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Does Entrepreneurial Spiral Work in Large Organisations? A Formal- Informal Organizations' Interplay Perspective

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Abstract

Organisational scaling has been a critical research area in management science; however, non-practitioner journals have not focused much on ‘how’ do organisations scale. In this work, we extend the works of Shepherd et al. (2010)’s entrepreneurial spirals. Entrepreneurial spirals have been looked at as an explanatory mechanism to explain how small Entrepreneurial organisations scale up. In this work, we try to examine whether entrepreneurial spirals can also explain how intrapreneurship can be propagated in large organisations. Our paper delves into how we can learn from entrepreneurial spirals so that it can be adapted in the context of big organisations and unravel new and potent explanations about how intrapreneurship develops in large organisations. This conceptualisation helps us to create the notion of intrapreneurial spirals as an interplay between formal and informal organisations. This multi-level interaction has the potential to enhance the entrepreneurship literature by providing a novel perspective to intrapreneurship.

Keywords

entrepreneurial mindset, entrepreneurial spirals, intrapreneurial spirals, organisational growth.

Introduction

Organisational growth has been one of the primary research areas when it comes to organisational theorists. However, the scholars focussed mainly on ‘how much’ and rarely on ‘how’ (McKelvie and Wiklund, 2010) do organisations grow. This imbalance has resulted in a poor and incomplete understanding of how organisations grow, especially when they grow organically (Shepherd and Patzelt, 2020); one way organisations can grow into corporate entrepreneurship is intrapreneurship (Sathe, 2007). However, mindset plays a pivotal role to identify and execute opportunities within or outside the firm (McGrath and MacMillan, 2000). This understanding has attracted many scholars to investigate the construct of the entrepreneurial mindset (Kuratko et al., 2020;

McMullen and Kier, 2016). Since construct EM is still in a development phase, it has been inaccurately used. For example, some studies have taken proxy constructs to measure EM (Sellappan and Shanmugam, 2020; Balachandra, 2019). In addition to this, we noticed that EM had been used to refer to the mindset of the managers in a firm that can aid them to venture into entrepreneurial activities within a firm (Shepherd et al., 2010). We argue that this is slightly inaccurate, and subsequently, we call for the development of a relatively more new construct of intrapreneurial mindset. Therefore, the study aims to throw some light on the construct of *intrapreneurial mindset (IM)* and subsequently understand how it helps in organisational scaling via *intrapreneurial spirals*.

This work argues that if employees or managers have an entrepreneurial mindset, they will also have a higher propensity to leave the organisation to pursue an identified opportunity outside the boundaries of their organisation. This propensity will introduce sunk costs into the organisations. Therefore, for organisations to scale, the managers need to have an intrapreneurial mindset rather than an entrepreneurial mindset. We distinguish the intrapreneurial mindset from the entrepreneurial mindset by certain factors such as fear of failure. Since the financial, social and human capital in a firm is usually replete in a firm (Phan et al., 2009); therefore we understand that individuals who have a higher fear of failure or similar attributes such as fear of rejection, fear of success (Groth and Peters, 1999) or its consequences while every other characteristic identical to an entrepreneurial mindset, will have an intrapreneurial mindset. We also develop a notion of intrapreneurial spirals, which is conceptualised as an interplay between the informal and formal organisations. Barnard (1968) suggested that many informal organisations or associations exist within a firm. Many such informal organisations also contribute to the development of sub-units of formal organisations within a firm. We use the conceptualisation of entrepreneurial spirals suggested by Shepherd et al. (2010) as a mechanism that drives and chokes intrapreneurial spirals.

This work acknowledges the developments done in the construct of EM and seeks to facilitate that understanding in constructing the construct IM. This understanding is achieved by conceptualising IM as a function of EM (equation 1). In addition to this, we try to ‘zoom-out’ from the entrepreneurial spirals suggested by (Shepherd et al., 2010) and discover the latent intrapreneurial spirals that exist within a firm. We propose that

within these intrapreneurial spirals, entrepreneurial spirals exist, and these entrepreneurial spirals serve as a mechanism that starts, perpetuates and stops the intrapreneurial spirals. The intrapreneurial spirals help us advance our understanding of organisational scaling (Shepherd and Patzelt, 2020).

Our work contributes to the extant literature in two ways. Firstly, it addresses the need for the construct of IM and provides an anchor that shall help future researchers to develop the construct efficiently. Secondly, it extends the work of Shepherd et al. (2010) and creates the notion of intrapreneurial spirals, reflecting a perspective of organisational scaling.

This work can be divided into three parts. The first section throws light on the current development of the entrepreneurial mindset (EM) construct and why we need a new construct of intrapreneurial mindset (IM). The second part deals with what we know and what we do not know about IM. The third part gains inspiration from the works of (Shepherd et al., 2010) and subsequently extends their work to develop the framework of *intrapreneurial spirals*, which helps us understand how intrapreneurial mindset plays a crucial role in the interplay of informal and formal organisations in a firm, consequently allowing us to understand a way in which organisations scale.

