[W]hat you pride yourself on, the things that you think are your insight and contribution ... no one ever even notices them. It’s as though they’re just for you. What you say in passing or what you expound because you know it too well, because it really bores you, but you feel you have to get through this in order to make your grand point, that’s what people pick up on. That’s what they underline. That’s what they quote. That’s what they attack, or cite favorably. That’s what they can use. What you really think you’re doing may or may not be what you’re doing, but it certainly isn’t communicated to others. I’ve talked about this to other critics, to other writers; they haven’t had quite my extensive sense of this, but it strikes an answering chord in them. One’s grand ideas are indeed one’s grand ideas, but there are none that seem to be useful or even recognizable to anyone else. It’s a very strange phenomenon. It must have something to do with our capacity for not knowing ourselves. (Bloom, 1991: 232)

The quote from Harold Bloom has been the in the back of my mind since I agreed to Alan Sturmer’s generous suggestion that Edward Elgar Publishing would publish selected portions of my work. (Thank you Howard for the initial book in this series [Aldrich, 2011] and its success. It paved the way for this effort.) The format of the book (as you see in the Table of Contents) involves an introduction that provides an overview of the selected works, the articles selected for publication, and a conclusion: an exciting opportunity, but also humbling in its own way.

So, this Introduction is an attempt to identify what I think matters in the research and writing that my colleagues and I have generated over the past 30 years. But, it is tinged with some apprehension. I have found myself in this place of retrospection before (Gartner, 2004a, 2008b, Chapter 21, this volume): offering interpretations of what I thought I was doing and why I thought what I was doing made sense and had value for other scholars in the entrepreneurship field. But, when I look back and see how other scholars have used my/our work, and how they have cited an article in a way that sometimes makes sense to me and sometimes not, I have this feeling, much as what Bloom has expressed, that the insights I had (or have now) about what a particular article is about and why it was written is simply out of my control. The ideas, insights and facts in these articles take on lives of their own. New ideas and different ideas sprout from the ground of our/my early work. And, I realize that, in this retrospective effort, I view our/my prior work differently as well, as I read how others have used this work and how my own experience as an entrepreneurship scholar has evolved.

So, this Introduction is not an attempt to ‘set the record straight’ on the ‘true’ meanings and intentions of our/my prior research. Rather, I consider this Introduction as a reflection at a particular moment in time (Fall 2013 and Spring 2014) where I attempted to consider our/my entire research experience (as expressed in the articles selected for publication). My plan is to offer a retrospective reflexive tour of our/my research: describe how and why I remember particular research articles were developed (both in terms of the context of ideas at that time, but also in how particular collaborative efforts emerged) and offer some thoughts about why I think these articles might matter, overall, as a contribution to the foundation for what, I believe, entrepreneurship is and how and why it works as it does.
The articles in the book are listed sequentially, by time, rather than by topic. I think particular articles were created in the context of prior work, so, by listing them by time, their relationship to one another, as both an evolution of certain ideas over time, but also as an expansion on certain themes, may become more apparent. I also believe that publishing these articles chronologically may prevent specific articles from being categorized as dealing, mainly, with specific ideas or themes. As I hope to address in this Introduction, some articles were written with different intentions than what might be assumed at face value when reading them without the context of their prior history. What might be a glaring problem with the introduction is that I didn’t attempt to put a substantial amount of effort into connecting my research to current research in the entrepreneurship field. As I’ve indicated recently (Gartner, 2014b) staying current in the entrepreneurship field, particularly as my research cuts across so many topics, is difficult. As the Bloom quote aptly expresses, how my research is used or connected to other research, is not really mine to suggest, in the end, anyway.

The book spans 25 years of published work (1985–2010). So, for the sake of having some way to divide up the book, I’ve divided the material, loosely, by decade: 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s in the Table of Contents. But, ironically, I don’t think that this work can be so easily divided by decade as the only way to categorize them. While I suggest that the work be read sequentially, as a way to see how, broadly, certain ideas evolve over time, this Introduction will be better served by headings that emphasize certain touchstones in the chronology. So, there is a chronology, and there are themes.

