Entrepreneurship - What Are We Talking about?
- Gaps Created by Rhetorical Challenges and Misguided Foci
Thomassen, Mette Lindahl

Publication date:
2019

Citation for published version (APA):
Entrepreneurship - What Are We Talking about?
- Gaps Created by Rhetorical Challenges and Misguided Foci

Mette Lindahl Thomassen, Associate Professor, VIA Engineering
Chr. M. Oestergaards Vej 4, 8700 Horsens, Denmark, +45 87554248, melt@via.dk

Abstract:
Questions we care about (Objectives)
Entrepreneurship has made its way from business educations into the majority of educational fields in higher education. Much funding is channelled into educations to promote and embed entrepreneurship, but what is entrepreneurship in an educational context and what should it be? I ventured into the world of entrepreneurship education research 5 years ago and I have read and heard many definitions of entrepreneurship; it is the creation of an organization, a method, a process, a mind-set, a trait, value creation or behaviour. On many occasions, entrepreneurship is used interchangeably with enterprise blurring the borders of the terms. When educators and researchers operate with vague definitions and/or different understandings of the term gaps are formed, both within the field of entrepreneurship education and between the field and other educational fields, by this rhetorical challenge. It poses as a problem for developing entrepreneurship as a field of research and in implementing entrepreneurship education in practice. Therefore, once again this paper raises the question “what are we talking about when we talk about entrepreneurship in higher education?” and maybe more importantly “what should we be talking about?”

Approach
Starting from key contributions in relation to definition issues in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education (EE) and snowballing, a minor literature review has been conducted to identify definitions of entrepreneurship, primarily relating to EE, in theory. The result was compared with empirical data of definitions in practice from five different Danish engineering educations. Based on these definitions, and drawing on practical experience, a conceptual discussion is spurred. A discussion about what entrepreneurship education should be about, in higher education, to start bridging the gaps.

Results
Entrepreneurship is defined in many ways both in theory and practice. In the definitions there appears to be two foci, a people focus and a process focus. With the definition issues many descriptions of entrepreneurship becomes outcome focused. The described outcome vary from the narrow establishment of a new economic entity to the very broad new value creation.

Implications
One final suggestion of how to define entrepreneurship to bridge the rhetorical gaps is not proposed by this paper. It acknowledge the multiple definitions and advocates for explicitly defining entrepreneurship in any given context. Furthermore, it seeks to raise the question of not only what is entrepreneurship but also what should it be in a higher educational context. In this connection a greater focus on intrapreneurship is proposed along with the embedment of enterprise in general formation.

Value/Originality
This paper seeks to shed light on the multiple definitions of entrepreneurship that is in play in theory and practice in entrepreneurship education. The multiple definitions of entrepreneurship can be the source of gaps between researchers and educators. However, bridges can be built through explicitly defining the term. In future reference, what should entrepreneurship be about in higher education? This paper takes a critical position in relation to the relevance of entrepreneurship, as new venture creation,
for the majority of the student body. In extension, enterprise education, as acting on opportunities, easily becomes intangible and the utility can be difficult for students to grasp. For this reason, it is proposed that in the future more attention should be directed towards intrepreneurship. This focus could potentially help students bridge the gap between being learners and becoming value-creators as employees.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Education, Definitions, Intrapreneurship, Rhetorical Challenges, Development
Introduction
Entrepreneurship is what an entrepreneur does and entrepreneurship education (EE) is educating about, for, through, in, embedded, within or inside (Jaimison, 1984) (Gibb, 2002) (Hannon, 2005) (Pittaway & Edwards, 2012) (Hoppe, et al., 2017) (Ramsgaard, 2018) entrepreneurship. But what is entrepreneurship and how does it translate to EE?

Already 1987 Gibb argued that the lack of clarity in defining the entrepreneurial concept had damaging effects (Gibb, 1987). The following year Gartner noted that there was no universal definition of ‘entrepreneur’ (Gartner, 1988). Ten years later this was still the case and Morris presented more than 70 definitions of entrepreneurship (Morris, 1998) while Gibb and Cotton pointed out how the definition issue greatly affected the approach to entrepreneurship education in the UK (Gibb & Cotton, 1998). This definition issue is echoed by Anderson and Starnawska (Anderson & Starnawska, 2008) who argue that the lack of definition of the phenomenon calls for other research practices than positivistic.

