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# Time and Entrepreneurship

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Temporal dynamics are at the heart of entrepreneurship. This Special Issue of *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* presents a collection of papers focused on the intersection of time and entrepreneurial organization. Traditional approaches to the interface between entrepreneurship and time are grounded in western logic, where time is linear and scarce, faster is better, and the future is held to be more important than the past. The papers in this issue are framed by the editors in this perspective, but also suggest alternative conceptualizations of time that offer compelling new ways of understanding entrepreneurship.

*The past is but a beginning of a beginning.*

— H. G. Wells

*Today when we glance at the clock and rush out the door, we are running our lives by a system of Babylonian numerology coupled with Egyptian technology within the framework of an Old Testament creation epic all synchronized by a technology that can split a second into unlimited pieces.*

— Boslough & Dale (1990)

*It is ironic that in a culture so committed to saving time we feel increasingly deprived of the very thing we value. . . . Our tomorrows are spoken for, booked up in advance. We rarely have a moment to spare. . . . We have quickened the pace of life only to become less patient. We have become more organized but less spontaneous, less joyful. . . . We have learned how to extract and make things at a faster pace but only end up exploiting and devaluing each other's time at the workplace in order to increase production quotas.*

— Jeremy Rifkin (1987)

*You see things as they are. . . . But I dream things that never were; and I ask "Why not?"*

— George Bernard Shaw

The word entrepreneur is derived from the French words *entre* and *preneur*, and literally translated means "to take between." Many definitions have been used over the centuries; but we believe contemporary studies of entrepreneurship connote a dynamic of movement across time. Time enters into the entrepreneurship equation at many points. While anything that involves an organizational process involves the temporal dimension, often implicitly and without discourse, temporal issues uniquely and explicitly characterize the entrepreneurial process. Past experience and understandings of the past form a backdrop against which present actions are taken leading to future wealth creation.

These temporal dimensions play themselves out across multiple levels within entrepreneurial organizations. Entrepreneurs and individuals who work with them act in the present to secure future resources and wealth where none currently exist. Their characteristics and competencies

derived from their personal histories – including temporal orientation (past, present, or future) and future time perspective, choices of deadlines, recognition of emerging opportunities, perception of emerging stage problems and phase development issues, and their intentions and hopes for the future are critical variables that enter into the formula for successful entrepreneurship. At the group or organizational level, temporal resources must be acquired and allocated. This affects the portfolio of options pursued, the pacing of activity, the synchronization of firm development with market readiness, and the emergent organizational culture. Organizational strategies of many successful entrepreneurial firms often have time-based foundations, such as first mover and rapid follower approaches or compressed cycle time development. At the industry or environmental level, time enters into the entrepreneurship equation in the form of rapid competitive response and the faster pace of technological change resulting in more rapid obsolescence, along with the increasing demands of customers, suppliers, stockholders, and venture backers for timely response.

This special issue of *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* brings together an invited introduction by Elliott Jaques with articles that examine relationships between time and entrepreneurial organizations across many of the dimensions cited above. The call for papers sought contributions that were not merely longitudinal studies but in which aspects of time or temporal dynamics take center stage in proposed theory, analysis, and implications. Time in organizational research is somewhat akin to the weather: everyone talks about it, but little is done about it. Over the years there have been a remarkable number of studies published about time, but fewer about time and organizations, as recent reviews point out (Bluedorn & Denhardt, 1988; Das, 1993). To our knowledge there has never been a collection of papers devoted specifically to this intersection. Nor has this intersection been adequately explored in the dynamic domain of entrepreneurship. Since temporal dynamics are at the very heart of entrepreneurship, we believe that such a collection of work in one place may serve to highlight attention to its importance in the domain. We also hope that such a collection will prompt interested colleagues to engage further with the compelling future research challenges suggested.

