Bricolage as a Management Tool: Literature Review

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 29 May 2023
Accepted 23 August 2023

Keywords:
Entrepreneurship;
Bricoleur;
Systematic Review;
Bricolage Entrepreneur.

ABSTRACT

Objective: This research analyzes the main characteristics of bricolage in entrepreneurship by determining the consequences that its use brings to ventures; presenting potential lines of research related to bricolage that can be addressed.

Theoretical Framework: Bricolage is the concept developed by Lévi-Strauss when referring to intellectual bricolage, he presents it as a way of creating, assembling or forming knowledge using parts or elements of diverse origins. The application of this concept to the business field, points to entrepreneurs who defy the limitations imposed by the scarcity of resources, explains how they adapt their work techniques to new contexts such as Bricoleurs. Bricolage applied to entrepreneurship is based on using available resources, both internal company resources and external resources, it involves combining resources for new purposes.

Methodology: The methodology used was the documentary analysis through the systematic review in the Scopus, Web of Science, and Emerald Insight databases. Using the PRISMA method, a total of 202 articles were identified, with 30 articles included in the analysis.

Findings: Bricolage is applied in various types of entrepreneurship, evidencing diverse characteristics depending on the economic and geographical contexts and the specificities of each management.

Originality: This document is based on double-blind peer-reviewed researches and can be consulted in the aforementioned databases.

Doi: https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2023.v8i8.3230

BRICOLAGE COMO UMA FERRAMENTA DE GESTÃO: REVISÃO DE LITERATURA

RESUMO

Objetivo: Esta pesquisa analisa as principais características do bricolage no empreendedorismo, determinando as consequências que seu uso traz para empreendimentos; apresentando potenciais linhas de pesquisa relacionadas ao bricolage que podem ser abordadas.

Estrutura Teórica: Bricolage é o conceito desenvolvido por Lévi-Strauss quando se refere ao bricolage intelectual, ele o apresenta como uma forma de criar, montar ou formar conhecimento usando partes ou elementos de diversas origens. A aplicação desse conceito ao campo empresarial, aponta para empreendedores que desafiaram as limitações impostas pela escassez de recursos, explica como adaptam suas técnicas de trabalho a novos contextos como os bricoleurs. O Bricolage aplicado ao empreendedorismo é baseado na utilização de recursos.

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disponíveis, tanto recursos internos da empresa quanto recursos externos, envolve a combinação de recursos para novos fins.

**Metodologia:** A metodologia utilizada foi a análise documental através da revisão sistemática nos bancos de dados Scopus, Web of Science e Emerald Insight. Utilizando o método PRISMA, foram identificados um total de 202 artigos, sendo 30 incluídos na análise.

**Constatações:** O bricolage é aplicado em vários tipos de empreendimentos, evidenciando diversas características, dependendo dos contextos econômicos e geográficos e das especificidades de cada gestão.

**Originalidade:** Este documento é baseado em pesquisas duplamente cegas revisadas por pares e pode ser consultado nas bases de dados acima mencionadas.

**Palavras-chave:** Entrepreneurship, Bricoleur, Systematic Review, Bricolage Entrepreneur.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Bricolage practices in entrepreneurship are characterized by the use of limited resources, their combination, and improvisation, resulting in the creation of new models (Baker, 2007; Baker & Nelson, 2005) becoming a management tool that helps entrepreneurs to be innovative (Senyard et al., 2014). Bricoleurs, as the entrepreneurs engaged in bricolage are called, can achieve business growth by optimizing resources (Bojica et al., 2018), thereby reinforcing market orientation strategies (Petzold et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial bricolage helps entrepreneurs accumulate knowledge, providing them competitive advantage over their competitors (Carlsson-Wall & Kraus, 2015).

Entrepreneurship is driven by various reasons depending on the location and circumstances in which it may develop. In emerging economies or crisis contexts, entrepreneurship is characterized by necessity and limited access to resources, as customers
spend less and investors become more cautious (Eggers, 2020). Research studies have explored how entrepreneurship addresses poverty in different environments (Sutter et al., 2019). However, in these situations, scarcity is combined with institutional limitations, insufficient financing, unequal access to technology, and inefficient government policies (Manning & Vavilov, 2023). These factors pose obstacles for entrepreneurs in their attempt to transform their ideas into competitive business models.