Entrepreneurial Mindset and Why Do We Need a New Construct ‘Intrapreneurial Mindset’

The entrepreneurial mindset is defined as an “ability to rapidly sense, act, and mobilise in response to a judgmental decision under uncertainty about a possible opportunity for gain.” (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006). Haynie et al. (2010) suggested a highly credible situated metacognitive model of an entrepreneurial mindset. But as the entrepreneurship literature has matured over the years, we understand that ‘mindset’ comprises of much more than just cognition and as the knowledge of the concept of EM has evolved, many scholars have added bricks on the wall of the conceptualisation of the broad latent construct of EM. For example, Kuratko et al. (2020), addressed the need of including all the three dimensions viz cognitive, behavioural and emotional aspects to describe EM more comprehensively. We now know that entrepreneurs think, feel and hence, act differently (Mullins, 2017), and entrepreneurship literature has made significant leaps in understanding entrepreneurial cognition, emotion and entrepreneurial action (Wood and

McKelvie, 2015; Jiang et al., 2019; Hmieleski and Baron, 2008) however, the underlying latent construct (EM) which is an amalgamation of all the three aspects (Kuratko et al., 2020) yet needs to be theoretically established. We acknowledge that the construct of ‘entrepreneurial mindset’ has made significant leaps in the recent past (Kuratko et al., 2020; McMullen and Kier, 2016; McGrath and MacMillan, 2000). However, the scholars agree that we need a more theoretical and practical understanding of the construct (Verzat et al., 2017; Shepherd et al., 2010).

Due to the inadequate knowledge of EM, scholars have used the construct a little inaccurately (Balachandra, 2019; Sellappan and Shanmugam, 2020). While we agree with (Shepherd et al., 2010)’s definition of entrepreneurial mindset as “an individual’s entrepreneurial mindset as the ability and willingness of individuals to rapidly sense, act, and mobilise in response to a judgmental decision under uncertainty about a possible opportunity for gain”, we argue that this definition overlaps with the possible meaning of IM as well. An individual high in entrepreneurial mindset might leave the organisation to pursue an opportunity outside the firm, which might not be conducive for an organisation, especially when the firm expects an intrapreneurial action from them. Therefore, we call for the development of a relatively more new construct of IM, giving a clearer understanding of the phenomenon where the manager’s mindset is gauged in terms of how intrapreneurial he/she is.

Intrapreneurial Mindset

What we know: While the construct development of EM is in the nascent stage (Verzat et al., 2017; Shepherd et al., 2010), the construct of IM is even more nascent. We did a simple search with the keyword “intrapreneurial mindset” in ‘all fields’ in the Scopus database, and it returned only ten results, 4 of which were conference proceedings. To enhance our literature review, we also did a search with ("mindset" or "mindset") AND ("intrapreneurship" OR "corporate entrepreneurship") in the article’s title, abstract, and keyword; we got 33 results, eight of which conference proceedings. We included conference proceedings in our analysis to reduce the publication bias in our study.

The mindset-based view that reflects the organisation’s culture and beliefs has been recently introduced in the literature that talks about how firms overcome innovation

barriers (Loewe and Dominiquini, 2006). Our unit of analysis to understand the intrapreneurial mindset is at the individual level, and we couldn't find much evidence about the construct in any of the leading journals. However, we could see certain instances that the authors used the term entrepreneurial mindset instead of an intrapreneurial mindset (Pohlisch, 2020; Gonthier and Chirita, 2019). This misunderstanding is likely given that even the construct of EM yet lacks theoretical establishment (Debarliev et al., 2020).

One of the critical differences between entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship is that the human, social and financial capital is replete when an individual pursues intrapreneurship (Phan et al., 2009) which is usually not true when an individual starts his venture due to which he/she reverts to effectual or bricolage logic (Sarasvathy, 2001; Baker and Nelson, 2005). However, we acknowledge particular works that show sometimes effectual logic also applies in scenarios of intrapreneurship (Szambelan et al., 2020). The difference in the available resources during entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship signals the critical difference between the EM and IM. Other facets should perfectly overlap between entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial mindset. Therefore, we conjecture that the intrapreneurial mindset should be a sub-set of an entrepreneurial mindset. Figure 1 depicts the intrapreneurial mindset (IM) as a part of the entrepreneurial mindset (EM), and the region 'X' that represents the uncommon part between IM and EM, where:

$$EM = X + IM \quad \text{----- (Equation 1)}$$

Insert Figure 1 about here

Proposition 1a: Intrapreneurial mindset is a sub-set of the entrepreneurial mindset.

The above proposition further throws light upon the individuals who pose intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial mindsets. The intrapreneurial mindset is a sub-set of the entrepreneurial mindset; therefore, individuals exhibiting entrepreneurial mindset will show an intrapreneurial mindset, but the converse is not necessarily true.

