

The Concept of Entrepreneurial Orientation

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) — overall strategic posture toward entrepreneurship — is emerging as a predominant concept in management science. As knowledge in the area of EO has expanded, researchers have become interested in issues related to the evolution, potential contributions, and future trajectory of EO research. The purpose of this essay is to take stock of where EO scholarship has come so far, identify interesting gaps for the future, and encourage extending the knowledge frontier in this area. In order to do so, we acknowledge key developmental milestones in EO studies, attempt to make sense of the extant EO literature and highlight possible avenues for further work, and offer specific suggestions for exploring areas where EO research has not gone before. We hope our essay will show that EO research has made considerable strides over its life course as well as point to productive directions for the EO concept going forward.

1

The Concept of Entrepreneurial Orientation

The last three decades have witnessed the emergence of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) as an extensively discussed concept in the management literature [Covin and Lumpkin, 2011]. Hundreds of studies exploring the EO concept have been published in a wide variety of scientific journals and presented at top conferences [Wales et al., 2011a]. Originating in Canada, specifically within a research program at McGill University under the leadership of Pradip Khandwalla and Henry Mintzberg, research on EO is now conducted by scholars around the globe [Basso et al., 2009]. Historically, EO research has primarily focused on firm-level entrepreneurship [Slevin and Terjesen, 2011]. As such, much of the published work investigates the reasons why some firms behave entrepreneurially, the consequences of doing so, the cultural and contextual factors that facilitate or inhibit corporate entrepreneurial behaviors, and whether the antecedents and moderating influences differ systematically from conservative firms.

Considering the proliferation of scholarship on the EO concept, especially over the last decade, this seems an ideal time to reflect upon the findings, development, and future of research within the area. The recent publication of several review articles (for example, Gupta et al.

[2014a], Rauch et al. [2009], Saeed et al. [2014], and Wales et al. [2011b]) suggests other scholars seem to think similarly. In this essay, we assess the growth and contribution of extant EO research as well as identify gaps in the state-of-the-science to highlight fruitful avenues for further scholarship in the area. We start with identifying key developmental milestones over EO's life course, then use Low and Macmillan's [1988] (henceforth L&M) widely-recognized specifications to organize our discussion of the EO literature, and conclude with some suggestions to push the frontier of knowledge in EO scholarship. We intersperse a careful analysis of prior research on EO with novel insights, speculations, and perspectives, aspiring toward a rich discussion about developing knowledge around the EO concept.

We acknowledge at the outset that we are favorably impressed with how far EO research has come from humble beginnings in the 1970s, especially with the way it has formed the basis on which a cumulative body has accumulated. As Miller [2011, p. 3] noted recently, much "insightful work" has been done on the topic of EO so that "EO research has advanced considerably" and become quite influential in organizational science. Yet, following Kuhn's [1962] advice that periodic inquiries into the status of ideas are critical for scientific progress, we attempt to clarify the current state of EO scholarship and specify its contributions. Our purpose, therefore, is not to criticize or dispute the progress made in the EO literature; instead, we seek to develop productive suggestions for future developments around the EO concept.

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