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## **High Potential Concepts, Phenomena and Theories for the Advancement of International Entrepreneurship Research**

### **Patricia McDougall-Covin**

Professor McDougall-Covin is the William L. Haeberle Professor of Entrepreneurship at the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA. She is the Director of the Institute for International Business and Vice President-Program for the Academy of International Business.

### **Marian V. Jones**

Professor Marian V. Jones is Professor of International Business and Entrepreneurship at the Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK, where she is co-director of the Community for Internationalisation and Enterprise Research (CIER).

### **Manuel G. Serapio**

Manuel G. Serapio is Program Director of International Business and Associate Professor of International Business and Entrepreneurship at the Business School, University of Colorado Denver. He serves as Faculty Director of the Institute for International Business and Center for International Business Education and Research, and teaches the international entrepreneurship course at the Jake Jobs Center for Entrepreneurship.



# High Potential Concepts, Phenomena and Theories for the Advancement of International Entrepreneurship Research<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this special issue on international entrepreneurship (IE) is to explore concepts, phenomena and theories with high potential to advance the field. Rather than identify concepts from the extant IE literature, we took the more novel approach of challenging leading researchers to write about IE relevant issues through the perceptual lenses of their own, or other scholarly domains. Through this process of cross-fertilization, our intention was to generate new topics and fresh insights, alternative arguments and constructs. The issue's seven articles enrich concepts and theories for IE, advance complementary or competing arguments that underpin IE thinking, and open the IE dialogue to issues of current global significance.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background, Aims and Objectives

International entrepreneurship (IE) emerged as a research domain in the late 1980s when emerging evidence indicated that new ventures were able to engage in international business at or near their point in inception. Interest in the phenomenon of international new ventures (INVs), often referred to as born globals (BGs), was noted at a time when dramatic globalization drivers such as lower cost and faster communications technologies, lowering of trade and investment barriers, industry deregulations and advances in cheaper and more efficient means of transportation converged and accelerated the world into the internationally dynamic and complex world of today.

The earliest definition of IE defined it narrowly as, "...the development of international new ventures or start-ups that, from their inception, engage in international business, thus viewing their operating domain as international from the initial stages of the firm's operation" (McDougall, 1989). Since that earliest definition, the study of IE has broadened. For example, Zahra (1993) extended its scope to include corporate entrepreneurship, and multiple other descriptions and definitions of IE have followed from

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scholars around the world (see e.g., Styles and Seymour, 2006 for a summary discussion). Such developments in our understanding of the field prompted Oviatt and McDougall (2005: 538) to offer a refined definition of IE that has gained wide acceptance. They defined IE as “International entrepreneurship is the discovery, enactment, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities—across national borders—to create future goods and services.”

Over the past two and half decades, IE thought leaders have broadened the definition of IE. There have been multiple literature reviews of IE (e.g., Terjesen, Hessels and Li, 2013; De Clercq, Sapienza, Yavuz and Zhou, 2012; Kiss, Danis and Cavusgil, 2012; Peiris, Akoorie & Sinha, 2012; Jones, Coviello and Tang, 2011; Reuber and Fischer, 2011; Keupp and Gassmann, 2009; Aspenlund, Madsen and Moen, 2007; Rialp, Rialp and Knight, 2005; Zahra, 2005), as well as special journal issues and conferences devoted to IE (see Coviello, McDougall and Oviatt, 2011 for a commentary). IE has become an important research domain at the intersection of entrepreneurship and international business. A diverse set of scholars from entrepreneurship, international business and a variety of disciplines have been attracted to the study of IE, not only from business disciplines but also from non-business disciplines as diverse as sociology, economic geography, political science, development economics and psychology.

### **Motivation and Purpose**

Our vision for this special issue is to advance research and theory in international entrepreneurship by facilitating the cross-fertilization of what we feel are high potential concepts, phenomena and theories from major established domains in business research. To achieve this aim, we invited distinguished scholars acknowledged as world-standard contributors in scholarly research, to write papers that will provide direction and insight for future IE research. The papers were first presented at a special conference held at the University of Glasgow’s Adam Smith Business School. We specifically sought to include some invitees who write in domains other than IE, but who are well known for their work in areas that we identified as having high potential for future research in the domain of IE. Prominent international scholars in business and management served as discussants on the papers<sup>2</sup>. The papers then went through the journal’s blind review process.

