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A call for novel research in entrepreneurship

Abstract

The article outlines selected issues that are of particular relevance in entrepreneurship research, including comparative research, studies at lower levels of enquiry as well as contextualized enquiries, and where we see special interest from the *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business* when it comes to receiving submissions.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship; Small Business; Call for Papers; Literature Review

Introduction

With the launch of the *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business* and its thematic area on entrepreneurship, we provide yet another space to make your research in the field of entrepreneurship public and to help you reach out to a wide research community.

Through the articles published, we, the Associate Editors, aim to illustrate the contemporary issues that new and established researchers are investigating within the broad area of entrepreneurship. In this introduction and call for submissions, we outline selected issues that are of particular relevance in entrepreneurship research and where we see special interest from the *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business* when it comes to receiving submissions.

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An examination of selected issues: what we know and what *we need to know*

As the Editors-in-Chief have already pointed out, one significant theme in current research is the importance of **context**, i.e. the geographical, political, and socio-economic environment within which entrepreneurship takes place. Within the strand of academic literature addressing context, Veciana and Urbano (2008), for instance, have called for researchers to look at how context promotes or inhibits the emergence of entrepreneurs and the rate of firm creation. They argue that researchers should move away from an approach that sees entrepreneurs as autonomous and ‘given’ actors, and should instead demonstrate that the process of becoming an entrepreneur is highly conditioned by contextual factors. In fact, it is now widely acknowledged that individual entrepreneurs respond to the incentives embodied in business, social, spatial, and institutional contexts (Welter 2011). However, entrepreneurship research over the last 20 years focusing primarily on context remains scant in comparison to the high percentage of papers focusing upon a more general managerial approach (Veciana 2006; Fayolle and Liñán 2015).

A related point is the existence of **comparative research** in entrepreneurship. With the greater emphasis placed on contextualization, cross-national comparisons have served increasingly as a means for gaining a deeper understanding of diverse and changing societies, their structures, and their institutions. But how much cross-national research is really conducted in entrepreneurship? We note that entrepreneurship researchers have gone some way in incorporating an international dimension into their conceptual and empirical work. This is perhaps best illustrated by the growing body of research on entrepreneurship in emerging markets, which has become a trendy focus in entrepreneurship research. However, much work is needed to move beyond analyses conducted mainly at the level of the organizational field (i.e. focusing on the environment in which firms operate), in order to use the firm and lower levels as the level of analysis. This has led to calls for studies that take into account how institutional processes manifest themselves within small enterprises or even how an organization itself ‘might be treated as an institutional context for understanding intraorganizational behavior’

(Greenwood et al. 2008, 29). Nevertheless, there is room for more comparative research from different theoretical perspectives to identify successful entrepreneurial practices and policy initiatives as well as to identify convergence and divergence in entrepreneurial dynamics.

However, moving towards **lower levels of enquiry** requires questioning our assumptions and broadening our knowledge as entrepreneurship researchers. Some commentators observe that at present the debate on the link between entrepreneurs and specific contexts has been held back considerably because viewing the entrepreneur as an ‘individual’ has led us into the trap of thinking in terms of ‘self-identities... rather than the less obvious working interactions which constitute and support them’ (Chia 1995, 596). The people who actually work in start-ups (who are often critical of the process of entrepreneurship) rarely figure within prevailing discourses (Ogbor 2000). Without doubt, the entrepreneur is important for the success of the start-up, but in most firms some form of teamwork is normal and essential to firm performance and we need to learn more about dynamics in work and intra-organizational relations that influence the operation of smaller establishments.

Through these illustrative examples, we want to trigger thoughts on the research carried out by academics in the field of entrepreneurship with regard to its level of contextualization, and on the depths and substance of research that may provide new insights into the dynamics of entrepreneurial processes (which may not necessarily be initiated solely by the entrepreneur him/herself).

Remarks on the origin and evolution of the entrepreneurship research field

Due to the multidisciplinary approach taken by the *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business*, we consider it particularly rewarding to review the origins of entrepreneurship as a field of research. Here, for this purpose, we select important developments based on the review by Carlsson et al. (2013) found in *Small Business Economics*.

The term ‘entrepreneur’ has been used by various academics repeatedly for more than 250 years. The origin of the word is French and roughly translates as ‘business person’. There is some consensus that the first scientific use of the term dates back to Richard Cantillon (1680-1734), whose main work was

published after his death in 1755 (Pleitner 2003). Cantillon believed that an entrepreneur is someone who exercises business judgement to deal with uncertainty. However, for a long time classic economic theory failed to understand the role of entrepreneurial activities in the economy (Carlsson et al. 2013). In fact, some economists such as Jean-Baptiste Say or John Stuart Mill merely hinted at the concept.

