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**GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON  
BUSINESS AND FINANCE  
PROCEEDINGS**

**VOLUME 8, NUMBER 1  
2013**

**ISSN 2168-0612 FLASH  
DRIVE**

**ISSN 1941-9589 ONLINE**

*The Institute for Business and Finance Research*

*Las Vegas, Nevada  
January 2-5, 2013*

**Global**  
IBFR

*TheIBFR.ORG*

# UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMIC OF THE ENTREPRENEURIAL PROCESS: THE INNOVATIVE ENTREPRENEUR AND THE STRATEGIC DECISIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*Literature regarding to the process of firm's start-ups has supported the idea that the entrepreneur fulfills a key role in the economic development, because of his strategic vision and as a result of his capacity to generate innovations, but also employment and economic growth. Nevertheless, recent empirical studies, have mainly tackled the process from the demand perspective, with focus on institutional, economical and context aspects that favours or hinders the development of the entrepreneurial capacities. In this sense, the entrepreneur's role, his skills, his decisions and actions have been less observed from the economical field and from the strategic decision area. Even though the debate about the importance of recognizing the subjectivity forecasting of the key drivers that impact and define the observed phenomenon is increasing. The aim of the article is to understand the innovative entrepreneur's role in the entrepreneurial process through the use of a biographic design method, so as to identify throughout his life the way he decides to initiate a firm, how he experiences the process and evaluates its performance. For that reason, it is proposed to analyze Enrique Eskenazi's entrepreneurial life, Grupo Petersen's President, one of the leading economic groups in the Argentinean business arena. His public recognition is associated to the YPF S.A's shares purchase in 2008 – the Leader oil company in the Argentinean market -, which has been recently nationalized.*

**JEL:** M10- M20

**Key Words:** Entrepreneur- biographic design method- strategic-decision making

## INTRODUCTION

Several authors have investigated aspects related to the firm's start up's process, its stages, moments and subsequent performance (Reynolds 1991; Reynolds et al. 2005, Acs, 2006, between others). The relevance of understanding this process lays in the predominant role that fulfills the entrepreneurs in the capitalist system development, given its skills to innovate and create employment and economic growth. Literature's evolution has shown the different models that explain this phenomenon. In a first stage, the firm's start up theory based in the analyze through supply's perspective (*pull factors*), that is to say, relating psychological elements, natural traits and personal motivation/incentive that drives an individual to begin its entrepreneurship (Mc Clelland, 1961; Gartner, 1989). Recently, specially due to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's creation (GEM) and the development of statistic information that permits a comparison of the entrepreneurial activity in different countries and regions, the theoretical and empirical contributions have been focused in the analyses of push factors.

That is, institutional and market conditions that attract entrepreneurial vocations to certain environments and no others (Álvarez and Urbano, 2012). In this sense, it is observed an important peak of the institutional analyses of entrepreneurship associated to an empirical investigation's enforcement carried out through aggregated and quantitative information. Even though the scope of statistics favored the comparison and the development of politics for entrepreneurs, these restrains the entrepreneur's approach from an comprehensive and holistic view that integrate his actions and intentions, its

natural and personal traits and his relationship with the environment where he socializes and detects entrepreneurial opportunities. The purpose of this article is to connect the hypothesis of the entrepreneurial risk management and agile style management as a fuel to economies in the world. In order to expand this, it is proposed to analyze Enrique Eskenazi's entrepreneurial life, Grupo Petersen's President, one of the leading economic groups in the Argentinean business arena.

His public recognition is associated to the YPF S.A's shares purchase in 2008 – the Leader oil company in the Argentinean market-, which has been recently nationalized. Because of that, this paper proposes to implement a narrative approach, identifying the principle events that define his entrepreneurial career. The novelty and contribution that provides this method is its limited use in the entrepreneurial arena, even when relevant authors in the field have emphasized its relevance (Gartner, 2010). The paper is structured in the following way. In the first place, we resume the main theoretical lineaments from the Austrian perspective that analyzes the entrepreneur's figure from an active role. In the second place, we briefly describe the method, but also the entrepreneur's analyze and the results obtained from the given data. Finally, an entrepreneurial decision model is developed and its conclusions.