Bricolage is associated with the attitude with which entrepreneurs approach their context. Considering that the driving force behind entrepreneurial behavior is often resource constraints, bricolage has been studied on various continents, intertwining its analysis with other management elements. Through this systematic review, we contribute to showcasing the state of knowledge on bricolage worldwide by analyzing articles published in specialized journals. To achieve our goal, the objectives set are (1) analyze the main characteristics of bricolage in entrepreneurship, (2) determine the consequences of bricolage adoption for ventures, and (3) present potential lines of research related to bricolage to be studied.

The justification for our research lies in the importance of a review of the management tools that entrepreneurs use in divergent contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bricolage in the meaning given by Levi-Strauss, (1997/1964), consists of building something based on residues and remains, in this sense, intellectual bricolage is presented as a way of creating, assembling or forming knowledge using parts or elements of diverse origins. Likewise, as a theoretical concept bricolage has been developed in a variety of fields as Di Domenico et al., (2010) the various applications have succeeded in theorizing the conceptual components of coping with the use of available resources and achieving for new purposes.

The application of this concept to the business field points to entrepreneurs who defy the limitations imposed by the scarcity of resources, adapting their work techniques to new contexts such as Bricoleurs (Bernardi and Pedrini, 2020). The bricoleur entrepreneur uses the available means and has full knowledge of these resources, which develops his ability to generate strategies, detect their potential uses and overcome limitations (German & Barrett, 2005).

On the other hand, we can say that bricolage is not simply about conserving resources and getting by reusing old and worn-out resources for their original purposes, but is
fundamentally about the creative recombination of resources for purposes for which they were not originally intended. (Baker and Nelson, 2005).

With respect to organizational theory, in management bricolage is considered an important tool in the generation of new knowledge and paradigm shift, as Boxenbaum and Rouleau (2011) affirm, changes originate from evolution, differentiation and bricolage, it is in this case that theoretical models are transformed as a result of changes in the context that force a reinterpretation of the paradigms that under the intervention of bricolage become a source of new knowledge. This intervention materializes in the use of heterogeneous elements to solve a problem.

Likewise, Molecke and Pinkse (2017), deepened this concept and provided two bricolage categories based on the available resources and the objective of the combination of resources. As Ben-Asher (2022) points out, a bricolage approach requires a deep understanding that there is no one correct description of an event. The researcher combines the theoretical constructs and the observation of the phenomenon, the information that arises in the context of the subject investigated, the data analysis, and the interpretation of the whole.

On the other hand, bricolage applied to entrepreneurship is based on using available resources, both the internal resources of the company and external resources, it implies the combination of resources for new purposes. This is how it is considered that the strategies derived from bricolage are operationalized in times of crisis, however, in the same perspective as Boxenbaum and Rouleau (2011), for An et al., (2018), the participation of these strategies fosters a corporate entrepreneurial spirit that in turn generates an identification of opportunities that stimulate innovation. This study contributes to the theoretical discussion considering that the Bricolage process can generate new knowledge. Likewise, Bricolage can have a long-term influence on the way managers run companies rather than simply acting as a coping mechanism.

**METHODOLOGY**

This research is a documentary analysis of scientific articles on the application of bricolage in entrepreneurship, considering that systematic reviews should be guided by research questions (Bendezú et al., 2023; Szablewska & Kubacki, 2023). The information analysis was centered around answering three questions: (1) What are the main characteristics of bricolage in entrepreneurship? (2) What are the consequences of using bricolage in ventures? (3) What potential lines of research regarding bricolage can be studied?
Using the Prisma review method, the literature from the Scopus, Web of Science, and Emerald Insight databases was reviewed, including research articles on the development of bricolage in entrepreneurship. These articles were double-blind peer-reviewed, ensuring rigorous information sources. The search terms used were bricolage and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial bricolage, and bricolage and entrepreneurship management. The publication period established ranged from 2020 to 2022.

The search yielded 202 articles, which were imported into Mendeley. After verifying titles and abstracts, duplicates were removed, excluding 65 articles, and thus 137 eligible articles remained. Due to exclusion criteria, articles that were not research papers (such as compilations and conference papers) were excluded as they lacked peer review. Additionally, articles that did not directly relate to the research questions and those for which full-text access was not available were also excluded. This process resulted in a final selection of 30 scientific articles as sources for this research.