These are some of the intellectual roots leading to this issue. But in many ways this issue also illustrates the very real application of time to wealth creation. As guest editors, our own past experiences and interests, combined with a chance meeting at the Academy of Management annual meeting a couple years ago, led us to recognize the opportunity for an issue such as this and to work together to bring it to reality. With superb assistance from reviewers, this issue assembles intellectual resources from the contributing authors and, we trust, will add value to our field of study by provoking thought and a new conversation.

## REFLECTIONS ON THIS ISSUE

Traditional approaches to the entrepreneurship-time interface are grounded in western (and primarily American) pragmatism and logic. In the traditional approach, time is linear and scarce, faster is better, and the future is more important than the past. Reflecting this bias there are three timing elements that underpin intention, although intentional actors are not necessarily conscious of them. These include perception, anticipation, and action.

Perception (from *per* and *capere*), means “to take thoroughly” in the present. The orientation to the here and now is best seen in the capacity to juggle the stream of information, tasks and demands of “real time.” A present-oriented person is going to focus on current capabilities and resources and will be a good judge of feasibility or actionability (Nutt & Backoff, 1997).

There is little research on the present orientation in managers or entrepreneurs (compared to some attention to future-orientation of managers), even though present orientation was suggested in the concept of the temporal tension that exists between the future possibility and the current state (Bird, 1988). Two articles in this issue deal with orientation toward the present as it confronts moving toward the future. Fischer, Reuber, Hababou, Johnson, and Lee observe that rapid-growth top management teams simultaneously consider both the present and the future. It is

through creative reconstruction of the tension between these two temporal frontiers that such firms are able to succeed. They suggest that entrepreneurs involved with fast-growth companies are better able to deal with both perspectives. On the other hand, using a scale that seems to measure person-in-role orientation toward the future, West and Meyer find that both "presents" and "futures" exist within top management teams. They explore the tensions and connections between these temporal categories by examining patterns of communication that may lead to or inhibit the pursuit of new opportunities.

If perception is orientation toward the present, the future tense is anticipation (from ante and cipare), meaning to "to take before" and connoting advanced thinking, discussion, and foresight. It takes meaning only in relation to time or an event that would be known to follow. Anticipation draws upon individuals' abilities to cognize the future. It is often measured by preferences for a future orientation in time, rather than a past or present orientation, and by dimensions of the future time perspective of the individual (e.g. extension, coherence, directionality, density, and attitude; Bird & Jordan, 1987). Related to anticipation is the ability of individuals to imagine alternative futures and use the present and the past to project trends for the future. Thus, anticipation touches the possibilities of future states (Nutt & Backoff, 1997).

This issue features a number of articles that address anticipation in one form or another. Elliott Jaques, whose work on time encompasses several books including *The Form of Time* (1982), outlines two dimensions of time related to anticipation—that of succession and that of intention. Intention captures the complexity of moving forward in time. He suggests that the value of the job, the entrepreneurs' contributions to the venture, and ultimately the size (and value) of the firm are fundamentally linked to entrepreneurs' time-span of intention. West and Meyer place anticipation and the future time perspectives of entrepreneurs in growth-oriented technology firms in the center of their empirical research on proactive change. Anticipation is also a component in the conceptual paper on growth and change by Slevin and Covin, who argue for shortening the cycle time between environmental change and firm strategy change. They include forecasting the future and envisioning changes in the firm that fit with changed environments as strategic steps for practitioners to consider taking. Using the future time orientation of entrepreneurs and their propensity for risk, Das and Teng attempt to recast our understanding of opportunistic entrepreneurs, and relate risk and time to networking as an illustration of their argument. Central to their thesis is the idea that the kind of risk really associated with growth-oriented entrepreneurs is the risk of "missing the boat."

Action (from actus), meaning "a doing," refers to the short-term tactical behaviors or even daily activities of entrepreneurs. Action includes communication, decision making, negotiating, networking, problem solving, as well as behavior specifically related to the scheduling, synchronizing, or allocation of time in new or growing ventures. It is necessarily conducted in the present, but does not require a state of psychological presence or even a present orientation to be effective. It is action that takes an entrepreneur or a new venture from the now to the future.

