

# 1. Introduction: rigour and relevance in European entrepreneurship research

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## INTRODUCING THE CHAPTERS

Although entrepreneurship research has progressed significantly in the past 40 years or so, a possible gap between the relevance and rigour in our research has emerged. This issue has exorcised researchers in business and management for some time (e.g. Hodgkinson and Rousseau, 2009) and has also been identified as an issue in the field of entrepreneurship (Frank and Landström, 2016). Given the applied nature of the field of entrepreneurship, it is important that researchers understand and realize the benefits of connectivity with practitioners, consultants and policy makers, ultimately to have an impact on real-world activities. Whilst this is happening and there are exemplary cases of such engagement (see Ram et al., 2017), more is needed if we are to see entrepreneurship research help shape the economy and society. Organizations, such as the European Council for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ECSB) and the International Council for Small Business (ICSB), its global equivalent, provide a forum in which this kind of dialogue can be initiated and take place.

This volume presents chapters that demonstrate contemporary examples of excellent research in the field and their relevance to policy and practice, directly or indirectly. The chapters are organized in three parts. In Part I, four chapters are presented regarding rigour and relevance in entrepreneurship research. In Part II, two chapters are presented about the entrepreneurial mindset and intrapreneurial orientation as factors of entrepreneurial behaviour. In Part III, attention is given to four chapters regarding entrepreneurial behaviour, resources and outcomes.

## PART I: RIGOUR AND RELEVANCE IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH

In Chapter 2, Johan Wiklund starts with some references stating that tenure track faculty are spending too much time and effort on research that is only of interest and value to them and their peers, while the bill for the research is being paid by those who receive little or nothing in return. However, Wiklund argues that relevance in research is not merely an option, but a matter of survival. Wiklund believes that the outlook for entrepreneurship research might be more positive and likely to have a great societal impact. His text suggests that entrepreneurship is well equipped for relevant research. He presents a different model for generating interest in research. In this model a distinction is made between the number of people that care versus how much people care about the research. Wiklund advocates an approach to relevance that starts with researchers asking themselves what they really care about themselves and try to find other people that care about this research.

In Chapter 3, Hans Landström argues that one requirement of good research is that our knowledge should not only attract interest among our peers, but also be useful for external stakeholders such as entrepreneurs, investors, policy makers and politicians, the media and our students. Traditionally, entrepreneurship and small business research has been regarded as a practical and relevant research field, providing knowledge to be used to solve various societal problems. As the field is becoming more and more institutionalized in the academic system, scientific rigour in research has been emphasized at the expense of relevance, triggering frustration among many entrepreneurship and small business scholars.

Bridging the gap between scientific rigour and practical relevance is a task not only to be accomplished by senior scholars, but also by young scholars. Therefore, the issue needs to be addressed in the infrastructure of universities and business schools, for example, by adapting the incentive criteria for promotion, or encouraging PhD students with practical experience who can serve as role models. Landström strives to show, in Chapter 3, that producing research with practical relevance does not conflict with the production of scientifically rigorous research. On the contrary, it is important that the implications formulated for external stakeholders are well-rooted in rigorous scientific research. The conclusion to be drawn is that we need research that is scientifically rigorous, practically relevant and actionable.

Entrepreneurship as a field of research has expanded in a number of directions, with a wide range of ontological, epistemological, methodological, theoretical and empirical variations existing alongside one another. In Chapter 4, Parkkari and Verduijn provide an introduction to three recent conversations

within the entrepreneurship research domain: (1) Critical Entrepreneurship Studies (CES), which has emerged to question and challenge mainstream, taken-for-granted understandings and ways of researching entrepreneurship; (2) Entrepreneurship as Practice (EaP), which incorporates an interest in doing entrepreneurship as an everyday practice by utilizing social practice theories; and (3) a Radical Processual Approach (RPA) towards entrepreneurship, which incorporates process philosophical premises to studying entrepreneurship as flux, as constant becoming. These conversations offer radical, complex and nuanced ways of understanding the entrepreneurship phenomena, to open it up so that novel possibilities, practical or conceptual, can materialize. An appreciation of the specific value each conversation might bring to entrepreneurship research is also discussed.