Proposition 1b: Individuals having an entrepreneurial mindset will have an intrapreneurial mindset, but individuals exhibiting an intrapreneurial may or may not have an entrepreneurial mindset.

While adopting the corporate entrepreneurship lens, scholars have argued that organisations that behave more ‘entrepreneurially’ exhibit more entrepreneurial culture (Ireland et al., 2003). While the concept of entrepreneurial spirals (Shepherd et al., 2010) have tried to give a perspective on how organisational culture and entrepreneurial mindset of the manager interplay to make organisations more entrepreneurial, we posit that this perspective is slightly incomplete. We argue this because individuals having an entrepreneurial mindset will also have a higher tendency to exploit the opportunities outside the boundaries of the organisation. Therefore, if such individuals (having EM) leave the organisations to build their firms, this can hurt organisational scaling because of the ejection of intrapreneurial individuals plus the added sunk cost of training and honing that was spent on them. Hence, we suggest that individuals exhibiting an intrapreneurial mindset should be preferred rather than individuals having an entrepreneurial mindset in an organisation that aims to scale.

Proposition 2: For an organisation’s culture to become more entrepreneurial, an intrapreneurial mindset is needed rather than an entrepreneurial mindset.

What we do not know: A mindset has been defined as the evaluative decision based on the integration of cognitive and affective reactions to an opportunity or situation (Crano and Prislin, 2006). However, currently, we have noticed that IM and EM have been interchangeably used in extant literature (Pohlisch, 2020), which distorts our understanding of the IM construct. To develop an understanding of IM as a standalone construct might be a taxing job. We have spent almost two decades on EM, yet it needs a theoretical establishment. Therefore, we take the help of proposition one or Equation 1 to understand the intrapreneurial mindset, which will help the scholars accelerate towards understanding IM. Thus, the developments on the construct of EM act as a guiding light that will light the relatively dim room of the construct IM.

Using Equation 1: $EM = x + IM$, where the region 'x' represents the uncommon part between IM and EM, we understand that $IM = EM - x$. Therefore, if we find the components of x, i.e. the facets which do not represent the intrapreneurial mindset but represent the entrepreneurial mindset, we can discover IM. For starters, we can look at an aspect of *fear of failure*, which is a prominent aspect of EM. Fear of failure can be classified as fear of feeling shame, fear of belittling one's self-estimated, fear of unpredictable future, fear of losing social influence, and fear of upsetting important others (Conroy, 2001; Conroy, 2004). Fear of failure becomes a significant component of an entrepreneurial mindset as it effectively mediates the entrepreneur's propensity to act on the opportunity. No matter how financially rewarding (Carter, 2011) and higher status inhibiting (Parker and Van Praag, 2010) an opportunity might seem, a fear of failure is justified to be present in the hearts of an entrepreneur because of the high uncertainty (Knight, 2012) involved in entrepreneurial action (Cacciotti and Hayton, 2015). However, this facet might play a relatively less prominent role in the construct of fear of failure because usually, the firms are relatively affluent in financial, social and human capital compared to emergent firms (Phan et al., 2009).

Intrapreneurial Spirals: Towards the Understanding of Organizational Growth

In this work, we try to extend the works of Shepherd et al. (2010) to understand how organisational scaling can be understood, especially in intrapreneurship, which has proven to be a significant dimension through which firms can grow themselves. We look into these spirals through the lens of informal-formal organisations.

Barnard (1968) suggested that many informal organisations exist within a formal organisation. The size of these groups varies from two to large crowds. These groups don't have a definite purpose but do have norms, interactions, and changes in the working experience of individuals within and outside the informal associations. Furthermore, informal groups are formed by informal groups that can co-exist within the organisations and beyond them. In a similar vein, we suggest a model of intrapreneurial spirals, which exists due to the interplay mentioned above of formal and informal organisations.

In this article, we employ a spiral conceptualised as 'intrapreneurial spirals' to link the size of informal organisations to the extent of formal sub-units or organisations in the

context of entrepreneurship. We define formal organisations as a group of two or more individuals having a conscious and definite purpose. Informal organisations are a group of two or more individuals driven by common interests, characterised by norms but lacks definite norms. The lens of the interplay between the informal organisations and the formal organisations was implicit in the theoretical foundation of Barnard (1968). The interplay between formal and informal organisations has been used in existing literature (Soda and Zaheer, 2012) to understand employees' performance in a firm.

The enduring, deviation-amplifying relationship between formal and informal organisations is manifested as an intrapreneurial spiral, of which there are two general patterns: *enhancing intrapreneurial spirals and diminishing intrapreneurial spirals*. These patterns are similar to the ones suggested by Shepherd et al. (2010). Moreover, we go a step ahead by replacing the entrepreneurial mindset with the intrapreneurial mindset in the entrepreneurial spirals suggested by Shepherd et al. (2010) and using these spirals as mechanisms to perpetuate (positive intrapreneurial spirals) or decompose (negative intrapreneurial mindset) *intrapreneurial spirals*. Figure 2 shows the entrepreneurial spirals conceptualised by Shepherd et al. (2010).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Shepherd et al. (2010) conceptualised three kinds of spirals: Enhancing spirals (Fig. 2A), diminishing spirals (Fig. 2B) and steady-state (Fig. 2C). We used these three kinds of spirals as a mechanism in our conceptualisation of intrapreneurial spirals. We suggest that intrapreneurial spirals are nothing but a ‘zoomed-out’ version of entrepreneurial spirals, which helps us to see what happens when positive or negative entrepreneurial spirals exist within an organisation. Figure 3 depicts the intrapreneurial spirals, which interplay between the population of informal and formal organisations within an organisation.