#### Austrian Entrepreneurs And Market Opportunities. Theoretical Framework.

Since the beginning of the marginalism revolution, the Austrian perspective has emphasized on the relevance of human action in explaining economic decisions. In fact, Mises (1980) built a theory based on *praxeology*. The idea of this perspective is that individuals take decisions according to their objectives, subjective valuations and specific knowledge about the world. Furthermore, those characteristics imply a dynamic and uncertain context that often is not in equilibrium, where knowledge is disperse, pragmatic and tacit. Therefore, is not possible to explain economic relations considering a static and deterministic context as neoclassic economy sustained their arguments.

Moreover, Austrian economists pointed the following traits that describe economic agents: 1) specific knowledge of their preferences and opportunities; 2) subjective interpretation of the economic facts and other agent's behaviors; 3) subjective expectations of future events; 4) active engagement in new unexploited opportunities. Summarily, market competence is promoted by different agents that know different things, manage disperse and incomplete information, sometimes in an adversarial mode. As Hayek (1998) argued, market competence is a discovery process. The searchers of new opportunities (new products or incremental innovations of existent ones) are entrepreneurs. Therefore, market competition is an entrepreneurial process; profit maximization is the exploitation of a new economic opportunity and the entrepreneur, the key economic agent in the economic system.

According to Kirzner (1973), sellers and buyers act in an entrepreneurial mode. That is, they exercise the competence of taking decisions, searching for new products and changes to pursue and maintain economic benefits. As neoclassic explanations ignore the consequences of the existence of uncertainty, the market competence is unreal. Knight's ideal (1933) situation of perfect competence has omitted the consequences that emerge from uncertainty's existence, being the intelligence and the entrepreneurial capacity the responsible of its existence "in situations in which there are no correct proceedings so as to decide what to do". Individuals should create their own structures to comprehend a decision and it is not a rational choice's process but it depends on human intelligence's traits (Loasby, 2006: 33).

In this sense, Knight joins the entrepreneurial function, a human intelligence's trait, with uncertainty or non insurable risk. In fact, this author calls entrepreneur to who decides in a company, without being the owner, because he assumes the chance that this independent entrepreneur may not invest capital in his business, just providing his work in such a sense that the capability of gaining money is his principal

guarantee. From a similar perspective, Kirzner (1973) assumed that Mises's human action is an entrepreneurial action, in the sense that is capable of discovering, innovating, predicting or appreciating opportunities in a dynamic and competitive world, where agents purchase their personal interests. The entrepreneurial activity and profits arise from instability conditions from different individuals plans; conditions that the entrepreneur captures and tries to manage with his actions. Consequently, his entrepreneurial activity is basically a coordination activity of the different personal projects, owed to his imagination and audacity. Thus, for Kirzner (1998), the entrepreneur is the agent who is seeking for opportunities and throughout his intervention reestablishes equilibrium in the market. Therefore, the entrepreneurial function basically consists in opportunity's perception, assigning an active role to the entrepreneur, as a key agent for market equilibrium's evolution and attainment. According to Kirzner (1999), the entrepreneur's role is essentially creative, develops new information where he perceives that there is a profit opportunity that the market notifies through prices, in the sense that agents learn the way they should act; coordinating their activities.

Kirzner (1973) believes that it is not an entrepreneur the one who knows how and where to buy cheap sources and where to sell them at higher prices or which are the market's technological advances. If its role was confined just to manage existing information, profits would tend to be eliminated in an equilibrium situation. On the other hand, if it is taken into account that knowledge is disperse and incomplete, it infers that from this imperfection, business opportunities may emerge. In line with this concept, this author considers that taking advantage of available information is not what characterize an entrepreneur but its perspicacity, that is to say, to know where he should seek the information for taking de most efficient and appropriate decision; that is, without knowing exactly what is looking for and without undertaking any delivered action of research, he is constantly watching over, prepared and ready to seek for new discoveries and profit opportunities. Fort the rest, only in a capitalist or opened economy, the entrepreneur may develop his perspicacity, arbitration and to be the driving force that motivates the markets's development (Baumol, 2003; Casson 1993).