In many European countries family firms play an important role. In recent decades, one of the main changes occurring in family firms has been the increasing involvement of women in their ownership, leadership and management. In Chapter 5, Sentuti, Cesaroni and Cubico aim to contribute to the ongoing debate through a structured literature review of studies in the business and management literature, by exploring and outlining the state of the art of relevant research topics concerning women's involvement in family firms. Sentuti et al. include author affiliation as well as the location of research. The country of research is particularly relevant for analysing women in family firms because cultural models, traditional values and rules embedded in social behaviours may differ among countries. Three important tendencies were identified. First, there is a significant increase in the number of publications over the period 2000–2017. Second, this field of research is no longer North American scholar dominated, as a growing contribution is now coming from European researchers. Third, the geographical context of research has progressively expanded from North America and the UK towards other countries such as those in Northern and Southern Europe, Asia and Africa. With regard to the focus of literature concerning women's involvement in family firms, four main themes are identified and discussed: women in family firms, succession, women-owned family firms and female entrepreneurship, and a new theme, copreneurial ventures.

## PART II: ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET AND INTRAPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION

In Part II, two chapters are presented that examine entrepreneurial attitudes and factors predicting entrepreneurial activity or behaviour. In Chapter 6, Shaver and Commarmond present a model for developing a scale regarding measuring the entrepreneurial mindset. The authors believe that none of the previous existing measures capture the full breadth of individual differences that can be

said to constitute the entrepreneurial mindset as explanations for entrepreneurial behaviour. A comprehensive approach to measuring the entrepreneurial mindset must, according to Shaver and Commarmond, (1) assess cognitive processes and behavioural tendencies as well as traditional personality traits, and (2) do so while paying attention to the varied roles that an entrepreneur might play. Based on a literature review and further quantitative analysis, the authors identified 37 separate constructs from the 76 conceptual statements found in the literature. They create a list of 116 items to assess these constructs. These items will be subsequently tested in a national study of 3661 individuals.

In Chapter 7, Blanka, Rückel, Koch and Kailer present a qualitative study that analyses the importance of intrapreneurial orientation within the context of technology firms and discuss future opportunities for IT students. Intrapreneurship is a subfield of entrepreneurship. Intrapreneurs, as entrepreneurial-thinking employees, are considered key to companies' growth and innovativeness. The topic of intrapreneurship in the technological context will gain in importance in research and practice, as so-called technology interpreneurs combine business and technological skills. Based on the entrepreneurial orientation dimensions of innovativeness, proactiveness and risk taking, the authors develop a scale that captures the individual-level orientation. Five items were developed for each dimension, leading to a scale of 15 items measuring individual intrapreneurial orientation. Based on an online questionnaire answered by 106 students in business informatics, the students' entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial potential was measured. The majority of the intrapreneurial orientation items based on the dimensions innovativeness and proactiveness are correlated to personal initiative, supporting the hypothesis that individual initiative is an important key to activating intrapreneurial potential. Students with considerable work experience as well as being in a late stage of the studies, show higher levels of intrapreneurial orientations than students with no work experience respectively being at the beginning of their studies. The dimension of risk-taking offered non-significant results. The results of the empirical investigation also show that IT students have high levels of intrapreneurial orientation and possible future careers as technology entrepreneurs.

### PART III: ENTREPRENEURIAL BEHAVIOUR, RESOURCES AND OUTCOMES

In Part III, four chapters pay attention to entrepreneurial behaviour and discuss the relationship between resources and outcomes. Technology-based firms have an important impact on an economy's long-term development and can be seen as drivers of economic growth and innovation. Technology-based start-ups need to utilize existing internal resources and acquire external resources to be able to grow. In Chapter 8 Rydehell, Isaksson and Löfsten study the effects

of two kinds of resources on early firm performance. They found empirical evidence, based on a sample of 401 young technology-based Swedish firms, that human capital and external relations are important drivers for good firm performance during the start-up phases of technology-based firms. In terms of resources at founding, founders' business experiences enhance early firm performance. Contrary to expectations, founders' attitudes regarding growth orientation had no significant effect on early firm performance and were seen as an initial obstacle rather than a competitive advantage. Growth orientation as an internal resource dimension, seems less important in the early stages.

