

Network-based Research in Entrepreneurship: A Decade in Review

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Abstract

Since Hoang and Antoncic [2003], network based research in entrepreneurship continues to develop and grow. To chart these developments, we discuss core relational (network content, governance), and structural constructs. We identify recent work that has introduced nodal and contextual constructs; the former capture attributes that inhere in the entrepreneur or venture to explain regularities in the patterns of network change. Contextual constructs reflect higher-level characteristics of the environment that influence lower level processes. The resulting theoretical models upon which empirical studies build reflect how the field as a whole has become more rich and complex. Broadly, studies continue to either examine how networks develop over time or their consequences for entrepreneurial outcomes. With more studies examining how network ties are initiated, evolve or are culled, our review of work published in the past decade finds that there is now a greater balance across these two streams. The process-oriented studies inform how entrepreneurial networks arise that may in turn lead to successful milestones achievement including financing and venture growth. We conclude by proposing future areas of research that include exploring the malleability of networking competencies, reviving dormant ties, examining the role of team level network constructs in venture performance, and greater incorporation of contextual factors. We also encourage research designs that employ multiple methods in order to better capture the wide range of constructs being incorporated into current theoretical models of networks.

1

Introduction

The paper entitled “Network-based research in entrepreneurship: A critical review” summarized a burgeoning research domain focused on understanding the content, governance, and structure of network relations in the entrepreneurial context. Since the article appeared in 2003, numerous new empirical and theoretical articles employing diverse methods have been published suggesting that interest in this topic remains unabated. Similar to the intent of the original review, there is a need to characterize the research conducted in the past decade in order to highlight cumulative or divergent findings, and to identify areas where further research is needed. Reflecting the various definitions of entrepreneurship that exist in the field, we included papers in our review if they focused on the development and consequences of networks in the new venture creation process or focused on small to medium-sized firms and family firms. While the scope of the field is broad, it is consistent with that of the Entrepreneurship Division of the Academy of Management and its selection of representative journals.

The insights that appear in the original review came by organizing and evaluating research articles in novel, theoretically relevant groupings. We defined and illustrated the core constructs of network content,

structure, and governance. We also assessed the cumulative findings that emerged from organizing articles into two broad areas where network constructs were the main target for explanation (Network Constructs as Dependent Variables) or served as the independent variable to explain entrepreneurial outcomes (Network Constructs as Independent Variables).

Insights from the earlier review have prompted the following questions: to what extent have we now achieved a better balance in terms of our understanding of network processes that lagged behind the body of work on the outcomes of networks? How have network developmental processes been reconceptualized and further complemented by longitudinal study designs? How has our understanding of outcomes been improved when processes are better taken into account? What novel mechanisms have emerged to explain the impact of networks?

This review includes papers that have sought to address these challenging questions and in the process have contributed novel concepts and theory development (for example, Slotte-Kock and Coviello, 2009). In addition, other papers that are relevant and are integrated into our review build more explicitly on topics and issues central to economic sociology, organization theory, strategic management, and organizational behavior. By covering a broad spectrum of published work that has emerged in this and related areas over the past 10 years, we seek to consolidate theoretical and empirical developments and identify areas of future research.

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