Our aim for this special issue is to advance research and theory in IE through the cross-fertilization of ideas and conceptual mapping of methods and theories from major established domains in management research within an IE framework. We hope to attract new scholars to IE who research in one of the high potential areas identified in this special issue but who have not previously researched in IE. For IE scholars, and those who aspire to

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<sup>2</sup> Special thanks to the discussants for providing insightful comments on the papers. The discussants were: Pavlos Dimitratos, Stephanie Fernhaber, Rod McMaughton, Becky Reuber, Galina Shirokova, Roger Strange, Ivo Zander, and Antonella Zucchella,

conduct IE research, the articles in this issue are intended to serve as valuable blueprints for future research. Provocative and thoughtful high potential research questions are presented in each of the articles, laying a foundation for further developing IE as an important and relevant discipline for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In reflecting on the domain of IE we identified several strengths that we sought to draw upon in crafting this special issue. First, IE has been effective at dealing with complex concepts, phenomena and problems. Second, the multi-disciplinary nature of the entrepreneurship and international business disciplines has facilitated IE's competence in combining theories and drawing upon different lenses when examining research questions. Third, IE has always been open to provocative dialogue that refines its arguments and explanations and has never been afraid to challenge the status quo.

Of the seven papers in this special issue, the first three papers take well-known concepts, entrepreneurial orientation (EO), experience and effectuation, and develop and enrich them for IE scholars by exploring their utility for IE. The next two papers focus on entrepreneurial internationalization and present complementary and competing arguments from their authors' own paradigmatic standpoints in explanation of the INV phenomenon. The final two papers open IE to issues of current global significance and focus on international poverty alleviation, and global sustainable well-being through social entrepreneurship. These final two papers extend the scope of IE to international problems not previously considered as part of the IE domain, but lend themselves to interpretation and analysis through an IE lens as demonstrated by the authors. These papers also highlight the importance of the context in which we do our research and its influence on our theorizing.

#### HIGHLIGHTING THE ARTICLES IN THE SPECIAL ISSUE

##### **Developing and Enriching Concepts and Theories for IE**

Extending concepts or paradigmatic lenses from one domain to another is not straightforward. It may involve the refinement of constructs to the particular setting of a focal problem; or alignment of theoretical concepts to extant assumptions about the domain of inquiry (Okhuysen and Bonardi, 2011). Furthermore, the complexity of the setting as well as the focal problem may compound the difficulties involved in looking at it through alternative or multi-theoretical lenses. Thus substituting IE for "management" we agree with Okhuysen and Bonardi (2011: 6) in stating that "-----the complexity of [IE] as a setting often requires explanations that can be built from combinations of perspectives to provide answers that are uniquely suited to [IE]". Equally, the researcher extending the concept or applying the lens may have unequal knowledge of the domains that he or she is attempting to straddle (Coviello and Jones, 2004). However knowledge domains and new theories emerge iteratively through succeeding generations of scholarly dialogue and initial attempts provide the foundations for new lines of inquiry and novel research questions (Kuhn, 1996). Three papers in this issue have the primary intention of developing and enriching concepts

from other scholarly domains and extending them to prominent questions or lines of inquiry in IE.

The first paper is authored by Jeff Covin and Danny Miller, whose early work along with that of Dennis Slevin, germinated the rich body of work in entrepreneurial orientation (EO). The paper examines how the construct of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is leveraged in the IE literature and considers the distinctiveness between EO and international entrepreneurial orientation (IEO). Covin and Miller suggest a number of promising paths for future research. These include studying: fundamental definitional and measurement issues (seldom considered in the current IE literature) regarding IE's emphasis on the form of international market entry; how an EO might differ within various cultures; how certain socioeconomic and institutional conditions might favor the emergence of an EO; and the effects of key factors on EO, including national and religious values, national economic development, diaspora and racial separation, and institutional voids. According to Covin and Miller, future researchers can also advance EO/IEO research by building on prominent strategy and organizational theories, such as institutional theory, network theory, organizational ecology, resource-based views, and the dynamic capabilities perspective.