The first economist to focus on the role of entrepreneurship in economic development was Joseph A. Schumpeter (1885-1950) (Carlsson et al. 2013). The second edition translated into English of his work *The Theory of Economic Development* was published in 1934. It argues that economic development arises when 'new combinations appear discontinuously'. These new combinations must include: (1) the introduction of new products or new product quality; (2) new methods of production; (3) the opening up of a new market; (4) the achievement of a new supply source for raw materials; or (5) the reorganization of a sector (Bull and Willard 1993). Schumpeter asserted that carrying out a new combination is what we call business, and the individuals whose role it is to carry it out we call 'entrepreneurs' (Schumpeter 1936, 74).

A few years later, Schumpeter reiterated that the role of the entrepreneur is '...to reform or revolutionize the pattern of production by exploiting an invention or, more generally, an untried technological possibility for producing a new commodity or producing an old one in a new way, by opening up a new source of supply of material or a new outlet for products, by reorganizing an industry and so on' (Schumpeter 1942, 132). He distinguished between economic growth and economic development, the latter being facilitated by the creation of new opportunities through 'creative destruction'.

From the mid-1940s, a series of events took place that became the first steps towards the formation of the entrepreneurship field. For example, in 1947 Peter Drucker gave the first 'Entrepreneurship and Innovation' lecture at Harvard Business School. One year later, the University of St. Gallen organized the first conference focused specifically on small business problems, and Arthur Cole founded Harvard University's Research Center in Entrepreneurial History. During the 1950s, other events took

place such as the first conference organized by the National Council for Small Business Management Development, which since 1977 has been widely known as the International Council for Small Business (ICSB). In 1953, Peter Drucker started a new Entrepreneurship and Innovation course at New York University (Carlsson et al. 2013).

David McClelland published his landmark study *The Achieving Society* in 1961. This is one of the first empirical studies in entrepreneurship based on the psychological school of thought and focusing on personality traits. The 'acquired needs theory' or 'learned needs theory' developed by McClelland (1961, 1987) has been of great importance for the identification of the personal characteristics of entrepreneurs. The motivational model approach is easily applied to the study of individuals who carry out activities based on some inner motivation and that lead to the formalization and development of start-ups despite the lack of favourable surrounding conditions. McClelland (1961) stated that entrepreneurs were self-confident individuals with a high need for achievement and a preference for situations with medium-level risk. Thus, McClelland's contribution has not only become a major landmark in the development of entrepreneurship research associated with the behavioural and personality traits of entrepreneurs, but has also demonstrated the relationship between economic development in countries and their populations' need for achievement.

However, it was not until the late 1960s that economists became interested in the role of entrepreneurship in economic development and economic theory. Examples include the work of Harvey Leibenstein (1968), *Entrepreneurship and Development*, or William J. Baumol (1968), with his work *Entrepreneurship in Economic Theory*. In 1970, Purdue University celebrated the first research conference in entrepreneurship and in 1974 created the first entrepreneurship group under the auspices of the Academy of Management (Carlsson et al. 2013).

In the 1980s, the academic community started to talk about entrepreneurship as an academic discipline in its own right. This became evident through the inauguration of the first *Babson College Entrepreneurship Research Conference* (now considered by many to be the premier entrepreneurship

research conference in the world) and through the creation of the Entrepreneurship Division in the Academy of Management, today ‘a large, growing and very strong division,’ according to the latest AOM five-year-review (Wright 2012). Another key factor was the establishment of some currently renowned academic journals in our field (Carlson et al. 2013).

Leading entrepreneurship researchers calling to action

Given the state of development of our discipline, leading researchers in the field of entrepreneurship have started to reflect on the type of research conducted so far and to critically discuss the directions in which research inquiries should go. Here we point to some of the key aspects highlighted in distinguished papers published since 2010.

One noteworthy development was *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*'s special issue *The future of entrepreneurship research* (2011), which offered important reflections on recurrent topics and key methodological elements. In particular, Sarasvathy and Venkataraman asked themselves: ‘What if we have been thinking about entrepreneurship the wrong way?’ ‘What if we temporarily suspend our thinking of it as a sub-discipline of economics or management?’ (Sarasvathy and Venkataraman 2011, 114). These authors support the idea of the *method* of science or of entrepreneurship. Researchers should observe experienced entrepreneurs in action and identify ways to study their day-to-day practices through particular techniques and mechanisms in order to better understand the phenomenon and thereby contribute valuable new knowledge.

That same year, *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* published a special issue in honour of the (editorial) work of Bengt Johannisson. The editors of the special issue, Chris Steyaert, Daniel Hjorth, and William B. Gartner, specifically emphasized the importance of keeping entrepreneurship studies imaginative. In particular, William B. Gartner (2011) proposed new paths for building entrepreneurship concepts in his article, suggesting a break with linear studies in order to encourage researchers to think in new ways.

In 2015, Dean A. Shepherd celebrated the *Journal of Business Venturing*'s 30th anniversary and made

an explicit call for entrepreneurship research to be more interactive, activity-based, and prosocial. He argues that ‘the future of the field of entrepreneurship is bright but only if we continue to be entrepreneurial in our research’ (Shepherd 2015, 489).

