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Chapter 1
Putting 'Thought' into the Theory/Practice Debate

David Higgins, Paul Jones and Pauric McGowan

The purpose of the two volumes of this book was to offer a unique combination of studies that illustrate critical perspectives of current entrepreneurship research (Higgins, Jones, & McGowan, 2018). We sought to offer new theoretical perspectives and approaches as a means of illustrating the inherently social embedded and contextualised nature of entrepreneurial practice. As a result, we seek to develop a more critical and constructive position towards current theories, methods, assumptions and beliefs, which seek to question the prevailing assumptions currently dominating entrepreneurial researching and practice. This volume covers a broad spectrum, in terms of topics and approaches, on diversity and critique in their perspectives towards entrepreneurial practice and scholarship. The second volume includes nine invited chapters, which are introduced next.

In Abdullah, White and Thomas chapter we are introduced to the use of an extended stage model for the evaluation and adoption of e-business in the small business sector in the Middle East. Empirical studies of e-business adoption are rare in a developing country context and the chapter provides novel insights into this region, by evaluating the use of the extended stage model to explore adoption among Yemeni Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (SMEs). Current technology adoption models imply that organisations adopt technologies in a linear fashion, gradually increasing complexity and capability. This chapter suggests that there are multiple points at which SMEs may 'enter' the technology-adoption ladder.

Hatt's chapter presents a study on the concepts critical to thinking as an entrepreneur to inform entrepreneurship curriculum development. There is a lack of entrepreneurship education research that integrates the external stakeholder perspective. Using a Delphi-style method with 12 entrepreneurs, five candidate entrepreneurship threshold concepts were identified. Threshold concepts offer a potentially transformative effect on the learner, allowing the learner to make sense of previously isolated pockets of knowledge. This chapter contributes to the call for more research grounded discussion on the quality and effectiveness of entrepreneurship education initiatives. Designing curricula around the threshold concepts in entrepreneurship will enable educators offer relevant support in areas where students are likely to become 'stuck' and will facilitate constructive alignment with assessment.

The chapter by Evans explores the decision-making processes past the start-up stage that small businesses employ to grow. The study examines how entrepreneurs evaluate and make decisions on growth opportunities in their business environment; it employs a cognitive style as a theoretical lens to evaluate differences in information processing. The chapter determines how intuitive and analytical cognitive styles are used by entrepreneurs and the contribution these make to decision-making. The chapter findings demonstrate that the two styles are versatile as entrepreneurs adjust and adapt their style over time, in keeping with the situational factors of their business environment. The study also found differences between novice and mature entrepreneurs and that experienced entrepreneurs exhibited greater levels of cognitive versatility, which was linked to prior experience.

The chapter by Ndlela, Storhaug Hole, Slettli, Haave, Mei, Lundesgaard, Hermanrud Staffas and Namdar explores the process of facilitation of entrepreneurial learning. The literature on entrepreneurial learning and education emphasises the importance of facilitation, although it is yet to be addressed in-depth. This chapter contributes to the further understanding of the role facilitators play in the entrepreneurial and transformative learning processes. Drawing on the social constructionist approach to learning, the chapter discusses how facilitators and learners (entrepreneurs) become co-creators of knowledge and learning experiences. The findings offers an example of scholarship that demonstrates a commitment to the exploration of the research field, which is accessible to readers in terms of their applied focus through capturing the experiences of learners/readers as they enact in practice.

The chapter by Mallett examines the interactions of formal and informal forms of small business support, characterised as interactions within an 'enterprise industry'. An analysis of the interactions revealed in the existing literature for different forms of business support develops a new conceptual framework for understanding those varied forms of external influence targeted at small businesses that constitute and extend a 'patchwork quilt' of provision. This chapter focusses on how different forms of support and advice interact, the centrality of state influence and how such interactions can be considered part of a firm's regulatory context. This conceptualisation allows the consideration of both business support and state regulations to move beyond conceptions of positive or negative impacts on factors such as firm growth. Instead, it offers a novel conceptual lens for considering how different forms of external influence can shape practices and attitudes of small businesses and their owner-managers.

The chapter by Owen, Haddock-Millar, Sepulveda, Sanyal, Syrett, Kaye and Deakins examines the role of volunteer business mentoring (VBM) in relation to potentially improving financing and financial management in youth enterprises in deprived under-served neighbourhoods. The chapter explores the following questions. To what extent is youth VBM associated with access to external finance? Where access to external finance takes place, does VBM improve business outcomes? Do VBMs make a difference to the performance of businesses receiving financial assistance? In the post-global financial crisis era of high youth unemployment, rising youth entrepreneurship and constrained business finance VBM offers the potential of improved youth business signalling and credibility, reducing information asymmetries and associated agency failures. Findings suggest that VBM is a positive opportunity, offering low-cost support and improvement to business financing and subsequent performance. VBM allied to microfinance offers a blueprint for future youth enterprise start-up policy.