## METHODOLOGY

We develop a biographical study combining primary data (in-depth interview) and secondary one (documents) highlighting the main aspects related to entrepreneurial decisions. The method of research allows us to deeply understand Enrique Eskenazi's leadership strengths (Gartner, 2010), covering his first years as a child, providing educational and family values to all his career stages/experiences. Placing as specific lends on risk management as well as companies's acquisitions.

In-depth interview made to this role model of entrepreneurship and also based on the documentary analysis of his autobiography, it clearly lays out the key factors that impact in the process of start up, its restructuring, expansion and diversification. By describing the different moments in his business's life and of each decision of new firms' acquisitions, this research inquires in the model of decision making that defines the entrepreneurial dynamic, the key elements in the process and the entrepreneurial qualities shown in each observed moment. The results show that behind the decision of firms' purchase there is a innovative entrepreneur leader that is constantly seeking for new opportunities in the market, and agile and innovative style that makes the big difference in business growth, manages information and networks, assumes risks, faces challenges of solving problems, makes strategic planning, makes innovation in process through companies' restructuring and devotes his life to develop his entrepreneurial personality assuming challenges when entering to diversify markets. Therefore, innovative entrepreneurs have great impact on economic growth in any market, industry or global business context.

The interview was done in February 2012 in YPF's Company. For analyzing the decisions strategy we identify the central categories using Glaser and Strauss (1999) methodology. Firstly, doing an axial codification analysis and, secondly, a selective codification with the main categories. The validation is guaranteed by the saturation of categories, the transcription of the interview, the triangulation of researchers and sources of information for the interpretation of data.

## RESULTS

Enrique Eskenazi's career for sure started when he was ten years old. As we know family values are key to drive behaviours. His father, Isaac Eskenazi, gave him a tray full of toys, and said "*if you want to buy any candies or magazines, you should sell those toys in the neighbourhood*". This upbringing approach taught Enrique Eskenazi how to manage efficiently his working capital since he was very young, and early injected him his entrepreneurial decisions. He would also define himself, as a "*curious and naughty*" whom would love to call people's attention, so temper is key as well.

Another important piece of his life was that his parents had migrated from Istanbul to the province of Santa Fe, Argentina, so from this experience he internalized the concept of risk and a complete change of the family life. "*The concept of risk thrills me, I believe that if there is someone who exposes is the person who migrates, because abandons its roots over a dream's base...*"

Nevertheless, not everything diminishes to taking risks. In the interview shared with us, he, very humbly mentioned that although he acquired knowledge after some unsuccessful episodes, luck has also been on his side. "*It is impossible to deny that before, during and after everything I could say, there is a factor that installs, a kind of diva between factors, that is the good luck. It is only in hazard's function –that neither philosophies, nor economists - can explain some results of entrepreneurial life*".

We also understand, in this paper that formal education, training and experience in big companies are fundamental to consolidate the skills and capabilities for an innovative leader of this nature. He took up chemical engineering in the Universidad Nacional del Litoral, (UNL) and the good chance of requiring a trainee gave him the opportunity to have his first and foremost contact with the multinational Bunge & Born group (first multinational company in Argentina). Starting off with his twenty four years he drove his whole career in this group to get to the general manager position. His almost thirty years gave him the chance to expand his knowledge as a businessman, take advanced courses in the USA, manage diverse industries, and in this way gave him more confidence and expertise in the enterprise arena. In this period of his life, he got married with Sylvia who has relentlessly supported him around his career life.

It is natural in human beings to stay in the comfort zone, but a true entrepreneur challenges this concept, in the very best professional momentum Enrique Eskenazi had as a general manager in Bunge & Born he decided to resign and focus his entrepreneurial instinct to new business path and fulfilling his dream of becoming an independent businessman. "*It came a time in my career, where I had reached to the general manager's position, I was a guy with prestige and I said I want to make my ultimate stage of my career as an entrepreneur*". Giava FBR S.A, was the company that pushed Enrique Eskenazi in his entrepreneurial dream come true -A food machine's consultancy, manufacture and sale company-,it was partnered with Italian businessmen. Though the company was very well managed, the economical and political instability didn't help, so he continued seeking for further opportunities. "*The food industry's businessmen knew me and also I'd been one of the founders of an organization that was called COPAR, that for the very first time I gathered together all the food industry and all that gave me an affection with honesty, prestige and also an upright mainstream, typical from Bunge & Born*".