Most recent, Henry and Lewis (Henry & Lewis, 2018) addressed the definition issue relating to EE, where it becomes even more problematic since ‘Entrepreneurship’ and ‘Enterprise’ often are used interchangeably. It is even suggested that entrepreneurship means different things to different people (Sexton & Bowman, 1984) (Bennett, 2006)).

The many interpretations of entrepreneurship results in ineffective communication, which is why I call it a rhetorical challenge. It becomes difficult to discuss and develop subject matter and attract people to the field in education and research while being arbitrary. The lack of a unanimous definition of entrepreneurship becomes an issue when we try to establish the legitimacy of the field as a research field and develop the practice of entrepreneurship education. In line with creativity, where Plucker, Beghetto and Dow (2004) argue that the problem with defining the term is harmful to the field of research because without a solid definition the field will lack direction, be object for damaging mythologies and general misunderstanding. This will generally undermine field of research and have a negative impact on the development of educational practices.

If entrepreneurship means different things to different people, are we then merely creating gaps with in the field when we try to research and discuss entrepreneurship and EE, because in reality we do not share a common preunderstanding? With this internal inconsistency can we expect anything else than to be creating gaps between entrepreneurship and EE and other fields of research and educational practice?

To bridge the gaps, I believe it is important to once again raise the question: What are we talking about, when we talk about entrepreneurship in entrepreneurship education? And in a future oriented perspective ask what should we be talking about?

Method
In the search for an answer to the above stated question, a brief literature review was conducted. Starting from key contributions in relation to definition issues in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education (EE) and snowballing.

To further study the definition of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship in educational practice, empirical data was collected and analysed. The data stem from a survey distributed to educators, with
in the field of innovation and/or entrepreneurship, at five Danish engineering educations. The data was collected in an attempt to compare and contrast invention, innovation and entrepreneurship (Thomassen, et al., 2018) and only the data from the definitions of entrepreneurship is presented in this paper. The survey had 24 respondents.

This paper does not aim to deliver an exhaustive presentation of definitions of entrepreneurship in theory and practice. It rather seeks to portray the diversity and multiplicity of definitions to spur a future-oriented discussion. Therefore, the potential bias of the chosen method for the literature review and the small number of respondents, all from the same field of education, is not considered problematic.

Findings
The issues with defining the term entrepreneurship and the consequences for policy, practice and education is not new to the world, but still a challenge.

In the following definitions from theory and practice are presented.

Definitions in theory
How entrepreneurship is defined, naturally has an effect on the ‘How’, ‘What’, ‘Where’, ‘Who’ and ‘When’ of entrepreneurship education. Over time there has been some trends in the definition of entrepreneurship, but generally multiple definitions have co-existed.

Schumpeter (1934) described entrepreneurs as having “the capacity of seeing things in a way, which afterwards proves to be true” and through creative destruction innovates practices and corporations. In the early years entrepreneurship research seemed focused on the entrepreneur, trying to identify traits that separated entrepreneurs from other people. But in 1988 Gartner, possibly as a sign of the time, argued “Who is an entrepreneur?” is the wrong question” and throughout the 1990’s a shift in research focus from ‘who is an entrepreneur’ to ‘what is entrepreneurship’ is seen.

Research in entrepreneurship and EE seems rooted on at least two ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically very different scientific theories. On one hand positivism seems dominant in publications. It seeks to define entrepreneurship as an object that can be measured, weighed and put in causal relations. On the other hand many researchers recognise the complexity, contingency and context dependence of entrepreneurship and there for vows to social constructivism. Which rather try to describe the phenomenon of entrepreneurship leading to a process focus (Bygrave, 1989) (Anderson & Starnawska, 2008).

Entrepreneurship is defined in 1989 by Curran and Standworth (Curran & Stanworth, 1989) as the creation of an economic entity and by Gartner (Gartner, 1989) as the creation of a new organisation. The first definition has a formal business focus where the latter combines the process, the individual, the organisation and the environment. With Gartner’s definition, characteristics of the lead entrepreneur, the start-up process, management practices and strategic behaviours (Duchesneau & Gartner, 1990) are among central themes. In a Delphi study from 1990 eight themes were identifies as an answer to ‘what are we talking about when we talk about entrepreneurship’;
- The Entrepreneur.
- Innovation
- Organization Creation. 
- Creating Value. 
- Profit or Nonprofit. 
- Growth. 
- Uniqueness. 
- The Owner-Manager. 

