Foreword

Although the study of entrepreneurial opportunities – their origins, nature and evolution – should form the core of the field of entrepreneurship, it has been a relatively neglected topic. Finally, we have a book that fills this much needed gap in the literature.

Professor Scott Shane provides a deep and comprehensive discussion of the individual–opportunity nexus in entrepreneurship. Eschewing the usual approaches of either focusing exclusively on the individuals and their motivations and actions or focusing exclusively, almost always *ex-post*, on the economic potential of opportunities, Shane fixes his gaze squarely on the nexus of the individual and the opportunity. It is this nexus that I believe is the building block for a better understanding of the entrepreneurial phenomenon.

A remarkable feature of Shane’s work is its breadth of discussion. Shane surveys a vast literature, from economics to psychology and from sociology to management as he builds a compelling framework of the individual–opportunity nexus. He alternates dexterously between the phenomenon and theoretical discipline, always striking a good balance between the two and never falling into the trap of becoming either phenomenon-centric or discipline-centric. Nor does he stop at theoretical frameworks alone. You will find rich and compelling evidence to back up the arguments in the book.

Shane’s work will certainly be provocative because he takes at least two positions which will evoke considerable debate in the field. First, Shane firmly believes that entrepreneurial opportunities exist independent of the actors in a system. In Shane’s view, every price, every invention, every bit of information already engenders within itself opportunities for the creation of new ends. However, human creativity and some idiosyncratic conditions have to exist for the *objective* opportunity to be brought to life. The reason *specific* individuals are required in a world of objective opportunities, in Shane’s view, is because opportunities themselves lack agency. A human being is required to provide this agency so that when *a market can come to be, it will come to be*. This explicitly *discovery* view of entrepreneurship is in marked contrast to an alternate view emerging in the literature, namely, the *creative* view. According to the creative view, opportunities do not exist in any objective form, but are merely a social construction. I foresee a vigorous debate, perhaps even central to the development of the field, on this issue.

Second, Shane also firmly believes that individuals, and not groups or firms, discover entrepreneurial opportunities. Since discovery is a cognitive process, it is meaningless to talk about a cognitive process as a collective act. The collective process is meaningful only in discussions of execution and exploitation, but not in the discovery process itself. Both of these arguments run counter to recent developments in the literature on entrepreneurship. Shane's ideas and arguments will certainly provoke a healthy debate about our underlying assumptions and arguments about the entrepreneurial phenomenon. I say, let the debates begin!

I am pleased to introduce the Edward Elgar series *New Horizons in Entrepreneurship*. I am further pleased to be able to publish Scott Shane's provocative book as a first in the series. The purpose of this series is to publish the best thinking about the nature and role of entrepreneurship in business. The books in this series are aimed at three audiences: entrepreneurship and management scholars, teachers of entrepreneurship and management, and reflective practitioners.

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