In the second paper Marian Jones, whose background is primarily IE, with Lucrezia Casulli, identify individual experience as a widely acknowledged causal factor in traditional, and INV approaches to internationalization. In their paper, they turn to cognitive psychology and behavioural economics to understand the reasoning processes through which individuals draw on and apply their experience to new situations. Their paper builds on cognitive theories of comparison-based reasoning, and shows how key individual experience and reasoning concepts can be refined within an IE context. Specifically, the authors propose that heuristic reasoning (HR) and analogical reasoning (AR) approaches have promise to advance IE research. The paper contributes towards theory development in IE. It begins by drawing attention to the role of the individual in IE and the impact of their cognitive processes to make sense of the uncertain, novel and complex situations encountered during internationalization. The paper proceeds by delineating the nature of individual experience, highlighting how experience as a sense-making process is "under-theorized" in IE. It then synthesizes comparative reasoning concepts from cognition theories, and illustrates how they might inform future empirical studies. Finally, it advances speculative propositions to extend HR and AR theories into fundamental lines of inquiry and analytical frames in IE research.

In the third paper, Saras Sarasvathy, the originator of the effectuation approach, and her colleagues, K Kumar, Jeffrey York and Suresh Bhagavatula, offer insightful observations about IE research using the theoretical lens of effectuation. For readers unfamiliar with effectuation, Sarasvathy et al. offer an informative summary of the five principles of the effectuation framework. They argue that the effectuation framework can provide useful explanatory variables for empirical IE study and theorizing, particularly in addressing the

central “Why?”, “When?”, “Where?”, “How?” and “How Fast?” questions of entrepreneurial internationalization. The authors compare the Schweizer, Vahlne and Johanson (2010) modified version of the Uppsala model, which they refer to as the UE model, with the effectuation approach and note how both models cohere to a worldview based on less prediction and more on partnerships and networks. However, they point out two key differences: that effectual processes involve several cycles of interactions between stakeholders, and that in effectuation, opportunity is not seen as an exogenous process. Sarasvathy et al. close by identifying four major avenues for future research focused on social ventures and organizational forms, new methods—counterfactual analysis, intersubjective units of analysis and transnational and post-national ventures.

### **Complementary and Competing Arguments Regarding the INV Phenomenon**

Theories are generated through a process described by Weick (1999) as theorizing. Theorizing is an iterative practice of processing, synthesizing, abstracting and refining concepts and arguments that continues until the scientific community is convinced of the explanatory power of the theory advanced, or until new evidence or phenomena emerge that challenge its efficacy (Kuhn, 1996). Comparison or application of complementary and competing arguments is an important process of development in any field of study (Jones et al. 2011; Coviello, McDougall and Oviatt, 2011). We therefore welcome the following two papers in this special issue that through systematic argumentation explore complementary and competing theoretical explanations of the INV and make important contributions to the development of IE perspectives on internationalization.

Both papers are grounded in the widely accepted characterization of the multinational enterprise (MNE) from classic theory in IB. As outlined in Dunning and Lundan (2008), an MNE has two distinctive features in that, 1) it accesses, and coordinates value-adding activities across national boundaries, and 2) it internalizes some cross-border transactions within its own boundaries. Additionally, the IB literature describes many types of firms that are international but fall short of these conditions for multinationality, e.g. international traders. Thus international traders are not, by classic definition, MNEs. Similarly, the INV literature describes firms that fall short of the necessary and sufficient conditions for sustainable INVs, as set out in Oviatt and McDougall (1994: 57-60). Thus BGs/INVs in some current popular operationalizations, as defined by international sales alone, would fall short of the criteria for INVs that require coordination of many activities across countries. Thus in common with the IB literature on MNEs, the IE literature on INVs embraces a great deal of variability in the nature of international activity undertaken, and associated venture types (Jones et al., 2011). These points are important in both of the papers in this section of the special issue that advance arguments in explanation of the INV. In the first by Abdulrahman Al-Aali and David Teece, the INV is characterised as involving FDI (FDINV), whereas in the second by Jean-Francois Hennart, the focus is on the born global which in traditional IB



theory would be described as a trading or exporting firm. These alternative perspectives enable different lines of argumentation and the application of alternative suppositions.

The arguments advanced in the paper by Al-Aali and Teece, interweave capability theorizing with entrepreneurship and IB theories to develop a more robust framework for analysis of the multinational enterprise (MNE). They specifically note that MNEs include foreign direct investment-supported new ventures (FDINV). It is noteworthy, that the authors do not endeavour to apply their framework to exporting INVs with no FDI involvement. Their paper begins by reviewing the Oviatt-McDougall (1994) framework of sustainable INVs and relating it to existing research on MNEs and FDINVs. Al-Aali and Teece point out several shortcomings of MNE theory, one of which is that it does not ask enough of the right questions. They argue that MNE theory needs to attribute greater importance to external linkages. They also point out the importance of asset orchestration rather than ownership, especially for resource-constrained INVs. They suggest, for example, that MNE theory should extend its questioning to incorporate a role for entrepreneurs and managers, beyond their role in cost minimization efforts. Their framework, enriched by dynamic capability insights, emphasizes opportunity identification and timely response in complex environments. It also acknowledges the important sensing, seizing and transforming roles entrepreneurs and managers must play when seeking to compete in the international environment. They suggest that these concepts naturally complement the INV literature.