(Gartner, 1990)

Taking a broader perspective Shane and Venkataraman (2000) (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) focuses on opportunity and enterprising individual, stating that entrepreneurship can be defined as the nexus of the two. This definition raises a number of questions like what is an opportunity which fires up the debate of do they exist to be found or are they created, plus who is an enterprising individual and enterprising how? With this definition, the elusiveness of opportunities does not really seem to promote the definitions of entrepreneurship.

In line with Schumpeter, Sarasvathy (2001) introduced effectuation as the entrepreneur’s method of reasoning. Stating that “Entrepreneurs are entrepreneurial, as differentiated from managerial or strategic, because they think effectually; they believe in a yet-to-be-made future…” (Sarasvathy, 2001, p. 9). To further elaborate the four principals and a world view was proposed; Affordable Loss, Bird-in-Hand (Means), Crazy Quilt (Partnerships), Lemonade (Leverage Contingencies) and Pilot-in-the-Plane (Control vs. Predict). Making entrepreneurship about, reasoning, mind-set, interactions, attitude, network, personal skills and competences. This framework was inspired by studying entrepreneurs, but in 2011 Sarasvathy and Venkataraman (Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011) redefined entrepreneurship as a method, a powerful social force, not only relevant for aspiring business owners but for everyone. Here the lines between enterprise and entrepreneurship becomes a bit blurred.

Recently defining entrepreneurship as new value creation is regaining attention (Gartner, 1990) (Bruyat & Julien, 2001) (Lackéus, 2016). This teleological definition makes entrepreneurship very capacious and again raises additional questions; what or who defines novelty? In addition, who defines and/or receives the value?

Entrepreneurship is being described as a way of being, processual and the confluence of many factors. It even encompasses all that can be imagined (Anderson & Starnawska, 2008).

How does these multiple definitions and diverse foci translate into EE?

In their research, Henry and Lewis have looked at how EE is defined and they found the following:
- “The structured formal conveyance of entrepreneurial competencies” (Alberti, et al., 2004)
- “the process of providing individuals with the ability to recognise commercial opportunities and the insight, self-esteem, knowledge and skills to act on them” (Jones & English, 2004, p. 416)
- “learning to recognise and act on opportunities and interacting socially to initiate, organise and manage new ventures” (Rae, 2005, p. 324)
- “to let students know of the skills necessary to successfully start a business and help build their confidence in being able to perform those activities” (Engle, et al., 2010, p. 51)
- “learners developing the skills and mind-set to be able to turn creative ideas into entrepreneurial action” (EC, 2014).

(Henry & Lewis, 2018)

In these definitions there are traces of various understandings of entrepreneurships. From the commercial business focus, over the focus on knowledge, skills, competences and courage, to opportunity recognition and social interaction.

With this brief summary of how entrepreneurship and EE is defined in theory, the next section will present results from collected data focusing on definitions of entrepreneurship in the practice of engineering education

**Definitions in practice**

As stated earlier, logically, how entrepreneurship is defined translates into how EE is practiced. It is established that in theory there are many takes on entrepreneurship and EE. For that reason it is investigated how entrepreneurship is defined in practice.

In the following definitions of entrepreneurship in an engineering educational context in Denmark is presented. The data was collected at five different engineering education institutes in Denmark, four universities and one university of applied science. The 24 respondents are all educators within the field of innovation and/or entrepreneurship. In a survey or by an interviewer, the respondents were asked to define invention, innovation and entrepreneurship. Only the latter is presented in this paper.

Not surprisingly the definitions varied a lot, even at the same educational institutes educators were operating with different definitions.

To present the data figure 1 was constructed. It encompass all the 24 different definitions of entrepreneurship provided by the respondents.

Figur 1: Definitions of entrepreneurship in an engineering education practice

Source: (Thomassen, et al., 2018)
Like in theory, the definitions are either process or people centred and most of them with a focus on outcome. In the process-focus definitions includes descriptions of the process as being mean driven, related to opportunity or creative destruction, probably inspired by Saravathy, Shane and Venkataraman and Schumpeter. The people-focus draw on different descriptive characteristics i.e. entrepreneurs have certain skills, competences, a mind-set/attitude, talent, traits or behave in a certain manner. Common for the process- and people-focus is that two outcomes are described, first the classical venture/new business/new organisation creation and second the broader value creation.