This issue includes several articles that deal with action related to time. Levesque and MacCrimmon develop a model that explores the time allocations of prospective entrepreneurs and the potential payoffs from ventures they consider starting. Their research points to the timing of the founder's move from "moonlighting" and hobby venturing to full-time commitment to the venture. Cooper, Ramachandran, and Schoorman link the past experience of entrepreneurs to the goals they set, the time devoted to certain tasks, and the venture's performance; their approach neatly spans the past, present, and future with time allocation the actionable core. Thus, while entrepreneurs may prefer certain pathways to entrepreneurship based on past experience and personality, they may act in less familiar and comfortable ways to achieve different results. Hansen and Bird examine the sequence and pacing of two start-up events in high-technology new ventures, responding more to Jaques' succession dimension of time but with implications for different types of entrepreneurs, such as those identified by Cooper et al., Das and Teng, and others. Fischer et al. look at the way rapid-growth firms socially construct time in the present, and com-

pare these to slow-growth firms. Rapid-growth firms actively engage in shaping the temporal expectations of employees, and select employees and customers whose pace matches that of the venture. Collectively, these studies suggest that some entrepreneurs whose intent is rapid growth or above-average returns on time invested may need to act in unfamiliar but learnable ways.

## NEW DIRECTIONS

In summary, this issue includes papers on presence, anticipation of the future, and actions taken to move from the present to the future. Many interesting future research questions are suggested by the contributing authors, pursuit of which should enhance our understanding of the intersection between time and entrepreneurship. While grounded in the three timing elements that underpin traditional logic about time, we nevertheless see this collection of papers as challenging many of the traditional notions.

First, a fundamental question raised in several papers goes to the heart of our conceptualizations of time. We tend to think in western, linear terms about time — where it is fixed, is in limited supply, and marches on unstopably in precisely defined increments. On the other hand, Fischer et al. raise the interesting notion that time may be constructed, and therefore may be constructed differently. Is time a resource that can be “managed creatively”? What differences in entrepreneurs enable them to use this resource in a different fashion, and are there multiple constructions possible? By invoking the laws of thermodynamics in their paper, Slevin and Covin suggest the exciting possibility that time (perhaps like quarks) is energy. Unused time, or time that has not yet passed, may be regarded as potential energy, which may be used by the entrepreneur as a resource. Freely available to all, perhaps time is the only real resource that nascent entrepreneurs possess, the conversion of which enables them to marshal and acquire other tangible resources as their new ventures develop.

The linearity of time is also called into question by the papers in this collection. Whereas traditional rational thought embraces a direction of causality from present actions to future results, papers in this issue implicitly and explicitly suggest an exciting alternative. The alternative is that there is reciprocity across time, meaning that the estimated or envisioned future also causes actions in the present. Others have written about this possible relationship in the context of systems thinking and organizational learning (Evered, 1980; Senge, 1990). There may thus exist opportunity for researchers to examine the dynamic of entrepreneurship using these and other models.

Finally, because the collected papers herein focus on western firms, we believe there is opportunity to explore dimensions of time and entrepreneurship by examining the dynamic in non-western cultures. In cultures where faster is not necessarily better, where time's linearity is not necessarily assumed, or where deep, rich pasts vibrantly affect the present, what differences might we observe? Under such circumstances would perception, anticipation, and action or their interactions assume different roles? Examining these concepts in non-western new venture situations would be important for two reasons. Findings consistent with those seen in western new venture studies might strengthen a theoretical foundation for understanding the genesis of successful entrepreneurship. In addition, even in western cultures significant entrepreneurial activity is undertaken by persons of non-western origins. Since entrepreneurship is becoming a key tool for economic development and social wealth creation, the temporal influences on new venture creation within many populations are important to understand.

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