The second of the papers is by Jean-Francois Hennart, a leading proponent of the transaction cost approach (TCA) and the theory of the multinational enterprise (MNE). Hennart's paper commences with the thought provoking claim that born global (BG) companies might be accidental internationalists. Hennart's paper is both challenging and provocative. An implicit but powerful argument underpinning the INV approach is that internationalization is intentional, proactive and future orientated, yet Hennart claims the opposite in suggesting that born global internationalization is not intended but accidental. In his paper Hennart focuses on the BG as an international trading/exporting firm, rather than an MNE. He elects to follow Evers (2010) in focusing on a firm's ability to sell early to foreign customers through exports, and foreign production (though the latter plays little part in his argument). The argument he advances is that INVs/BGs are accidental internationalists who sell distinctive niche products to spatially dispersed customers that incur low communication, transportation, and adaptation costs. The speed with which firms can develop their international sales, and hence the probability that they will become an INV/BG, will depend on their chosen business model—i.e., the way in which they link their product and service types to a particular subgroup of customers while using a specific communication and delivery method. Hennart contributes a set of coherent arguments that counter the established INV view of intentional and proactive internationalization and offers an alternative explanation. One of the most significant contributions from his argument is highlighting a line of inquiry for future IE research on specific business model characteristics that lead to rapid internationalization among (INVs/BGs).

## **Opening IE to Issues of Current Global Significance**

The authors of the final two papers call on IE researchers to address two issues of critical global significance and draw attention to specific issues in the circumstantial context of the international environment. These are global sustainable well-being through social entrepreneurship, and poverty alleviation and economic growth through the challenge of entrepreneurial opportunities in impoverished circumstances. These papers highlight the importance of the context surrounding the research problem and the need to fully consider its influences in our theorizing and research designs. Contextualization is fundamental to a fuller understanding of IE (Zahra and George, 2002). Furthermore, within the overall consideration that these topics of concern are positioned in international settings, it is important to note the finer nuances of context e.g. the situational circumstances, and the complex interactions between those circumstances and entrepreneurial behaviour. As posited by Welter (2011: 175), context theorizing “----requires researchers not only to acknowledge the importance of context, but to challenge the boundaries of their preferred research paradigms”. We agree and welcome these papers as adding to the contextual richness of IE research today.

Shaker Zahra, Lance Newey and Yong Li’s paper on social entrepreneurship moves the context of entrepreneurship from an emphasis on profit-making firms to organizations pursuing blends of financial, social and environmental values. They address the important question of how social entrepreneurship (SE) can enrich the study of IE—namely by examining some limiting definitions and assumptions in current IE research. Just as Zahra (1993) previously sought to broaden the scope of IE, once again, two decades later, he and his colleagues call for further broadening the boundaries of IE. They highlight monumental changes in the global economy. Among these developments, the rise of entrepreneurship internationally as a major source of value creation presents new and rich opportunities to advance IE research. They present a wealth of innovative research possibilities that should be of interest to both IE and SE scholars seeking impactful projects. By exploring shared findings between SE and IE research, the authors show how researchers can gain a better understanding of the creation and distribution of global blended value and global sustainable well-being.

In the final article in our special issue, Sharon Alvarez and Jay Barney position their research within the narrow context of abject poverty. They make a strong case that the poverty context varies and that the particular context should matter to researchers and policy makers. They highlight ways in which entrepreneurial opportunities drive economic growth and point to the mixed results that have been achieved in fighting poverty throughout the world. They maintain that self-employment opportunities (often emphasized by governments in conditions of considerable poverty) do not lead to sustainable solutions. Instead, they argue that discovery and creation opportunities that are based on

entrepreneurs' unique insights and are born from purposeful and emergent entrepreneurial processes hold the greatest potential for significant and sustainable economic impact.