Insert Figure 3 about here

We also acknowledge the boundary conditions of intrapreneurial spirals. First, we focus on the changes in formal and informal populations, which might or might not apply to the creation of new formal organisations. Secondly, we do not comment on the performance of the newly formed formal organisations due to enhancing entrepreneurial spirals.

Antecedents of Intrapreneurial Spirals. To enhance the conceptualisation of intrapreneurial spirals, we strictly follow the works of Shepherd et al. (2010), which provides a framework to develop our work. In Figure 4, we present our model of an intrapreneurial spiral. The model contains the components that contribute to the enduring, deviation-amplifying properties' as they affect informal organisations' population changes and, subsequently, formal organisations'. These factors are equivalent to mechanisms that apply force. Since we are using Shepherd et al. (2010) 's conceptualisation, his conceptualisation of entrepreneurial spirals forms a mechanism that acts as a force that *starts, perpetuates, stops or diminishes* the intrapreneurial spirals.

Insert Figure 4 about here

Starting a spiral: Informal organisations that we focus on in this work relate to the exhaustive set of associations or groups within an organisation. However, it is intuitive that not all informal organisations associate themselves to become formal sub-unit within an organisation. Instead, only the informal groups characterised by an intrapreneurial mindset (consisting of desirability and feasibility of opportunities (Krueger, 2007; McMullen and Shepherd, 2006)) and supported by organisational culture tend to form formal organisations within an organisation. Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 3: Enhancing entrepreneurial spirals (consisting of a positive intrapreneurial mindset and positive entrepreneurial culture within an organisation) starts the intrapreneurial spirals.

Perpetuating a spiral: An intrapreneurial spiral can be perpetuated by factors that make the informal organisations interested in intrapreneurial activities. This interest can develop when previous corporate entrepreneurship instances have given positive feedback to the firm's employees. This positive feedback leads to a positive perception within the existing informal groups of an organisation. Therefore, informal associations catalyse the formations of formal organisations (intrapreneurship), which increases the population of informal organisations within a firm. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 4: Intrapreneurial spirals are perpetuated by positive perceptions within the informal units of organisations; these perceptions result from (1) high performance of the corporate ventures or (2) higher job-satisfaction within employees.

Stopping a spiral: Since enhancing entrepreneurial spirals are the essence of the mechanism of intrapreneurial spirals; therefore, even a compromise of one of two components of entrepreneurial spirals, i.e., the intrapreneurial mindset of the managers and entrepreneurial culture of the organisation, will break the enduring chain of intrapreneurial spirals and will bring the intrapreneurial spirals towards the static state which is depicted in figure 3B. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 5: An intrapreneurial spiral can be stopped by decreasing the intrapreneurial mindset of the employees or by decreasing the entrepreneurial culture of the organisations or both.

Discussion

The notion of intrapreneurial spirals aids us to understand a perspective of the governing dynamics of an organisation's growth or why the growth of an organisation stops and gives a sneak peek towards a genetic nature of an organisation. While much has been discussed in this work about how these spirals propagate or fail, it is interesting to see what happens when we travel backwards along these intrapreneurial spirals.

Suppose we travel backwards in the intrapreneurial spiral of a relatively mature and non-entrepreneurial firm. In that case, we can notice why the organisation turned out so:

whether it was due to the lower intrapreneurial mindset of the firm's managers or weaker entrepreneurial culture or the negative perception (feedback) of the employees from the past entrepreneurial activities. In addition to this, if we go back even further, we notice that these spirals end up at a point which contains one or a group of two or more individuals (entrepreneur/s), which represents an informal organisation or what we call as Seed Informal Organisation (SIO), who then later started a venture within which all the current sub-units (formal organisations) exist. This understanding would solve the chicken-egg problem between informal and formal organisations if there were any. It will be interesting to track the nature (in terms of cognitive, emotional aspects) of the various organisations' different SIOs and analyse how different SIOs emerge in terms of their bureaucratic structure and their stance towards entrepreneurial opportunities present in the market. This conceptualisation will also help bridge the stream of literature that concentrates on informal social networks that operate 'behind the chart' (Tichy and Fombrun, 1979; Tichy, 1981; Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993), and literature on firm performance.

While the entrepreneurial mindset would have given an inaccurate understanding to top-level managers, the intrapreneurial mindset can potentially be a vital construct for firms that aim to remain 'entrepreneurial' over time. Future researchers can expend effort in unravelling the facets of 'x' that distinguish IM from EM. This stream of research shall further progress into measuring the intrapreneurial mindset.

