurial planning abilities and overall growth (Watson & Robinson, 2003). Since, both males and females exhibit a low level of entrepreneurship knowledge and whether females, are more aware of their deficiencies in this knowledge area than are their male counterparts. Both sexes believe that further education can correct the knowledge problem (Kourilsky & Walstad, 1998). Hence, the objective of the study aims to identify whether there is any difference in level of entrepreneurial knowledge and level of strategic orientation in terms of gender.

II. METHODOLOGY

A sample of 50 SMEs owner managers were randomly selected from a list of 397 owner managers registered in Badulla Divisional Secretariat. Data collection was facilitated by a structured questionnaire.
with 5-point Likert scale statements based on the constructs defined by Vesper (1987) for entrepreneurial education and Venkatraman (1989) for strategic orientation. The pilot study of 15 owner managers informed a high reliability level of the questionnaire with a Conbach’s Alpha value exceeding 0.7 in all the dimensions of the questionnaire. The One-Way ANOVA test has been used to identify the difference between entrepreneurial knowledge and strategic orientation in terms of gender.

Accordingly, this study has been investigated the previous research findings, which are related to Entrepreneurial Knowledge (EK) and Strategic Orientation (SO). Secondly, it has been deliberated the result of the study. Then, it has been organized the discussion and conclusion related with the result.

III. PRIOR APPROACH

Previous research findings, which are related to entrepreneurial knowledge (EK) and strategic orientation (SO) has summarized as follows. Firstly, the definitions of each variable and constructs of them has been revealed.

3.1. Entrepreneurial Knowledge (EK)

Entrepreneurial knowledge describes as the concepts, skills and mentality required by enterprise owner (Anderson & Jack, 2008). It is involving with multidisciplinary such as many skills and technical factors (Wei & Guo, 2010). As cited by Packham et al., (2010), entrepreneurial knowledge and skills can be taught and developed (Gibb, 2005; Kuratko, 2005). According to Vesper (1986), the attitudes and personality traits required for successful entrepreneurship can be transferred through learning. Further, it plays an important role in the process of building entrepreneurial capacity (Hannon, 2006).

According to Packham et al., (2010), there are main objectives for effective EK. As cited by Jones (2010), they are develop wide understanding (Chen et al., 1998; Jack & Anderson), acquire entrepreneurial mind set (Loudon & Smith, 1999) and how to start and operate an enterprise (Solomon et al.; 2002). Further, as cited by Sehat & Ghanepasand, (2014), knowledge is resulted by experience, skill, culture, personality, emotion (Beijerse, 2000).

However, there is no comprehensive criteria for measurement of entrepreneurship knowledge in organization and most of the researchers’ concentrated on role of knowledge of owners (Sehat & Ghanepasand, 2014). Most of the knowledge based researches were applied the vesper’s knowledge levels (Shane et al., 2000) and It has been identified as constructs for this study. Business General Knowledge

According to the Vesper, (2004) business general knowledge is able to gain in the classroom. Specially, the knowledge about each functional area of the business and the knowledge of start up the business are the specialized knowledge areas under this knowledge level (Vesper, 2004). Further, the way of stretch the resources, pursue bootstrapping and fundraise and the way of selling vision of the business are concerned under this knowledge. Further, Dierickx & Cool (1989) has been identified General Knowledge as a stock which reflects the background of the entrepreneur.

Venture General Knowledge

The content which is included in entrepreneurial course is identifying as venture general knowledge (Vesper, 1986). Further, Information of venture capital, venture plan, intellectual property should be included in this level of knowledge (Vesper, 1986).

Opportunity Specific Knowledge

Opportunity specific knowledge is more vital and essential element for entrepreneurs (Ardichvili,Cardozo, & Ray, 2003; Gaglio & Katz, 2001; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). It is important to start company, business survey related on the particular type of business person wishes to start and the existent knowledge is concerned in this level of knowledge (Vesper, 2004). Further, it can be developed through market experience and it cannot be taught (Vesper, 2004). Therefore, understanding the opportunity identification process represents one of the core intellectual questions for the domain of entrepreneurship (Gaglio & Katz, 2001)

Venture Specific Knowledge

Venture specific knowledge is a half of the opportunity specific knowledge which cannot be taught in the class room (Vesper, 2004). Knowledge regarding production of a particular product or service is identified as venture general knowledge (Vesper, 2004). Further, it can be identified as knowledge learned by the entrepreneur during certain activities occurring during the start – up process Friga (2000). According to Dierickx & Cool (1989), venture specific knowledge is identified as specific knowledge flows which reflects the knowledge acquiring through learning.

3.2 Strategic Orientation (SO)

As to Manu & Sriram, (1996) SO is how an organization uses strategy to adapt to and change aspects of its environment for a more favorable alignment. As cited by Bing & Zhengping (2011), SO reflects the strategic directions of firm to create the proper behaviors for the continuous superior performance of the business (Narver & Slater, 1990). According to Hitt et al., (1997); Venkatraman, (1989); it is the heart of the strategic management discipline and it is a dynamic capability that represents the organization’s ability to integrate and built internal and external competencies (Zhou,Yim, & Tse, 2005; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997).

SO is consisted with multidimensional constructs (Voss & Voss, 2000). It refers to umbrella term covering different constructs such as market orientation (MO) Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) and Learning Orientation (LO) (Barney, 1991). As cited by Faryabi et al.,(2002)
There are three main views, narrative approach, classificatory approach, and the comparative approach. These methods have been used to examine the strategic orientation (Venkatraman, 1989).