I have also decided to write a haiku for each article. Why? The poetic enables one to see differently that which already is (Gartner, 2008a, 2009; Weick, 2011). Or, maybe it is more obtusely expressed in this aphorism from Gary Snyder: ‘Poetry is how language experiences itself’. And, each poem is another way of ‘telling back’ the story (Bruner, 1986). This Introduction will end with a few brief thoughts about the nature of entrepreneurship.

As this Introduction is essentially an autobiographical account, I would assume that there will be no mystery that (turning Charles Dickens’ words around in David Copperfield): ‘I shall be the hero of my own life and that station will be not be held by anybody else’ (Dickens, 2004: 13). Yet, in the back of mind is the quote from Bloom that begins this chapter. What matters in my work is really left to others to decide and to understand. I have some insights, but the work is what it is, with or without me. So, I am well aware that an autobiographical overview might be viewed as hubris. I hope this chapter reflects the munificence of the friendships I have enjoyed, and, I apologize to my colleagues if this account is not as inclusive or appreciative of your efforts and thoughts.

Reflection stares back.
I see. Who is this? Old man.
Where did the years go?

A tale of two Karls
I begin with a retelling (see Gartner, 2004a, 2008b) of the genesis of the development of my scholarship in entrepreneurship. Rather than repeat those stories, I will approach the creation of the foundation of my initial insights into entrepreneurship as a recognition of the primacy of the two ‘Karls’ in my life: Vesper and Weick. I believe that my approach to entrepreneurship might be considered a blend of their views on new venture creation (Vesper, 1980) and
organizing (Weick, 1979). For me, both books support a perspective that begins with variation. In Karl Vesper’s (1980) book, there is an explicit recognition of different: backgrounds of entrepreneurs; reasons that entrepreneurs get into business; ways that entrepreneurs go about starting businesses; kinds of businesses that are started; and entry strategies that these emerging and new businesses utilize. While there are different intellectual facets to the ideas that comprise Karl Weick’s (1979) book, a substantial portion of the text is based on Campbell’s (1965, 1974) sociocultural evolutionary perspective that begins with variation (as further elaborated in Weick, 1979: 147) as beginning with the flows of experience ‘ecological change’ that is ‘enacted’ (for example, through such activities as ‘saying, doing, spinning webs of significance, adapting and producing variations’). Both descriptions, here, of Karl Vesper’s and Karl Weick’s scholarship are a bit simplistic, yet the gist of their more elaborate explorations is, from my view, that the process of organization creation begins with variation. When we look at new venture creation, we see that there are different kinds of: people who start organizations; types of organizations that are started; environments; and ways of starting organizations.

The article ‘A Conceptual Framework for Describing the Phenomenon of New Venture Creation’ (Chapter 1, this volume), which originated as a part of my dissertation (Gartner, 1982), is both a recognition of variation as a key aspect of new venture creation, as well as a framework for making sense of how scholars might identify and describe this variation in their studies. As a precursor to later articles on entrepreneurs themselves, what should be noted is that the framework article does not deny that there are characteristics of entrepreneurs that matter (such as: background, experience, and attitudes) rather, it suggests that certain characteristics of entrepreneurs will matter, more or less, depending on the other three factors: type of firm started, type of environment, and type of startup process. One cannot study the characteristics of entrepreneurs without accounting for their context (firm, environment, and process). In re-reading the framework article, I’m struck with how prescient it is in identifying topics that later occupied entrepreneurship scholars such as opportunity (p. 699), partners/teams (p. 701), and women (p. 703). Yet, if one does a close historical inspection of research prior to Gartner (Chapter 1, this volume), these topics (that is, opportunity, partners/teams, and women) have always been primary focal points of entrepreneurship scholarship. Be that as it may, the framework article best summarizes itself:

the paper provides a means of making a fundamental shift in the perspective on entrepreneurship: away from viewing entrepreneurs and their ventures as an unvarying, homogeneous population, and towards a recognition and appreciation of the complexity and variation that abounds in the phenomenon of new venture creation. (Chapter 1, this volume: 704)

Differences among entrepreneurs, the way they start new ventures, the ventures ‘themselves’ and the context of the startup process, all matter: it is not one aspect of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship that is important to account for, it is all four.