The chapter by Davies, Roderick, Williams and Thomas provides a case study approach to evaluate the Technium initiative, started in Wales, to encourage business start-up and growth in the knowledge economy sector considering evidence from two decades. This case study helps address the evidence deficit by revisiting the initial Technium Swansea initiative and its subsequent development. A vibrant policy and practice debate subsequently emerged, together with strident media comment. The case study provides novel insights into what can realistically be expected of such initiatives in the short, medium and long terms, with realistic time-horizons for 'success' and the role of learning for knowledge-based development in similar initiatives and regions.

Rae's chapter explores three dimensions of the 'Open Space' of freely available resources for Entrepreneurship. Here, 'Open Entrepreneurship' is discussed as a unifying approach for value creation through a conceptual model combining 'Open' tools and resources. Open resources for digital and data-led entrepreneurship offer conditions for new, pervasive and distributed forms of value-creating entrepreneurial activity. Namely, what is 'Open' in the context of entrepreneurship? Secondly, why is Open Entrepreneurship important for conceptualisation, education and practice? Finally, can Open Entrepreneurship offer significant new opportunities for innovation, value creation and learning, and how can these be realised? These can create learning environments with rich access to data and resources, innovative connections and opportunities for co-creating value in multiple forms. This learning-centred approach builds on the concept of entrepreneurship as an educational philosophy of value creation for others.

In the final chapter Jones provides an ethnographic account of a team involved in preparing a proposal and, subsequently, undertaking a small firm research project. Teamwork has become increasingly prevalent both in undertaking research projects and in preparing manuscripts for publication. There is limited literature considering this process in the Entrepreneurship discipline. Typically, existing studies discern between problems associated with task-based conflict and relationship-based conflict. This chapter profiles a major Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) project initiative that funded 13 distinct projects. During a nine-month period of developing the research proposal, the research team worked extremely effectively with periods of intense knowledge sharing, which enabled the team to develop a successful bid. However, a major dispute between team members, during the early stages of the fieldwork, led to a period of both task-based and relationship-based conflict, which threatened to undermine the project. This chapter assists those who may find themselves operating in dysfunctional teams; it makes sense of the underlying tensions associated with 'academic knowledge creation'.

Some thoughts………………
The field of entrepreneurship is growing but the fundamental question of what it means to be an entrepreneur, what they do and how they engage in practice is becoming more obscured and fragmented, resulting in different conceptual perspectives (Higgins et al., 2015; Ucbasaran, Westhead, & Wright, 2001; Watson, 2013). Gartner (2001) suggests that each discipline in the field has its own way of viewing what entrepreneurship is; but equally, it is difficult to fully appreciate the phenomenon of the entrepreneur by simply looking at its effect, we need to understand what it means to 'be' (Hjorth, 2004). The beauty, simplicity and yet complexity of what it means to be an entrepreneur cannot be decontextualized into constituent parts; it must be appreciated as an emergent dynamic whole. This is not to say that the knowledge we have gained about entrepreneurship is redundant rather what is being suggested is that we use this knowledge as an opportunity to seek alternative ways of exploring entrepreneurship. We need to be critical of the strengths and weaknesses of the current theories we have formulated. This involves taking time to understand and appreciate what we know, (Anderson, 2000; Diochon & Anderson, 2011; Korsgaard & Anderson, 2011). Currently, many entrepreneurship scholars retain a narrow perspective of what entrepreneurship is and comprises of; if this view persists, as a field, we run the risk of systematically limiting our ability of seeing, alternative purposeful perspectives, hindering our ability to enquire and develop new ways, which may offer

further insights and values.

This, of course implies, the question (an all too often ignored question): what value and insight would an alternative mode of inquiry give the field and to whom? To a degree, the contents of this book could be viewed as offering novel insight and interesting points of discussion, but, to others, it may sound obvious. Gartner (2001) suggested that words, such as entrepreneur or entrepreneurship, have now developed a wide variety of overlapping and contradictory meanings; a suggestion offered at the time was to encourage scholars to be more explicit about how and why they define entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is not simply a thing that we look upon but rather a social enactment, a living experience embodied in social action, shaped and mediated by context, a means of becoming, co-constructed in connection with others, as a practical measure of how it is and what they do (Anderson, Park, & Jack, 2007; Anderson, Dodd, & Jack, 2012).