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Figures:

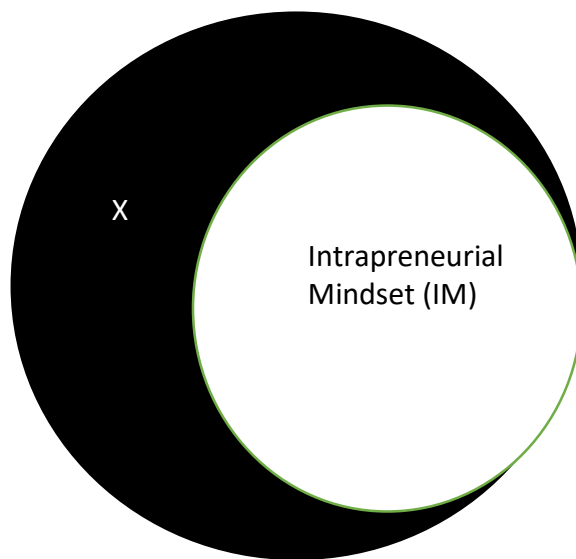
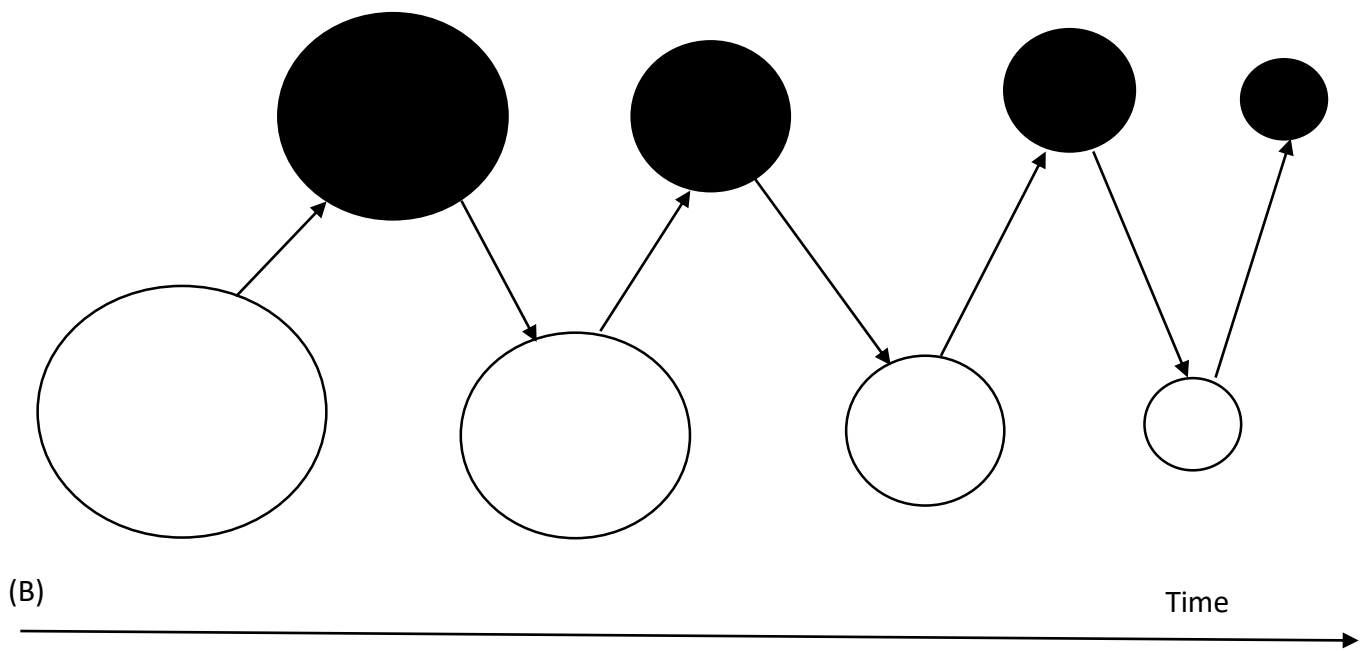
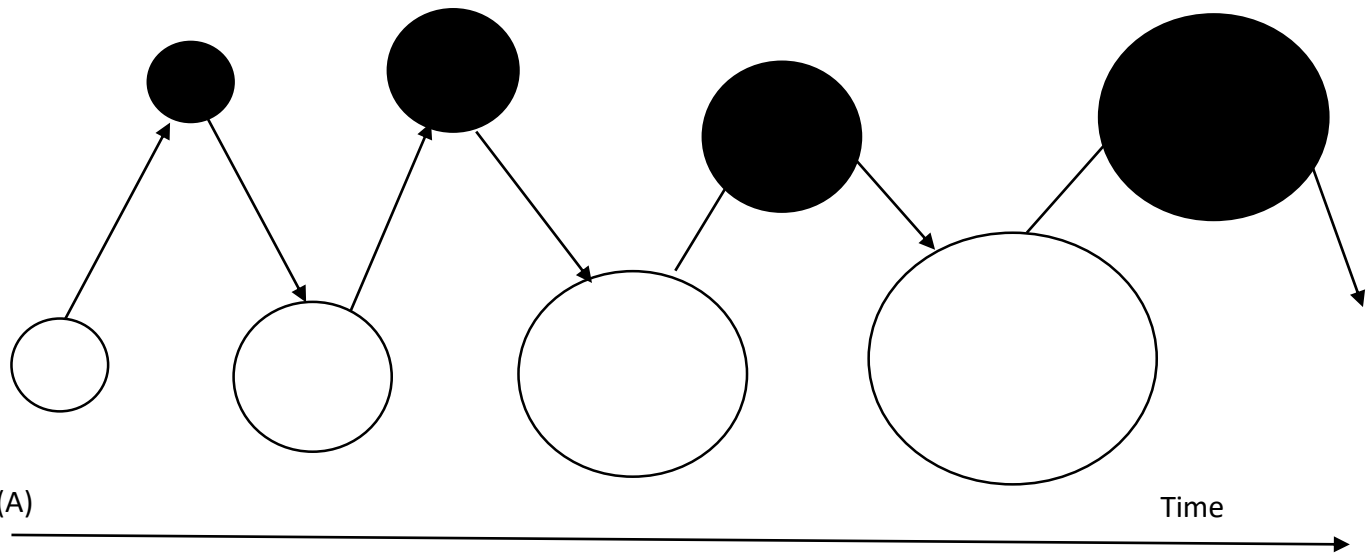