**Conclusion**

According to the Oxford dictionary, a definition is a statement of the exact meaning of a word. Neither in theory nor in practice entrepreneurship seems unequivocally defined. The confusion from theory translates into practice or vice versa. It appears that the definitions of entrepreneurship in many cases are more descriptive and teleological of nature than actual defining. To answer the initial question, “Entrepreneurship- what are we talking about?”; this study shows that we are still talking about many different things in EE practice, it appear to be a mix of the past 80 years of entrepreneurship theory.

The search for a unanimous definition might be a positivistic quest, but seemingly the field is struggling between two paradigms, positivism and social constructivism, cluttering the communication and the ability to generalise findings. Anderson and Stranawska presents it as a thesis and an anti-thesis. Where positivism is trying to limit and objectify entrepreneurship, thus creating an atomistic and fragmented presentation of entrepreneurship, in contrast to social constructivism that takes a broader approach for understanding entrepreneurship as a phenomenon rather than a thing to be defined. Entrepreneurship is being described as a way of being, processual and the confluence of many factors. It even encompasses all that can be imagined (Anderson & Starnawska, 2008). Positivism might be too limiting, but can we really say that we study “all that can be imagined”. That hardly seems prosperous in order to move the field forward.

**Discussion**

Maybe we need to find the synthesis?

This paper is not exhaustive in presenting what we are talking about in entrepreneurship education and practice in terms of defining entrepreneurship. Yet it illustrates that there is no prevailing definition of entrepreneurship in theory or practice. Based on the findings the following questions can be raised.

If Entrepreneurship is new value creation, who defines what is novel and what is value? Moreover, how does it then differ from creativity when defined as:

“Creativity is the interaction among aptitude, process, and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context.” (Plucker, et al., 2004)

Moreover, how is it different from innovation, which by some definitions is similar if not completely overlapping with creativity, i.e. “Innovation is composed of two parts: (1) the generation of an idea or invention, and (2) the conversion of that invention into a business or other useful application?” (Roberts, 2007)?
If we go back to the definition of entrepreneurship as new venture creation (Gartner, 1985) are we then to narrow in our focus and do we then risk that the majority of students do not see the relevance entrepreneurship and are disinclined to get engaged. In extension, could we talk more about enterprise? If so, what do we do to promote and define the word enterprise, which currently is adapted by many disciplines to make entrepreneurship education relevant for all students i.e. vocational educations, where students primarily educate themselves to become employees. However, with this approach is enterprise in reality a subcategory of employability? If we accept that entrepreneurship is capacious and therefore can accommodate multiple definitions, then we allow the field to be studied in fragments defined by context and circumstance, but how do we get an understanding of the whole phenomenon of entrepreneurship if this is our approach? Referring to Gartner (2001), I no longer believe there is an elephant in entrepreneurship, I believe there is an entire Noah’s Ark. Once again looking into definitions of entrepreneurship has raised more questions than produced answers, so how do we move forward in relation to developing the field of entrepreneurship education? How can we escape being trapped in the elusiveness of non-definitions or from being restricted by too narrow and limiting definitions? What should we be talking about? Can we talk about different types of entrepreneurship to bridge the gaps and become more specific and clear in our communication? I believe it is time to divide and conquer in practice. On a course level, let’s make entrepreneurship education about new venture creation again. Because entrepreneurship as business start-up will be relevant to a minority of the general student population, we should start focusing more on intrapreneurship. Let’s start practicing and researching more intrapreneurship education, to secure the relevance for the majority of the students who become employees. Enterprise, as any form of proactivity, is in my opinion too broad to purposefully operationalize in a single course and should instead be embedded in entire educations as a part of general formation. In the effort to enable our students to feel purposeful by utilizing their knowledge, skills and competences to become creators of new value, I believe we should focus on ‘Old School’ Entrepreneurship AND Intrapreneurship in our rhetoric and on embedding enterprise in general formation.
Bibliografi


Lackéus, M., 2016. *Value Creation as Educational Practice - Towards a new Educational Philosophy grounded in Entrepreneurship?*. Gothenburg: Chalmers University of Technology.


Roberts, 2007. Managing Invention and Innovation: Technological innovation can alter the competitive status of firms and nations but its purposeful management is complex, involving the effective integration of people, organizational process and plans. *Research-Technology Management*, p. 35.