Higgins et al. (2015) has argued for alternative approaches to entrepreneurial inquiry, which illustrates the contextualised nature of social practice. Placing human activity at the centre of how we understand and make sense of what it means to practice is critical. It is often recognised that entrepreneurial practice is a crafted form of art, which requires an appreciative and sensitive engagement with a range of sociocultural phenomena in the entrepreneurial setting (Blackburn & Kovalainen, 2009; Hjorth, Jones, & Gartner, 2008). Before any kind of research or theorising can occur, clarification in terms of what is going to be regarded as real in the social world and how we might evaluate and make sense of that knowledge becomes critical. The entrepreneur continually faces complex situations, as they engage in their everyday practice, dealing with new situations and seeking ways to overcome perceived barriers and maximise apparent opportunities. In this sense, the development of how we view and make sense of social action can be to assume that entrepreneurial action is emergent in nature. Such emergent behaviour is not unbounded; it is situated in a social context which has outcomes that are determined and mediated by social, historical and cultural elements. This is consistent with the perspective of Steyaert (2007) and Johannisson (2011), who view the practice of 'entrepreneuring' with that of everyday life.

The problematic nature of how we view and approach entrepreneurial research is matched by the lack of agreement on the most appropriate conceptual and theoretical foundations within the field. Watson (2013) argues entrepreneurship and scholarly activity need to break away from the more traditional perspectives of Economies, Psychology or positivist perspectives, and instead towards more Sociological perspectives and theories, which could provide more appreciative and explanatory powers/means. The importance of developing a scholarly voice, which seeks to foster innovative and accessible scholarly writing, is of crucial importance to any research field. In this context, the role of our own attentiveness, what it means to be reflexively aware, in our practice, as custodians of knowledge, becomes extremely important – how we perceive our roles as lecturers, researchers, writers and editors, how we enact our relationships with our audiences and wider communities in a meaningful way. A thoughtful inquiry requires the questioning of the relationship between ourselves, our community and the theories/concepts we work with. As we learn through action, the need to become reflexively aware in terms of how we construct our knowing becomes critical.

Through the influence of the field, we have come to understand the social world by creating meaning through our research practice. The social world cannot exist independently from us; rather, it is our actions, which shape, mediate, maintain, and are represented in and through our ongoing daily interactions. Our ability to explore and pose questions to these often-overlooked relationships and the manner in which we seek to make sense of our social world is key. The need to move beyond simple what, how and why questions, to questions which provoke and challenge such as where, when and who as a method of unlearning and advancing the discipline. At the basest level, these questions involve thoughtfully considering the relevance and application of existing knowledge, by offering novel insight and future debate. Connecting these question sets, offers the possibility of drawing connections towards research material, which reveals the relational orientations of enacted learning. Such a practice opens up the possibility to introduce different perspectives to now we view and practice in the subject area of action learning.

The importance of creating a voice, which asks questions that seek to challenge and push boundaries, is an important core value of our scholarship. When we consider the meaning of dialogue, and begin to recognise the importance of your voice as a means of dialogue, we look towards the view that none of the things we do as humans happens in a vacuum, speaking, writing, reading, thinking or listening. In this sense, positioning ourselves as active participants in the process of shaping our actions meanings thinking reflexively about our relationship with self and the field. This could mean:
- the questioning of our assumptions, who we are and what is it that we want
- to achieve;
- the questioning of what really makes sense, of how we live and experience, our
- own and others voices and conversations; and
- understanding our relationship with our social world and recognising its
- dynamic and emergent nature.

Although I refer to the term 'self', I am conscious that I am implying an individualistic stance; rather, I am recognising self, in a reflexive context which incorporates the understanding that we are in relation to others and thus need to consider the nature of those relationships as a collective mediated voice. The ability of any scholarly publication, to develop material, which engages with practical experience and action must be a key priority in the advancement of future practice and scholarship. One of the most important contributing factors for the advancement of your scholarly knowledge and field is the questions we ask and, in particular, the manner in which we pose questions. Our capacity to ask meaningful and insightful questions is critically more important than finding a right answer. In this sense, the creation of academic/practice-oriented material, which offers to the reader the opportunity to build upon our capabilities to become more informed and knowledgeable is one of the most impactful attributes any journal can offer, to both contributor and readers. As such, the need for academic publications to engage with and appeal to different communities as a means of encouraging writers and readers to ask explorative questions is a challenge but one, which is of increased importance. If, as a scholarly community, we are serious about developing and constructing our practice, we must be mindful not to be afraid to question our assumptions and beliefs, in doing so reframing and extending the manner in which we seek meaning, through the questions we ask and how we ask those questions.

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