At that moment, Enrique Eskenazi met Carlos Alberto Petersen, owner of Petersen, Thiele & Cruz Arquitectos & Ingenieros, a very important firm that was on the edge of bankruptcy, and offered him the

management of the company. Because of his knowledge in the subject and the prestige reached in the field, the management of the company is given to this innovative entrepreneur. At the same time, this entrepreneur visualizes a great opportunity, buying stock from shareholders that withdrew from the company. Finally, Carlos Alberto Petersen and Enrique Eskenazi remain as partners and owners from this company.

It is interesting to go in depth in this purchase's decision, considering that thereafter, this innovative entrepreneur generated big decisions, completely restructured and turned around the company. The results, for assuming such a risk, have been extremely satisfactory for the entrepreneur. Each businessman needs to have the accurate balance of risk management, he must recognize where and how to play with it on his daily decisions. *"I remember that in certain moments of crisis some of the stockholders wanted to sell stock because they were exhausted. So I started to buy them because I honestly saw that Petersen had an excellent future in the mid-term"*.

As per this new job, he starts expanding in new and different fields. The first diversification carried out by Enrique Eskenazi from Grupo Petersen is related to the financial area. This innovative entrepreneur identified as essential to support the different Argentinean economic areas such as agrarian and mining industry by creating a regional bank. There are several reasons for that: due to costs reduction, a specialized bank for different industries. Furthermore, profits would stay in the area and reinvested in the sector and would not be rerouted to the city. In line with this strategy he didn't hesitate about the decision of acquiring San Juan's bank in 1996; since then a multiple bank acquisitions: Santa Cruz Bank in 1998, Nuevo Banco de Santa Fe in 2003, Nuevo Banco de Entre Rios, in 2005. More importantly is to mention, that these acquisitions had been made in a critical context of the financial sector. The '90, was a decade in which the financial sector had a really poor profitability. Moreover, state-owned companies have started being privatized. So, this entrepreneur, with his team takes the opportunity to participate in these biddings behind bank acquisition and thereafter having restructured. Within this financial move, he modified the name of the company as Grupo Petersen. Another relevant strategic driver is a very smart networking within the business arena, Enrique Eskenazi shows how important is, with a wide spread of examples within his experience throughout strategic associations with investors.

*"We began to develop the idea of organizing a regional bank so the money didn't continue flowing to Banks in the city of Buenos Aires or to the Gran Buenos Aires. These were absorbing an important percentage of the profits that were produced by the country. That is, the concept was that the capital stayed in the region where it was produced for, from there, obtaining profits for the simple fact that in the regional banks the money has no other chance than being re-invested in the area. The key consists in retaining the money in the province's area."*

Consistent with his innovative thinking process, he enters in the agricultural wine production industry, Santa Sylvia, approximately in the year 2000. He was foreseeing a strong global demand with the entrance of Asian countries. It is interesting the way, at the in-depth interview, the entrepreneur rescues the role of farmers, supporting the idea that they are the real innovative entrepreneurs, who take constant risks. What demonstrates also, that this innovative entrepreneur value the person who is capable of taking risk. This is, for him, a fundamental and necessary trait that has to have an innovative entrepreneur.

*"Argentina is a country with great possibilities because there are four riches. There are agrarian riches that are the Argentinean basis because it is a combination of capable people, that even they seem to be ignorant they assume risks, that are the true entrepreneurs, that are the agricultures, big, small, medium-sized....and that they give a mainstay to Argentinean growth, with the world's needs and more now with the inclusion of the Asian countries. The other riches are mining, energy and education."*

In line with the idea exposed above, the decision of entering to the energetic industry becomes the third stage of Grupo Petersen's diversification. It is a quantum leap that Enrique Eskenazi makes, the acquisition's decision, in this case, of YPF S.A shares in 2008. Is extremely important, because of the dimension of the transaction but also because of it is a national emblem for Argentina. Repsol owned approximately 85% of the stock, first Enrique Eskenazi acquired 10%, and then, in 2011 acquired an additional 15%. YPF S.A. (*Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales*) was established in 1922 as a state-owned company. The company has dedicated, from its establishment, to exploration, distillation and oil sale. Afterwards, in 1992 the company is privatized. Therefore, six years later, Repsol, a Spanish company, makes the acquisition. Since May 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2012, the company returned to the government's hands. This generated an international commotion not only between the governants from different countries, that showed their annoyance but also from others that demonstrated their support to this decision. Enrique Eskenazi explained the dimension of this transaction, and background of YPF S.A. historical data.