In entrepreneurship research, there has been a strong focus on the importance of being in control of resources and being embedded in networks and industries. The role of prior industry experience has attracted attention from entrepreneurship scholars for decades. In particular, it has been argued that industry experience can be beneficial because it provides access to customer and supplier networks as well as important rules and norms. Yet this may also represent a limitation when lock-in effects impose limits on the innovation activities. The opportunity creation process is complex and contingent on factors ranging from individual personality traits, prior knowledge and social networks to favourable circumstances in the environment and personal interest in the topic. In Chapter 9, Hellerstedt, Wigren-Kristoferson, Aggestam, Stevenson and Brundin investigate how entrepreneurs handle a lack of industry embeddedness in their venturing process. The authors address this by building on the literature on prior knowledge and embeddedness phenomena to advance our understanding of the entrepreneurial process. They also conduct three exploratory case studies with entrepreneurs to illustrate how they manage to change their position from disembedded to embedded in their venturing process. The study by Hellerstedt, Wigren-Kristoferson, Aggestam, Stevenson and Brundin challenges the assumption that prior industry experience is decisive for the success of entrepreneurs, by showing how disembeddedness in an industry can contribute to radical innovations. Entrepreneurs who lack particular experiences perceive challenges but are also able to adopt an open view in the opportunity creation process. The ability to compensate for the lack of knowledge at a certain level, by drawing on resources that are disembedded at another level, appears to be important for the opportunity creation process. The authors conclude that depending on their previous experiences, entrepreneurs adopt different approaches when entering a new industry. They rely on storytelling to build a strong brand and acceptance in the market or use prior knowledge and experiences from other industries (or a combination of both approaches) to build a convincing venturing process.

Acquiring funds constitutes an important and challenging activity for an entrepreneur. In this activity, scholars consider 'narrative' as an effective mechanism because of its capability to shape investors' decision making. In Chapter

10 Guillaume, Jacquemin and Janssen develop and test a set of hypotheses concerning how the tone of entrepreneurial narratives affects funding success of different crowdfunding operations. The propositions are tested on a sample of projects seeking resources on a donation and reward-based crowdfunding platform (Ulule) as well as on a lending- and equity-based crowdfunding platform (MyMicroInvest). The results concerning the use of non-financial crowdfunding platforms suggest that money providers on such a platform prefer narratives characterized by a relatively high emotional language. The results also indicate that the community (social) sense displayed has a particularly high influence and even dominates the influence of the emotional tone while both aspects are present in the entrepreneurial narrative. The results concerning the use of financial crowdfunding platforms indicate that funding success is enhanced by a cognitive tone and that the sense of community stays an indicator of success. Funders on donation and reward-based platforms seem to be motivated by the emotional dimension while funders on lending- and equity-based platforms seem to be guided by cognitive considerations to a greater extent. The study shows that the crowdfunder, as a resource provider, must be distinguished from the traditional investor, and that emotions may affect an entrepreneur's ability in resources acquisition.

The final chapter, by Kitching and Iskandarova, provides a different focus from the other chapters in Part III. Their study investigates the extent to which freelancers or independent own-account workers are able to control their working time. Control over working time is one important dimension of freelancer autonomy and a source of greater meaningfulness in work. But freelancers must also contribute the labour time necessary to satisfy a portfolio of fee-paying clients to generate sufficient work income. Using qualitative data from interviews with 25 skilled freelance workers in two professional sectors, the authors present two contributions to the literature. First, freelance workers vary in their capacity to control work-time, conditional upon parties' relative bargaining power towards type of clients. Second, freelance workers engage in a variety of practices to preserve and extend control of work-time scheduling and duration. The research of Kitching and Iskandarova recognize the occupational heterogeneity of freelance work and its impact on struggles for work-time control.

## OUTLOOK

Overall, this anthology demonstrates the breadth and scientific quality of European entrepreneurship research, adding to the accumulated body of knowledge published in previous anthologies. Specifically the book highlights the importance of both rigour and relevance in the field: research that is scientifically and theoretically sound but also of utility outside the academic

arena. Certainly, this book demonstrates that both rigour and relevance is alive in this field of study. Many of the chapters in this book have agendas that are influenced by pragmatic questions as much as theoretical insights, showing that engaged research begins at the agenda-setting phase rather than an add-on at the end of a study. Additionally, the volume showcases interesting new work in the area of entrepreneurial behaviour and mindsets, intrapreneurship, family businesses, the role of prior experience or absence of it as a resource, funding and time allocation amongst freelancers. Whilst the chapters are focused on specific issues, they all illustrate that excellent research can have implications for practice and policy.

## REFERENCES

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