Fig. 1: Depicting intrapreneurial mindset (IM) as a part of entrepreneurial mindset

(EM= x+ IM)



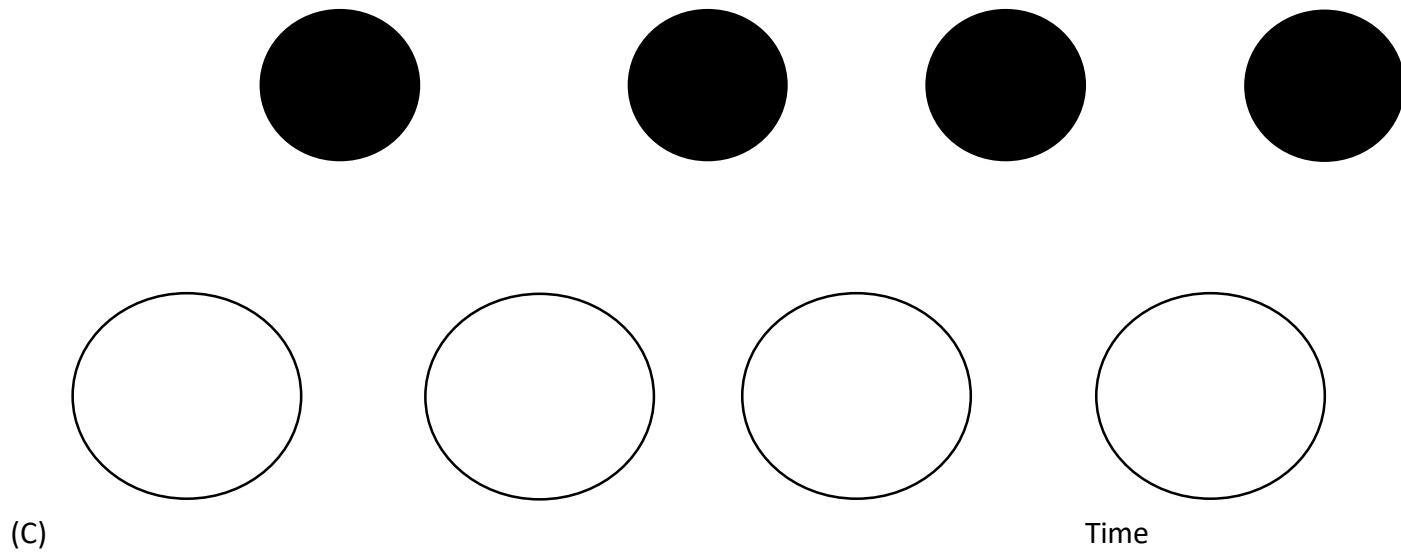
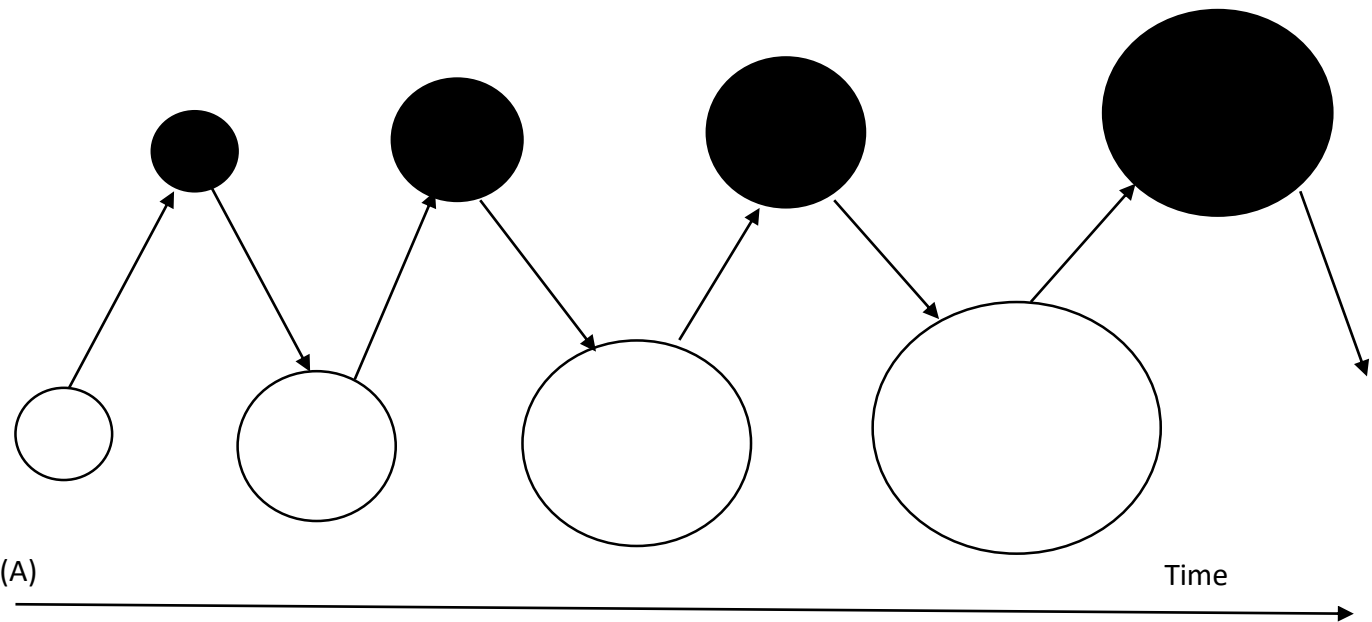