*"The decision of acquiring YPF meant a great leap for our company: we joined up to one of the most important energetic companies in Latin-America. Diversifying in a key industry, with an important growth potential for the country's development....This activity represents a sustainability base of commodities food's industry that characterize the country".*

Taking into account the interpretation and the obtained elements from the interview and the documentary given by the entrepreneur, we could analyze Enrique Eskenazi's life stages as well as professional and business milestones. Such as it is summarized inn the following comparative table.

Table 1: Decision-making strategies and personal traits

C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
Decision	Decision's description	Entrepreneurial traits	Opportunities's detection	Extract that relates C3 & C4
Decision N°1: becoming a businessman	Giava FBR S.A -A food machine's consultancy, manufacture and sale company-,it was partnered with Italian businessmen.	risky brave network persistant freelance independent	FBR, italian firm - dedicated to machine's manufacture for the food industry- proposes an association with Enrique Eskenazi, because of its prestige and knowhow acquired in Bunge & Born.	<i>"The food industry's businessmen knew me and also I'd been one of the founders of an organization that was called COPAR, that for the very first time I gathered together all the food industry and all that gave me an affection with honesty, prestige and also an upright mainstream, typical from Bunge &amp; Born".</i>
Decision N°2: Great challenge	Petersen, Thiele & Cruz Arquitectos & Ingenieros, a very important firm that was on the edge of bankruptcy offered him the management of the company.	challenging seeker knowhow prestige working capability network seeker	This entrepreneur visualizes a great opportunity, buying stock from shareholders that withdrew from the company.	<i>"I remember that in certain moments of crisis some of the stockholders wanted to sell shares because they were exhausted. So I started to buy them because I honestly saw that Petersen had an excellent future in the mid-term".</i>
Decision N°3: Diversification 1° stage: FINANC E	The first diversification carried out by Enrique Eskenazi from Grupo Petersen is related to the financial area. In line with this strategy he didn't hesitate about the decision of acquiring San Juan's bank in 1996. Santa Cruz Bank in 1998	determined creative forward looking approach  networker	This innovative entrepreneur identified as essential to support the different Argentinean economic areas such as agrarian and mining industry by creating a regional bank. There are several reasons for that: due to costs reduction, a specialized bank for different industries. Furthermore, profits	<i>"Resuming Grupo Petersen's idea of creating regional banks, the group supports the idea of unifying banks, either by acquiring banks or by making strategic associations, because our goal is to work in common services...for reducing costs through the centralized services purchase"</i>  <i>"...the idea of investing in the Patagonia excited me, because I intuited its revolutionary's role in Argentina. There was a promising future over there: oil and gas industry, mining and fish industry and tourism..."</i>