Most of the strategic orientation dimensions were derived from the Venkatraman’s (1989) and Chan’s (1992) instruments (Hopper, Huff & Thirkell, 2007). Since, Venkatraman’s (1989), Strategic Orientation of Business Enterprise (STROBE) model is selected for this study and the dimensions of selected frame work are further defined as follows as constructs of the study.

**Aggressiveness**

Aggressiveness is the willingness to challenge and perform better than the competitors (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). It means aggressiveness is more rival focused and aimed at introducing new products, new markets and types of competitive action (Miles & Cameron, 1982). Further, Buzzell et al., (1975) has been explained that aggressiveness seeks first-mover advantage and exhibits a combative posture in exploiting market opportunities. More, aggressiveness exploiting and developing resource more rapidly than the competitors (Clark & Montgomery, 1996). According to the Venkatraman (1989), the procedure of resources allocation which adopted by the organization in its selected market for improving market position at a relatively faster rate than the competitors has identified as aggressiveness.

**Analysis**

Analysis is the tendency of an organization to find out profound for the roots of problems and to generate the best possible solutions alternatives (Venkatraman, 1989). The over role problem solving ability concerning with the analysis dimension (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Resource allocation decisions and use of appropriate management system decision are relating with this dimension (Grant & King, 1982). More, analysis is the firm’s knowledge building capacity (Bourgeois, 1980). Further, it completes understanding of organizational and environment issues as result of overall problem-solving approach to strategic decision making (Miller & Friesen, 1984). According to the Grant and King (1982); Venkatraman (1989), analysis is the procurement of competitive strategy to achieve anticipated objectives in nature of internal systems.

**Defensiveness**

Defensiveness is behaviors aimed at protecting a firm’s market position through cost reduction and opportunity seeking as to develop with in the market (Venkatraman, 1989). As cited by Chatzoglou et al., (2011) defensiveness is the organization’s ability to maintain prominence within its domain (Morgan & Strong, 2003). Further, strategies that are rigid and conservative as well as a static view on product-market scope remaining existing product without moving to new product has identified as defensiveness (Miller, 1989). Further, this reflects the strategies are made by firms to be able to accumulate selected capabilities and skills, and develop composite strategies to outperform less domain-focused firms (Hart & Banbury, 1994; Morgan & Strong, 2003). Miller (1989) has been identified defensiveness as strategies that are rigid and conservative as well as a static view on product-market scope remaining existing product without moving to new product.

**Futurity**

Futurity is establishing the future desired state and reached it by processing through business plan (Andrews, 1971; Ansoff, 1975; Grant & King, 1982). It emphasizes on long term consideration against short term consideration of the firm. The view of preparation and positioning in future environmental situations by the organization (Morgan & Strong, 1997). According to the Venkatraman (1989), futurity is sequential considerations included in key strategic decisions, in terms of relative emphasis of effectiveness considerations versus efficiency considerations. The role in reducing corporate anxiety about competitive future and providing a base to understanding the pattern, form, and extent of potential change in competitive market are the supports which are included in futurity (Courtney et al., 1997).

**Pro-activeness**

Venkatraman (1989), has identified pro-activeness as seeking new opportunities which are related or not related with present line operations, introducing new products and brand fast than competitors and strategically eliminating operations which are in the mature or declining stages of life cycle. Further they has been sated that pro-activeness is central to innovative behavior which reflects a firm’s inertia for exploiting emerging opportunities, experimenting with change, and mobilizing first-mover actions (Morgan & Strong, 2003). According to the Miles & Snow (1978), pro-activeness is continuously search for market opportunities, and experimentation with potential responses to changing environmental trends. Further, initiative adopted by firms to continuously search for developing opportunities is pro-activeness (Slater & Narver, 1993).

**Riskiness**

Riskiness is extent of risks in decisions of various resource allocation as well as choice of products and markets (Venkatraman, 1989). Risk taking is an important factor in persuading entrepreneurship and this reflects organizational level risk than the individual level risk (Miller, 1987). According to Baird & Thomas (1990), riskiness is combining the entrepreneurial skills of constructive risk taking with opportunistic venture seeking is the objected strategic trait which firm demonstrates. Further, Baird & Thomas (1990) addresses that riskiness is combining the entrepreneurial skills of constructive risk taking with opportunistic venture seeking is the objected strategic trait which firm demonstrates.
IV. OUR APPROACH

The majority of the sample comprised with female entrepreneurs (52%) and owner managers in the age group of 31-50 (72%). The highest education level of 54% of the sample was G.C.E. O/L while 40% had completed A/L. Surprisingly, 84% of the sample had no any professional qualifications.

The Table-1 summarizes the results of one way ANOVA test and it confirms that significant difference cannot be identified between two groups when considering the mean values of entrepreneurial knowledge [Table 1 (a)] and strategic orientation [Table 1 (c)].

According to the Levine’s test of entrepreneurial knowledge and strategic orientation, significant value is 0.880 and 0.904. Hence, the evident could not be traced for identify a variance (P > 0.05) in the level of entrepreneurial knowledge and strategic orientation in terms of gender [Table 1 (b) and (d)].

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V. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to identify the difference in level of entrepreneurial knowledge and strategic orientation based on 50 SMEs owner managers. As per the one-way ANOVA test, the evidence could not be found in supporting for the significant difference in level of entrepreneurial knowledge and level of strategic orientation in terms of gender. This study informs the provincial level policy makers the direction they should take in designing and delivering the training programmes for future entrepreneur development initiatives based on gender differences.

REFERENCES

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