Fig. 2: The Dynamism of Entrepreneurial Spirals: (A) Enhancing Spiral, (B) Diminishing Spiral, and (C) No Spiral (Steady State)



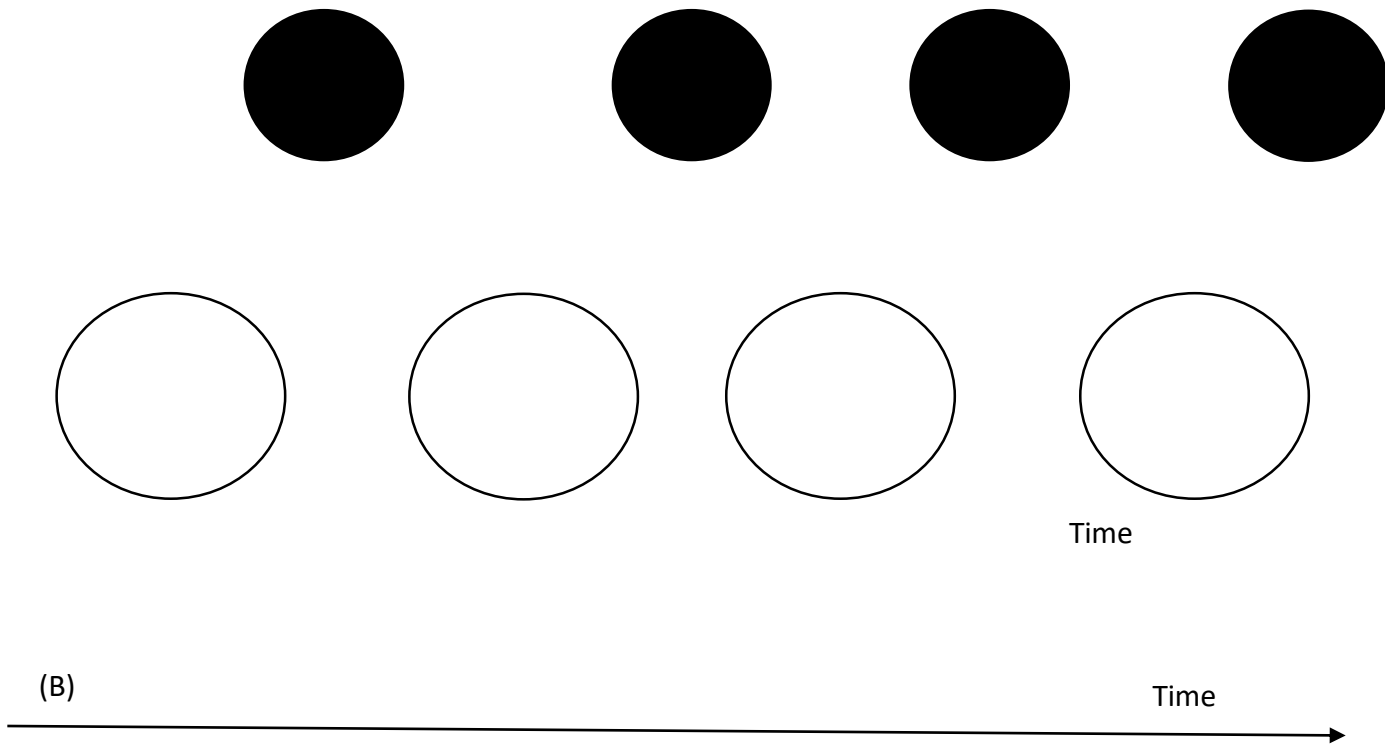