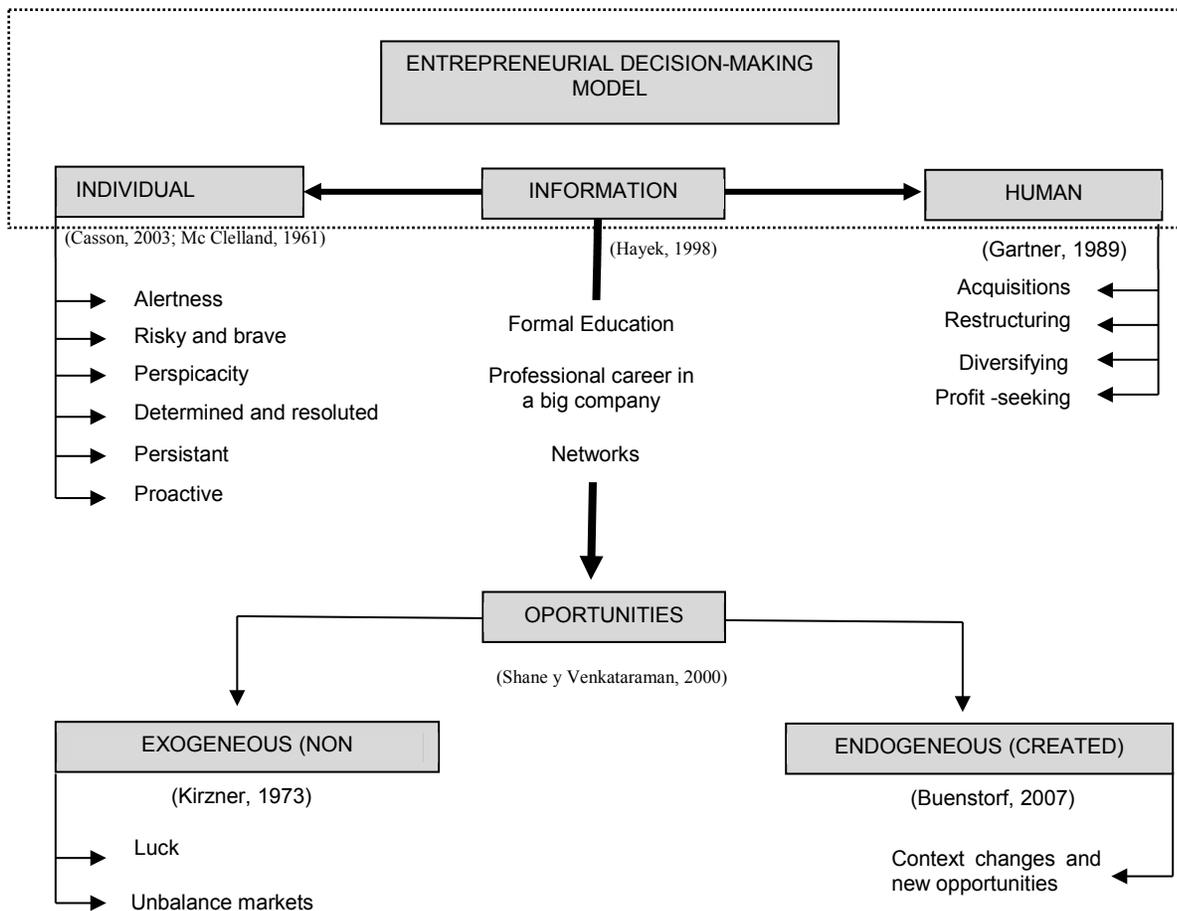
	Nuevo Banco de Santa Fe in 2003, Nuevo Banco de Entre Rios, in 2005.	networker	would stay in the area and reinvested in the sector and would not be rerouted to the city.	<i>"We began to develop the idea of organizing a regional bank so the money didn't continue flowing to Banks in the city of Buenos Aires or to the Gran Buenos Aires. These were absorbing an important percentage of the profits that were produced by the country. That is, the concept was that the capital stayed in the region where it was produced for, from there, obtaining profits for the simple fact that in the regional banks the money has no other chance than being re-invested in the area."</i>
Decision N°4: Diversification 2° stage: AGRARIAN INDUSTRY	He enters in the agricultural wine production industry, Santa Sylvia and Xumek, approximately in the year 2000 in the province of San Juan.	seeker resolved sense	He was foreseeing a strong global demand with the entrance of Asian countries.	<i>"Argentina is a country with great possibilities because there are four riches. There are agrarian riches that are the Argentinean basis because it is a combination of capable people, that even they seem to be ignorant they assume risks, that are the true entrepreneurs, that are the agricultures, big, small, medium-sized....and that they give a mainstay to Argentinean growth, with the world's needs and more now with the inclusion of the Asian countries. The other riches are mining, energy and education."</i>
Decision N°5: Diversification 3° stage: ENERGY	Entering to the energetic industry becomes the third stage of Grupo Petersen's diversification. It is a quantum leap that Enrique Eskenazi makes, the acquisition's decision, of YPF S.A shares in 2008.	risky network	Related to context, Enrique Eskenazi mentions the developed prestige by the Grupo Petersen that gave them support from swiss, northamerican, brasilian and mexican banks, that permitted Grupo Petersen	<i>"The decision of acquiring YPF meant a great leap for our company: we joined up to one of the most important energetic companies in Latin-America. Diversifying in a key industry, with an important growth potential for the country's development....This activity represents a sustainability base of commodities food's industry that characterize the country"</i>