### **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The recent special forum on IE published in the *Journal of Business Venturing* (Coviello et al., 2011), made a significant contribution to the field's development through tracking and documenting its history, parameters and future directions. The forum incorporated both systematic and critical review articles and was motivated, in part, by criticisms (summarized in Jones et al., 2011) that IE might be “---fragmented, inconsistent and lacking in unifying paradigms and theory”, and calls for unifying frameworks and consistency in domain vocabulary. Such criticisms reflect the desire for clarity and distinctiveness in a domain as well as methodological rigour (McDougall and Oviatt, 2000; Coviello and Jones, 2004). Implicitly, calls for unification and consistency require that scholars identify and confirm the core paradigms that belong to and define IE, refine its constructs, and establish the parameters within which it can claim distinctiveness.

There are tensions between the need for a field to be distinctive, with its own approaches and methods that over time are proven consistent and robust; and the need to be open to contributions and challenges from complementary and competing explanations, as well as new and interesting problems from the real world. Kuhn (1996) suggests two requisites for the development of a new and sustainable field. These are that its initial paradigmatic approach is sufficiently unprecedented to attract people away from competing lines of inquiry and sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for them to resolve. Recognizing this, Coviello et al., (2011: 629) concluded the introduction to their forum by making an appeal for “—new insights and new entrants to the field from other disciplines to enrich our understanding of the complex phenomenon that is now known as IE”. This was the motivation and purpose for this special issue in *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* in which we invited established researchers to consider and write about IE from their own or new or alternative perspectives.

Even for established scholars, expert in their own fields, this was not an easy task given the already hybrid nature of IE, sitting as it does, at the intersection of its two parents entrepreneurship and international business (McDougall and Oviatt, 2000). Given this positioning, IE literature contains numerous worthy examples of expertise in blending and combining theoretical lenses as well as operational constructs from both of its parent disciplines. This paradigmatic confluence has been instrumental, in particular, in expanding our understanding of early and non-linear internationalization processes, and essentially underpins what is now commonly known as the INV Approach to internationalization, established by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) in their seminal article in the *Journal of International Business Studies*. An early attempt to identify the specific dimensions and theoretical assumptions of the INV Approach is laid out in Autio (2005: 17) From his

exposition it is clear that the INV Approach embraces insights from other domains such as strategic management. For example, the resource based view and dynamic capabilities perspectives are evident in research on knowledge intensive internationalising firms (e.g. Autio, 2005; Sapienza, Autio, George and Zahra, 2006). The purpose of the INV Approach as outlined by Autio (2005) is to explain how it is possible for new ventures to internationalize early and rapidly. Currently, the INV Approach is applied widely to account for differences in the dynamics of internationalization by firms of all types and stages of development.

IE as a domain however is considerably broader than the INV Approach. IE encompasses cross-country and cross-cultural comparisons of entrepreneurship, as well as entrepreneurial internationalization, i.e. entrepreneurship crossing borders, and international comparisons of entrepreneurial internationalization (Oviatt and McDougall, 2005; Jones et al., 2011). As mentioned earlier in this editorial, definitions of IE and what it is concerned with have evolved from early foci on unusual patterns of internationalization and the types of ventures involved to the extension of entrepreneurial processes across borders, involving the opportunity discovery-creation-exploitation process, and the influence of the cognitive and behavioural characteristics of individuals and teams. IE also encompasses a significant number of topic areas, and Jones et al. (2011), in their review of the IE literature from 1989-2009 identified 51 primary themes falling within strict inclusion criteria delineating the evolving parameters of the field.

As IE continues to grow and evolve, challenges facing IE researchers and new entrants embrace tensions between a need on the one hand to clearly identify the paradigmatic approaches that define the field and mark its distinctiveness from other disciplines. Yet this can be hard to pin down and remains an issue for debate in future research. Simultaneously, and on the other hand, IE needs to embrace new problems and research questions to sustain its position as a useful and recognizable domain of scholarly inquiry, while avoiding the dilution of its core paradigms, or loss of IE's authenticity through their absorption into other disciplines.

We expect and encourage these tensions to play out through a process of dialogue in the literature between IE and other disciplines in which the core paradigms and constructs of IE are 1) refined and developed, 2) enriched and 3) opened out to embrace alternative theoretical lenses and new problems or phenomena that lend themselves to an IE approach. Equally, IE has the capacity to contribute in the same way to other domains through knowledge exchange, and we hope that the papers in this special issue will stimulate and encourage dialogue across disciplinary boundaries. We are grateful to the authors of the seven papers in this special issue, the conference discussants who through their insightful comments challenged the authors to further develop and refine their papers and to the reviewers whose critical assessments further enhanced each paper's contributions to the IE literature.

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