The Fundamental Attribution Error is THE Entrepreneur. Yet?
Running parallel to the framework article was an empirical exploration (Gartner, Mitchell, and Vesper, Chapter 6, this volume) ‘A Taxonomy of New Business Ventures’, a way to understand the variation I found in the sample of new ventures that I studied for my dissertation. The sense-making struggle of the empirical exploration of my dissertation is described at length in Gartner (2008b) so here I will only highlight that the ‘taxonomy’ article tried to find some mid-range way of talking about entrepreneurs that would be a happy medium between ‘all entrepreneurship is the same’ versus ‘all entrepreneurship is different’. The general idea of coming up with a way to categorize the variation across new ventures into similar groups is based on Bill McKelvey’s work (see 1978, 1982) on organizational systematics. My understanding of the systematic approach to studying organizations focuses on this question: What characteristics of organizations can be used to determine whether they are similar or different from one-another? For example, we tend to think of a type of firm, such as a ‘high technology business’, but high technology can be comprised of computer manufacturers, software developers, biological science companies, telecommunications – the list could go on and on with various subcategories of high-technology firms. And, within those categories, such as software developers for example, are these firms really that similar, or are they different? Is a developer of a computer operating system similar to the developer of computer games, or mobile phone apps? Having some way to determine whether a group of firms is really similar to each other is important, if we want to say anything about their characteristics as a group. If I begin with a view that entrepreneurships (entrepreneurs, firms, environments, processes) are likely to be different from one another, then, my challenge becomes: Are there any ways to find similarities among these different new ventures? The taxonomy article is one approach, based on ideas taken from Miller and Friesen (1978) (and for further elaborations of their work see Miller, 1987; Miller, Friesen and Mintzberg, 1984) for finding similarities among what appear to be a disparate group of organizations.

If one looks at the dates of publication for these two articles that came out of the dissertation, the frameworks article appeared in 1985, and, the taxonomy article appeared in 1989. (Three years and seven years, respectively, after the dissertation. ‘Getting published’, at least for me, had/has significant time lags.) The reasons for the publication lag for the taxonomy article were due to issues of inter-rater reliability (there was none), and, the taxonomic methods themselves that led to questions about the reliability of the data as well as the ability to replicate the taxonomic groups by other scholars. The article met with years of rejection from many of the management and entrepreneurship journals. One journal editor noted, in a rejection of the article, that taxonomies were a fad that had passed. Yet, Ian C. MacMillan, founder, and at the time editor, of the Journal of Business Venturing, with mixed responses from his reviewers, allowed the manuscript to be published. Thank you Ian!

My own view of the taxonomy article is that while the methods for generating the data (entrepreneur-submitted quantitative questionnaires and researcher-created in-depth case studies based on telephone interviews) may lack the sophisticated genius of Miller and Friesen’s work for generating inter-rater reliability, and that quantitative taxonomic methods have a bit of art in their construction, the article does provide a way to celebrate a mid-range approach to both recognizing differences and similarities among entrepreneurs, their firms, environments and startup processes. The article sticks to the perspective of the framework article:
There is no ‘average’ in entrepreneurship. Exploring opportunities is more often doing things differently, rather than following the typical. By recognizing many different types of new business ventures, we are more likely to see and appreciate the diversity inherent in entrepreneurship. (Chapter 6, this volume: 184)

Snowflakes fall to the
Ground. A blanket of white. Can
I pull them apart?

One way to talk about the process of entrepreneurship
As part of the struggle of finding some mid-range between ‘all entrepreneurs are alike’ or ‘all entrepreneurs are different’, I wrote mini-cases (very short one-page stories) about each of the 106 entrepreneurships in my study (Gartner, 1982). These mini-cases served to highlight critical aspects of each new venture creation across all four of the dimensions (individual, firm, environment, process). The act of writing so many cases that were, as one aspect of their composition, an attempt to describe the sequence of events that occurred, seemed to guide me towards an appreciation of how stories (even very short stories) might illustrate the complex interaction among intentions, actions, interactions, and reactions over time. I don’t believe that entrepreneurial stories necessarily unfold into an illustration that provides a clear or perfectly accurate picture of what occurred; rather, stories can highlight critical incidents of creation over time.