In addition to this, in accordance to the presented information, the following figure resumes the elements that have an impact in the entrepreneurial decision model of this entrepreneur from a naturalized and dynamic perspective

The previous diagram synthesizes the principal elements that define the entrepreneurial decisions from the analyzed entrepreneur. Following the analysis's logic proposed by several authors that give an active role to the entrepreneur in the dynamic start up's process (Casson, 1993; Gartner 1989; Foss et al. 2006; Casson and Wadenson, 2007; Buenstorf, 2007 and Shane & Venkatamaran, 2000). From the entrepreneur's active role, the model identifies as main personal traits the following: assumes risks, alertness, creative, coordinator, resolute and determined, forward looking approach, challenger, brave, persistent, networker, and strategist.

Additionally, it stresses his capability to innovate, considering that he recognizes the influence of changes in the environment. On the other hand from his actions, his abilities to evaluate and judge the market's opportunities are stressed, his capability for assigning scarce resources and his skills for entering to dynamic industries, with strategic scope and of key impact for the economic and social development of the country. The link between the actions and this entrepreneur's profile is the information availability, which is the access way to those exogenous opportunities. The network and relations developed by the entrepreneur, determined element in the entrepreneurs's decision making model, reduces the chance of committing two mistakes. On the one hand, by losing a profitable business opportunity or on the other hand, by carrying out an idea that he considers profitable presumptively and then it is not. This model considers an indispensable requirement to obtain information that allows to detect profitable business opportunity; information that maximize the entrepreneur's profits. In this case, the opportunities' structure it is not only an exogenous element, where alertness of individuals determines its exploitation, but also can create those opportunities through human actions.

Figure 1: Entrepreneurial decision model from Austrian's perspective



Source: Author's own.

From this perspective and in concordance to what was expounded by the interviewee, the market's dynamic and opening constantly generate new business opportunities, and as Buenstorf defines (2007) "like company's development, industries evolution changes the nature of the existent opportunities and also creates new ones". In this way, exist two ways to analyze new companies' arising. The first one, with an objective character, where given the opportunities' structure, firm's start up depends on the alertness of individuals to recognize and exploit them (Casson, 2003). The other view is peculiar and dynamic, as it is defined by Buenstorf (2007), and where the evolutionary perspective allows to include in the analyzes of opportunities' nature, the endogenous changes and differences between industries and regions. So, when there are diverse paths in the markets, are these markets that mark their development and dynamic. The companies that take part in it, not only can exploit the existent but not exploited opportunities but also by creating new opportunities, according to their own experience and learning process.

## CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this paper, we have illustrated that the opportunities' recognition is a subjective process, even when its existence is an objective phenomenon that it is not perceived for all the individuals neither in any moment. The entrepreneurial opportunities cannot be exploited having as a reference the optimization

action because the range of options as a result of new products' introduction is unknown, excluding the possibility of making mechanic calculation for valuing the alternatives. The entrepreneurial decisions involve the identification of means and goals previously not detected by the agents in the market. The process that links the individual with the business opportunities' capture is being analyzed in three stages: 1) Discovery's phase; 2) opportunity's running, and 3) the way to materialize it.

The discovery's phase is related with the ability of some individuals to visualize new ideas towards others that doesn't have that kind of ability. This asymmetry produces entrepreneurial opportunities and it depends on personal traits and abilities, manage of information and the implemented measures that the entrepreneur develops in a specific moment, that it is not a standardized layout in the population. It is also important to point out the value that the entrepreneur gives to that opportunity; assessment which is comprehended by its capacity of foreseeing its profits and its acceptance in the market. We believe that these entrepreneurs are essential in the business arena because they forge throughout their decisions and actions, building up plans in regions and countries simply with their own dreams, ideas and traits, that mean solid structures for future generations and most importantly, they are the driving force for up and coming entrepreneurs. This entrepreneurial style propels individuals to take risks and seek for their personal interests.

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