

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

We are excited about the state of entrepreneurship research. The community of entrepreneurship researchers has grown rapidly over the last couple of decades, there has been a dramatic increase in the quality and variety of entrepreneurship research as well as a dramatic increase in the number of entrepreneurship-specific journals, and entrepreneurship research now has greater prominence in disciplinary and functional journals (e.g., the *Academy of Management Journal*). As a result, there has been a boom in the generation of knowledge about entrepreneurial phenomena. This is all great news. Although we, as a community, can bask in the glory of this relatively recently acquired prominence, this is not the approach recommended in this book. Rather, we can apply the saying “dance with the one who brung you” to suggest that being entrepreneurial in our research is what has led to the field’s successes and that we need to continue to do so to maintain (or increase) the current trajectory. It is not a time to rest on our laurels but to push ahead. As March (1991) noted, after a period of time, exploration begins to drown out exploitation, which creates an unproductive imbalance for the entity. We hope this book provides a counterbalance to the tendency toward exploitation in entrepreneurship research by providing what we believe are some interesting research explorations.

While we are excited about the past achievements and the current state of entrepreneurship research, we are even more excited about the trailblazing opportunities that are ahead of us to develop the field in the

future. Indeed, in this book, we have hopefully established a number of trailheads (based on current state-of-the-art knowledge about important aspects of the entrepreneurial process) and then offered some insights into possible trails that can be blazed from these trailheads. The proposed trailblazing has largely focused on the notion of individuals' thinking, feeling, and acting in relation to potential opportunities embedded in communities and often extreme contexts. This is not to say that there are not important trails to be blazed at the entrepreneurial team, firm, institutional, regional, and other levels of analysis. These levels of analysis are not within our area of expertise, so it is more difficult for us personally to highlight potential trails at these levels of analysis even though we believe that they exist. We look forward to seeing advancements at these levels of analysis as well.

Regardless of the level of analysis (or across levels of analysis), maintaining an open mind to novelty is critical. We need to have an open mind about the philosophical approach. This does not mean that an author should use a different philosophical perspective for each paper (although he or she certainly could) but that we should be open enough to allow others to have a different philosophical perspective underlying their research. If we converge on a specific philosophical perspective, perhaps as the result of more closed-minded editors, reviewers, and authors, then we discourage trailblazing and "kill off" an important source of potential new insights. We are not advocating an approach of "anything goes," but we, as scholars, should (should is a strong word, but it emphasizes our strong belief) judge research based on the traditions and expectations in which it is embedded.

In a similar way, it is important that entrepreneurship scholars remain open-minded to different theoretical lenses and ways of generating new theory. Indeed, to the extent that people can apply new theories to entrepreneurship research, there is an increased chance of uncovering new insights into entrepreneurial phenomena as well as making contributions back to the literatures from which these "borrowed" theories come. Therefore, while we can borrow theories to understand entrepreneurial phenomena, it is important to go one step further and look toward "blending" to make a contribution back to the solutions' origins. That is, in applying a specific theory (from outside the entrepreneurship domain), what adaptations to that theory are required to apply it to an aspect of the entrepreneurial context? Exploring this question provides a basis for

blending (see Oswick, Fleming, & Hanlon, 2011) and/or bricolage (see Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011). Theorizing using blending and/or bricolage provides a strong basis for blazing new trails that contribute to knowledge and perhaps widen the entrepreneurial tent to include more diverse others.

Although we have largely focused on the content as the basis for blazing new trails, we want to acknowledge that method likely also plays an important role. Indeed, content and method are often closely intertwined. The empirical testing of new theories may require the adaption of existing techniques from other fields or the creation of new methods altogether, and the use of new (to entrepreneurship) methods has the potential of opening up our theorizing by encouraging us to think about research questions not normally conceived or rapidly dismissed because they were thought to be untestable. It seems that the community of entrepreneurship scholars has been very welcoming of new methods, used these new methods to open new research themes, and improved upon existing measures to further explore entrepreneurial phenomena. We encourage this interest in new methods for future studies as well.

The flipside to the same coin is that there is a very real danger to the future of the field if we collectively (but especially the gatekeepers—namely, editors and reviewers) become closed-minded. Signs of closed-mindedness are when the entrepreneurship field converges on a dominant philosophical approach, a dominant theoretical lens, a few preferred methodological techniques, and a narrow definition of the field. Although such outcomes may provide the field of entrepreneurship even greater legitimacy, our major concern is not so much with establishing legitimacy (this is largely already established) but with the generation of new knowledge about entrepreneurial phenomena. We believe that the entrepreneurship field will prosper more from blazing new trails than relying too heavily on well-established trails. Our hope is that this book provided the reader with some starting points for future trailblazing entrepreneurship research.

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