It is a tricky business to critically evaluate the nature of what a story is (see the final article in this volume, Chapter 21). And, in the middle of the 1980s I had neither the skills nor competencies to explore stories in a sophisticated way. Yet, there were stories that I felt could provide important insights into the process of entrepreneurship that might be appreciated in a way that an amateur (from the French, ‘lover of’ and generally defined as a person who does something for the pleasure of it) might find stories worthwhile. So, in parallel to attempts to generate research that would appear in traditional academic forms (that is, journal articles), I began a series of ‘meditations’ on stories that intrigued me as illustrations of how the process of entrepreneurship actually occurs. These writings can be pejoratively labeled as ‘just-so stories’. I have included two such writings in this collection: ‘Did River City Really Need a Boys’ Band?’ (Chapter 2, this volume) and ‘The Oz in Organization’ (Chapter 3, this volume). And there are others in much the same genre (Gartner, 1987, 1990, 1993).

My recollection of my intentions surrounding the creation of these articles centers on James Hillman’s work on archetypal psychology (see Hillman, 1972, 1975a, 1975b) and his interest in imagination and the image in ‘seeing psychologically’. I was/am very caught up in this idea of how images are inherent in imagination, and that images evoke significant power in one’s thoughts and actions. I tried to use both of these stories as ways for us to see, through images, how entrepreneurship occurs.

Chapter 2 is based on Meredith Willson’s Music Man. He wrote the lyrics, songs and book for the Music Man, which premiered on Broadway in 1957 and was adapted for film in 1962. Having grown up in Iowa (where the action of the story occurs), and having played in John Philip Sousa’s band, Meredith Willson combined his love and nostalgia of both experiences (after working on the play for eight years and thirty revisions) into a delightful story of a kind of entrepreneur (‘flim-flam man’): selling the idea of ‘boys’ bands’ to wayward country towns,
pocketing deposits for band instruments and uniforms, and then skipping town before these boys’ bands actually emerge. The musical shows how Harold Hill, the protagonist of the story, sells the idea of the boys’ band to skeptical townsfolk using captivating images of how the boys’ lives will be ruined without a band, and rallies them around images of how transformational a boys’ band will look. I use the story to mull over aspects of how Harold Hill’s activities in creating the boys’ band are analogous to some aspects of the process of corporate entrepreneurship. There are two issues about the article that I want to emphasize, one expressed in the article, the other not. The first issue centers on how focusing on entrepreneurs seems to evoke the world of dreams and creativity (see for example, the article by Cornelissen, 2013). I will circle back again and again throughout articles I’ve written to a touchstone quote from Collins and Moores’ (1964) study of post World War II manufacturers in Michigan:

In this period of fear and doubt, however, these men found creativity. At the time when it became necessary for them to reorganize their lives and to reestablish their futures, they had the capacity not only to dream but to transmute their dreams to action. They create the business of which they were dreaming. Between the idea and the act falls the shadow. This shadow, which these men had to explore, and out of which they had to hammer reality, lay immediately ahead. They had now to organize the universe around them in such a way that they could progress in establishing their new business. The first act of this direction is what we will call the act of creation. (p. 164)

This quote is such a poetic sense of the nature of entrepreneurship yet it comes through observing such a dry topic as manufacturing entrepreneurs. There is something magical about the entrepreneurial process that is evoked in their description. And, in the Music Man story, we see how a future vision is evoked and nurtured until it becomes, initially, a sorry state of reality. A boys’ band is indeed created, but the boys play pathetically, given that their learning has been through the ‘think method’. Yet, this is enough of a start that the town can re-imagine the boys’ band into something significant and wonderful, as the musical ends with a ‘real’ marching band and the finale – ‘76 Trombones’.

Second, there is one aspect of the show/movie that I didn’t point out in the article, the often ‘irrationality’ of our motivations and actions that frequently serve as the basis for what actually occurs: in this instance, through the love that develops between Harold Hill and Marian the Librarian. There is, at the basis of the story, a dynamic between Harold Hill’s original intentions of flim-flamming the town and moving on with the townsfolk’s money before an actual band is produced and his emerging love for Marion the Librarian, who draws him into staying and seeing through the creation of a very meager band of boys. For those with some musical interest, the dynamic is captured in the two key songs of the musical: ‘76 Trombones’, and ‘Good Night My Someone’. They are inverted melodies of the other. In terms of lyrics, one offers an expansive vision of a band that you can see in your imagination: 76 trombones, 110 coronets, 1000 reeds springing up like weeds, horse platoons, big bassoons, and so on. And, the other, a hope in a future love, unfulfilled, unknown, unseen, yet expected. Two visions, one seen, the other not, collide. And love unfolds. I find that the logical positivist or neo-rationalistic perspective tends to point one towards rational explanations of behaviors and motivations, yet, at the basis of many stories that entrepreneurs tell, it is something else (that is, love, beauty, altruism, hope). I’ll come back to this later on in this chapter.