As we have indicated, these authors insist on the idea of further developing the field of research rather than simply making it grow. The crucial question that remains is whether there really is an opportunity for such imaginative, non-linear development. According to our judgement as active researchers, this depends not only on those who carry out research, but also on other actors. These include editors, who market our research and provide the opportunities for publication; policymakers and practitioners, who put research results into practice and therefore often finance research endeavours; and, lastly, fellow researchers and the academic community, who enable the opening up of new approaches to understanding what scientists previously would hardly have considered valid.

Despite this, an assessment of publications in many entrepreneurship journals over recent years reveals that there is more incremental research than disruptive research. Firstly, the number of researchers publishing in entrepreneurship has increased considerably in the last decade, accompanied by growing pressure leveraged by employing research institutions to publish. Yet this has not gone hand in hand with increased diversity in existing research. Journals tend to continue publishing a larger percentage of classical quantitative research: large samples and sophisticated statistical analyses in order to contrast hypotheses. However, it is difficult to develop imaginative, non-linear, and disruptive research while sticking to the dominant methodologies. Already ten years ago, Pittaway (2005) criticized the ‘tendency’ of researchers to take established concepts, methodologies, and empirical operationalization for granted in entrepreneurship research.

Time to act: a call for novel papers in entrepreneurship

In response to the question ‘Does the academic community really need another journal?’, one might argue that it would be more logical for already established journals to begin to accept more transformational and less incremental publications. If we compare a new journal with a new venture,

authors like Hamilton and Singh (1992) argue that new firms are better suited to develop radical rather than incremental innovation. Studies show that investment in R&D is much more profitable, i.e. generates more patents per euro invested, in a new company compared to an already consolidated company.

We mentioned above that several actors related to the academic community play crucial roles here, and this includes us as thematic area and journal editors. If we call for novel research but subsequently are very cautious as an academic community when it comes to accepting research based on novel perspectives, addressing new issues, and adopting non-dominant research methodologies, then researchers back away from new endeavours. For this reason, we believe that there is room for a journal that opens the door to more *entrepreneurial* entrepreneurship research.

Moreover, the *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business* is being launched with the aim of providing a window for well-crafted manuscripts. The increasing competition from management scholars in traditional and emerging academic economies such as Asia, the Americas, and Eastern Europe, suggests that the demand for new journals is going to continue (Corbett et al. 2014). Nevertheless, we also believe that broader audiences and the convergence of disciplines and communities of scholars addressing entrepreneurial issues justify a new publication venue.

Finally, authors might ask why they should publish in a general management journal, which is what the *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business* is. While specific entrepreneurship journals can have large audiences, the issue for authors is often scope (Corbett 2014). Scholars will not get a wide scope or the opportunity to cross-fertilize their research with other disciplines or create an impact by publishing only in entrepreneurship-specific journals. The latest impact factors (from the 2014 Social Sciences Citation Index – SSCI) show that on average the top five management journals have a considerably higher impact than the top five entrepreneurship journals. Indeed, the top entrepreneurship journal has an impact that is nearly two full points lower than the leading general management journal. While the newly established *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business* cannot

yet demonstrate such impact factors from the outset, it is certainly true that authors publishing in the *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business* will reach a wider audience and therefore are more likely to cross-fertilize their research with other disciplines.

We invite well-crafted submissions from established and new researchers in the entrepreneurship field. We welcome multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches as applied to the study of entrepreneurship that show an emphasis on research that helps to understand entrepreneurial processes and the entrepreneurial field, which are contextualized and perhaps comparative in their approach and are not necessarily situated in the dominant management research disciplines. Therefore, articles published in the entrepreneurship area of the *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business* will reflect the methodological diversity that is typical of entrepreneurship research as well as heterogeneity in terms of the topics studied. In addition, we invite theoretical reflections on concepts and approaches in the existing literature on the evolution of the entrepreneurial field by focusing on research content as well as the methodologies used.

In line with the publication priorities outlined by the Editors-in-Chief, the journal prioritizes the following types of papers:

- literature reviews with a specific focus on the evolution of trends, methodologies, theories, etc., within the field of entrepreneurship and small businesses;
- critical assessment of existing entrepreneurship and small business research by drawing on different academic disciplines with the aim of enriching the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation;
- well-designed studies based on a methodology that evaluates how themes and topics evolve over time to provide new insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers; and
- studies analysing how entrepreneurial processes at the firm level change and evolve over time, bearing in mind that studies evaluating such processes from a cross-national perspective and/or in different contextual settings are particularly welcome.

As a final comment, we would like to stress that entrepreneurship research is an applied field of study and it is important that academic researchers maintain a dialogue with policymakers and practitioners. Publications in the *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business* are not necessarily aimed at practitioners and policymakers and there are organizations such as the ECSB and its international counterpart ICSB that provide the appropriate forums in which such dialogues can take place. Nevertheless, we would like to see articles featuring themes and approaches that have potential implications for policymakers and practitioners as well as entrepreneurs, and we invite authors to reflect on this.

We look forward to receiving your submissions.

María Esther Hormiga Pérez and Sylvia Rohlfer, Associate Editors

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