Figure 1. Flow of Systematic Review

Source: Prepared by authors (2023)

The analysis and coding of the thirty articles were conducted, and the relevant data for this research were extracted and organized in an Excel spreadsheet.
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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the sources consulted, social enterprises have allowed a clearer analysis of bricolage. Studies on the actions carried out by social enterprises demonstrate that material bricolage, related to tangible resources, and ideational bricolage, which refers, interpretation, and entrepreneurial intuition, are interconnected and used simultaneously. The literature indicates that social enterprises evidenced a greater use of bricolage practices (Janssen et al., 2018). Social bricoleurs manage their skills and resources to achieve business objectives, resulting in frugal innovation (Mishra, 2021). In that way, they solve problems for the beneficiaries of their ventures by bringing sustainable and socially beneficial products to the market in line with their origins. However, bricolage is currently being applied in various business contexts.

Research studies on entrepreneurship in contexts of scarcity have determined that the resource management allowing the growth of ventures has bricolage characteristics (Wierenga, 2020). Those who run the ventures used their greatest creativity to invent new versions and modify existing resources for new purposes. Bricolage channels entrepreneurial initiatives toward achieving sustainable ventures, particularly those focused on technological initiatives (Sivathanu & Pillai, 2020). While scarcity contexts are recurrent spaces for such studies, they are not essential for the development of bricolage, as we will see next.

Regarding the implementation of bricolage strategies in rapidly growing economies, the accelerated establishment of companies has influenced entrepreneurship by combining the exploration of new resources with the exploitation of existing ones (Fu et al., 2020). Likewise, this proliferation of companies has allowed to distinguishing between newly established ventures, growth-oriented ventures, and those with sustained growth, with significant variations
in the effects of the association between bricolage and decision-making depending on the business context (An et al., 2020).

The analysis of bricolage is enriched when studied in association with specific elements, such as effectuation. This association provides an alternative view to the idea that the market gives opportunities and entrepreneurs discover them. Servantie & Rispal (2018) found that entrepreneurs combine approaches, concluding that bricolage, effectuation, and causality coexist in social ventures. They later studied the same phenomenon in "born global" firms (Servantie & Hlady-Rispal, 2022). In this line of research, it was identified that while effectuation utilizes available resources, bricolage involves creating or transforming resources (Vasconcelos Scazziota et al., 2020).

Adaptive bricolage, transformative effectuation, and strategic planning are presented as three entrepreneurial behaviors from which entrepreneurs can choose (Lecuna, 2021). Bricolage leads entrepreneurs to creativity, effectuation to imagination, and planning to discovery, fostering the creation of new products and transforming contexts. As well as bricolage, effectuation emerges in a context of scarce resources and characterized by an attitude of doing business with the available resources; thus, they can overlap or coexist.

The introduction of bricolage in the sales domain (Epler & Leach, 2021), considering the current highly dynamic environments, allows for the analysis of how managers promote creativity in salespeople to increase sales in disruptive times, requiring the utilization of resources from the experience and determination of bricoleur salespeople. Similarly, bricolage has been associated with the supply chain, primarily studying the effects of excessive use of bricoleur practices in production, which can impact product quality and consequently affect the market (Sahi & Agarwal, 2020).

Another remarkable aspect is the relationship between entrepreneurial bricolage effects as regards both the growth of new companies and adaptability, especially in the presence of institutional voids (Yu et al., 2020). Institutional voids refer to a lack of management tools in ventures or an incipient organizational culture. Considering that the available resources also strongly influence entrepreneurs' decision-making and strategies, they adopt feasible courses of action based on their situation and the set of resources at their disposal (Haynie, 2009).

Bricoleurs, in their attempt to achieve positive outcomes in the absence of resources, assume business behaviors that generate routines, which, in turn, become new processes for ventures (Parmentier-Cajaiba et al., 2021). By utilizing scarce resources, this demonstrates how
bricoleurs can create new organizational structures, address new problems, and seize new opportunities.

The fields of application for bricolage can change. Some authors have explained its effect in the environmental field, where environmental entrepreneurs challenge limitations forced by scarce natural resources by adapting their work techniques to the ever-changing natural environment, which has often modified by climate change (Bernardi & Pedrini, 2020). Furthermore, they design low-cost solutions to environmental issues (Musona et al., 2020).

The geographical area where ventures develop provides certain characteristics. In areas where resources for normal economic activities are scarce, spatial bricolage emerges. This involves mobilizing resources and creatively combining the available resources in the immediate spatial context to generate new concerns and opportunities (Korsgaard et al., 2021). This situation is particularly evident in communities where bricolage practices contribute to local resource supply. Tools such as resource historization to increase their value and communal revalorization have been observed.

