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PAPER ABSTRACTS

Entrepreneurship as Social Construction: A Multi-Level Evolutionary Approach

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Abstract

Organizations are social structures -- patterned and relatively stable arrangements of roles and statuses -- that constitute the building blocks of modern capitalist societies. Efforts to understand their emergence typically focus on the role of entrepreneurs and stop at the firm level. Such firm-level analyses make sense in already existing populations and communities, because most new firms follow the paths of their predecessors and survive by filling an existing niche. However, in the case of new ventures that are the first of their kind, the formation of a firm cannot be the final step. Entrepreneurs creating organizations that depart from the established order must not only create a coherent and self-sustaining entity, but must also organize with other entrepreneurs to build a new, more favorable, context. Regardless of whether they begin in new or existing populations, entrepreneurs collect and organize resources to create new social entities that, with luck, will survive for a reasonable period of time.

In a fundamental sense, then, entrepreneurship involves the social construction of new social entities. Entrepreneurs in established populations benefit from the work already completed by antecedent firms. By contrast, entrepreneurs in new populations must create and give form to their own social environments. Entrepreneurs building new populations must engage in activities that range from making people and organizations aware of their existence and immediate value, to creating a system of cooperation and competition that facilitates their long-term survival. In these cases, entrepreneurial work does not stop at the firm level but instead also involves the formation of populations and communities. Evolutionary forces, comprising the changing environment, entrepreneurs' capacities for adaptation, and the interaction of these two factors, influence the success or failure of their efforts.

The other chapters of this book provide an in-depth look at the entrepreneurial processes at the firm and individual level. In contrast, the purpose of our chapter is to review and analyze the multi-level selection processes that apply across the different levels of entrepreneurial social constructions: firms, populations, and communities. We emphasize the unrelenting and inevitable tensions between selection forces at different levels. Sometimes organization and population level forces -- or population and community forces -- work in concert, but often they do not.

Forthcoming in: Zoltan Acs and David Audretsch, Handbook of Entrepreneurship (2002).

Good Times, Bad Times: The Differential Effects of Organizational Dynamics on the Careers of Male and Female Managers

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Abstract

This paper investigates gender differences in career mobility and attainment for managerial employees. We argue that the careers of male and female managers are affected differently by organizational founding, growth, decline, and merger. Our analysis of male and female managers in the California savings and loan industry shows that women generally benefit less than men when the set of available jobs expands during organizational founding and growth, and are generally harmed more than men when the set of available jobs contracts during organizational decline and merger. Some of these gender effects exist because relative to men women occupy lower-level managerial jobs, work in smaller organizations, and work in organizations that are less hierarchically sex-segregated. This pattern of results suggests that endogenous changes in organizational populations, although large in scale, are insufficient to eliminate the gender gap in social mobility and attainment for managers.

Institutional Technology and the Chains of Trust: Capital Markets and Privatization in Russia and the Czech Republic

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Abstract

The introduction of mass privatization policies in Russia and the Czech Republic depended on the creation of impersonal capital markets to finance the needs of privatized companies and to provide a secondary market for the trading of securities. Yet, mass privatization created the contradictory conditions of generating millions of poorly informed shareholders, with no efficient markets for the sale of the shares. The absence of financial markets created systematic pressures to move assets by illegal or non-transparent means to users who value them more. Privatization created the incentives to destroy the financial markets critical to its success. A comparative case analysis of post-privatization market formation in both these countries demonstrates that the functional necessity for these markets does not engender their own creation. In the absence of institutional mechanisms of state regulation and trust, markets become arenas for political contests and economic manipulation. The irony of these policies is that a principal lesson has been that market reforms cannot create viable markets, only institutional formation can.

Enriching or depleting? The dynamics of engagement in work and family

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Abstract

Current organizational trends have heightened interest in engagement in multiple roles such as work and family. The work-family discourse has framed the issue in terms of conflict and depletion. While acknowledging this perspective, this study challenges the assumption that engagement in one role is inherently depleting to engagement in another role, and suggests that multiple roles may enrich one another. The model of engagement in work and family builds on and integrates the depletion and enrichment arguments by identifying the type of emotional response to a role as a critical contrasting assumption held by the two perspectives. Rather than assuming that engagement is depleting, this study tests how people experience engagement in multiple roles. The findings reveal evidence for both depletion and enrichment. Gender differences were found modifying these findings. Specifically, depletion existed only for women and only in the work to family direction. Men experienced enrichment from work to family, while women experienced enrichment from family to work. Overall, more linkages between work and family were found for women than for men.

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