Fig. 3: The Dynamism of Intrapreneurial Spirals: (A) Enhancing Spiral, (B) steady state spirals

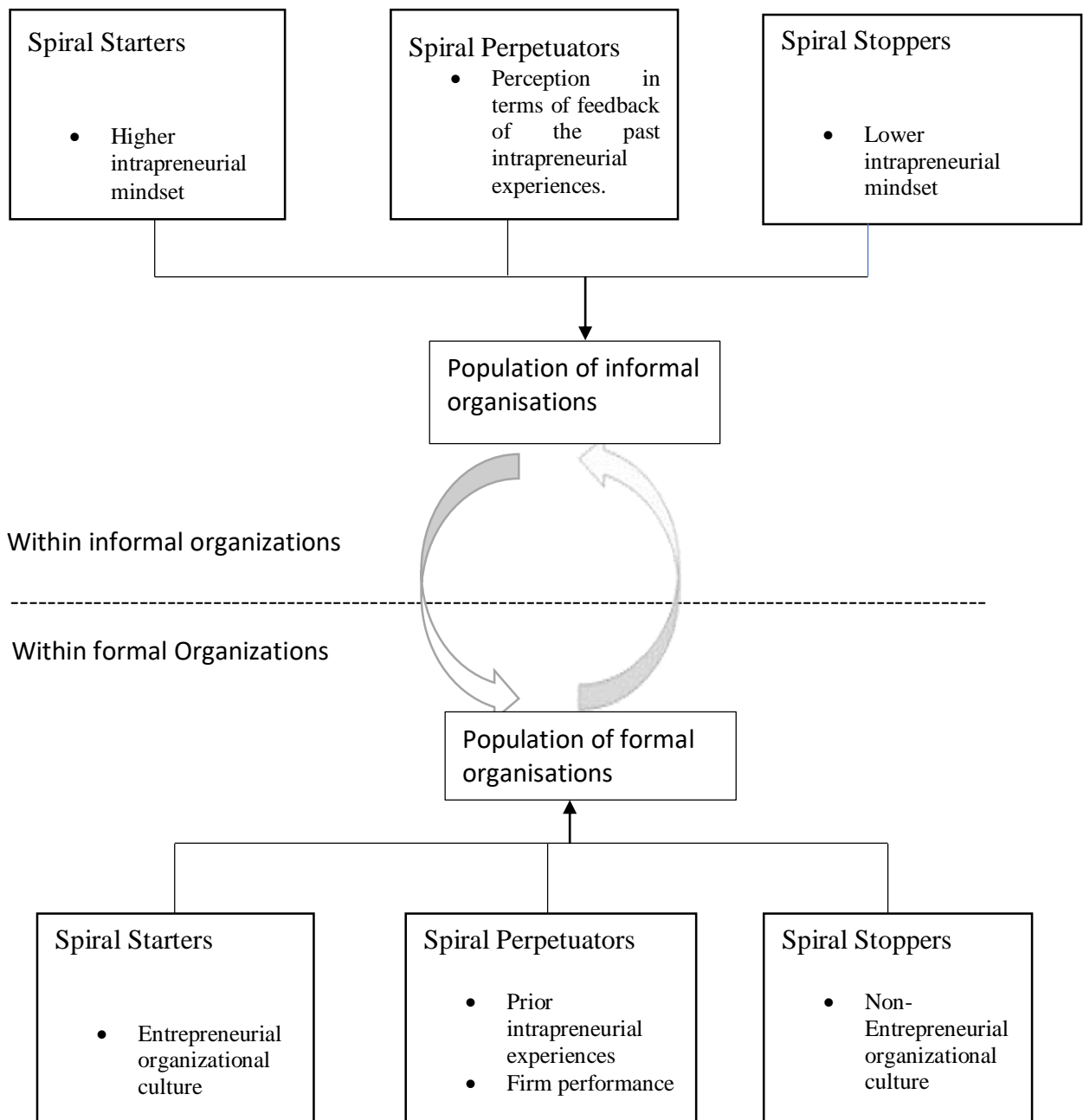


Fig. 4: Model of Intrapreneurial Spirals

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