The study of bricolage in a community context with limited resources allows us to identify how the practices of bricoleurs can become part of everyday life. They not only combine resources but also construct them in their quest to improve the quality of life for the population. This is the case with communal enterprises, which, unlike private enterprises, are associated with culture and traditions and are oriented towards the common good (Papazu, 2021).

The rapid pace of technological change compels entrepreneurs to take action, driven by the benefits they can obtain through its utilization (De Mattos et al., 2023), even though implementing technology may require significant effort due to resource scarcity of small and medium-sized enterprises. In response to technological and market turbulence, it is necessary to innovate in order to be more competitive (Lima dos Santos et al., 2021). Under such circumstances, bricolage facilitates innovation and acts as a facilitator to optimize resources, promoting the combination of resources to democratize innovation and reach more people (Beltagui et al., 2021).

The technological revolution is leveraged by entrepreneurs who can incorporate it into their bricolage approach, creating a network where digital platforms contribute to marketing their ventures. Network bricolage promotes trust between suppliers and potential customers (Grzeslo, 2020). That is how social media can be used to share product catalogs with a network.
of friends of friends, simplify payment platforms, or provide detailed product information in record time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to new ventures (Kariv et al., 2022) amidst the crisis, driven by both necessity and opportunity, becoming a favorable scenario for recognizing bricolage practices. Many ventures born during this period responded to adversity with intentional bricolage, seeking to solve new problems and identifying new opportunities for their businesses (Kuckertz et al., 2020). Examining the different effects of financial crisis and the consequences of the pandemic on entrepreneurial activities through the lens of bricolage has been a recurring topic in research studies published in the last three years (Tsilika et al., 2020). In this line we found a study that draws on information from model companies in Australia, Europe, and South America measuring the impact of COVID-19 and the strategies adopted, highlighting the crucial role of bricolage and entrepreneurial improvisation. The study emphasizes the need to consider these theoretical foundations in future research (Duarte Alonso et al., 2021). In such circumstances, bricolage is seen as a managerial capability (Baier-Fuentes et al., 2023) to assess and take survival actions for ventures.

Research on the usefulness of bricolage in developing new products in newly established companies (Wang et al., 2021) considers that the resource limitations that they face have a positive effect. However, the role of managers is also considered, as they can potentially strengthen or weaken the venture performance, the composition, diversity, or synergy of the functional team, considering that a heterogeneous team strengthens the management of the enterprise. Leadership is also highlighted when associated with entrepreneurial bricolage, as when an emergent problem occurs, individuals must be prepared to break out of their routine and utilize bricolage as part of their way of working and performing a task (Paolino, 2020).

Studies on entrepreneurship from a gender perspective suggest that entrepreneurship empowers women (Jacob & Munuswamy, 2022), promoting economic growth and driving social change. By incorporating bricolage as a category of analysis (Le Loarne Lemaire et al., 2021), it is determined that women utilize bricolage learned within their work network. As they master their business model, applying bricolage becomes easier for them. They can also draw on experiences from their close social environment and peer exchange. In emerging economies, women face not only the challenges of entrepreneurship but also the consequences of patriarchal societies (Ahmetaj et al., 2023). The notion that the approach to bricolage has differences according to the gender is still under investigation. However, its utility as a tool to overcome crisis in female entrepreneurship has been raised (Alva et al., 2021).
CONCLUSIONS

Bricolage takes on different characteristics depending on the business context in which it is developed considering the sector as an important dimension of analysis. While early research focused on identifying bricolage practices in entrepreneurship, current studies have shown that this tool has been adopted in various types of ventures. Another dimension to consider is the geographical area, which is associated with resource access, showing that bricolage practices cross borders. The gender dimension of entrepreneurs is a relatively new area of study, and we are not yet in a position to assert whether one gender is more inclined toward bricolage than the other.

Bricolage practices have consequences for the ventures in which they are implemented, and the reviewed literature mostly suggests positive outcomes. Bricolage is associated, nevertheless, with other management elements such as decision-making, effectuation, and leadership, making it enriching to study in conjunction with such elements. Scarcity, resource combination, and improvisation foster creativity and, in some cases, innovation.

Various lines of research open up when exploring bricolage, particularly when studying it in association with management elements and in specific contexts, as it occurred with literature on bricolage resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, or within specific geographical environments, such as Latin American communities showing an emerging interest in the subject.

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