Finally, James O’Toole, who was at that point the editor of New Management saw something
in this article and published it, as well as awarding the article ‘Best Article’ for 1985. Thank you, Jim, for publishing this article and the two others (Chapters 2 and 3, this volume; Gartner, 1987).

Take the money and Run. What has love got to do With it? Everything.

‘The Oz in Organization’ (Chapter 3, this volume) offers some thoughts about the relationship between ‘doing’ and ‘being’. The article focuses on the film *The Wizard of Oz* (LeRoy and Fleming, 1939) that is loosely based on L. Frank Baum’s book, *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900). For those few unfamiliar with the film, a quick synopsis is (another ‘telling back’ the story [Bruner, 1986]): Dorothy, a girl growing up on a farm in Kansas, while running away from home (with her little dog Toto) is swept up in a tornado that carries her off to the Land of Oz. Upon landing in Oz, the house that she rode out the tornado in has fallen on and killed one of the two wicked witches who rule parts of Oz. The remaining wicked witch promises revenge. In Dorothy’s odyssey to return to Kansas (on the Yellow Brick Road), she meets up with three characters – the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion – who, through various challenges, assist Dorothy in destroying the second wicked witch, while they also gain for themselves a heart (Tin Man), a brain (Scarecrow), and courage (Lion). And, Dorothy is told by one of the good witches that her ruby slippers (gained as a result of killing the first wicked witch) could have taken her back to Kansas all along (which Dorothy subsequently does). The film ends with Dorothy back in Kansas saying: ‘there is no place like home’.

As will be discussed in more detail in the next section regarding the ‘Who Is an Entrepreneur?’ (Chapter 4, this volume) article, I believe that actions can lead to character or more strongly stated: actions are character. If we consider a person who is generous, I contend that the characteristic of generosity comes about through actions of giving. By giving, generosity becomes an aspect of that person’s character. What we do changes who we are. We become our actions, rather than our actions manifesting ‘who we are’.

In the film, *The Wizard of Oz*, we see that the Scarecrow has a brain because he thinks, the Tin Man has a heart because he loves, and the Lion has courage because he acts (through his heart and mind). Certainly, each of these ‘characters’ in the story already had a brain, a heart, and courage, yet these characteristics could only become manifest through their actions during their journey in the land of Oz. Can you have a brain without thinking, a heart without loving, or courage without acting? If a person doesn’t give, can this person be considered ‘generous’? This perspective might be plausible within issues involved with process and content views of situations: organizing versus organization (Weick, 1979). I think this is a dilemma in the study of entrepreneurship: whether actions are the outcomes of intentions (or characteristics) or whether actions embed themselves in intentions and become characteristics. I believe that ‘what we do’ essentially comprises ‘who we are’; that is, for example, a painter paints, and it is the act of painting that makes the painter. I think it would be difficult for someone to claim the characteristic or identity of painter without engaging in painting. So, a focus on actions is critical for an understanding of the development of identity and character.
Another way to talk about the process of entrepreneurship

I strongly believe that the most fruitful way to understand the nature of entrepreneurship is through a behavioral approach (see Bird, 1989). The article ‘Who Is an Entrepreneur? Is the Wrong Question’ (Chapter 4, this volume) was an initial step at outlining what a behavioral approach to entrepreneurship is, and how it might be carried out. While I’ve provided some commentaries on aspects of the genesis of this article and its intellectual motivation (see Gartner, 2004a, 2008b), I will focus my comments here on my surprise and regret that the article tends to be read as an attack on the value of exploring the characteristics of entrepreneurs, rather than a forceful argument to direct entrepreneurship scholarship towards entrepreneurial behaviors. I hope that, earlier in this chapter, I have shown that I have championed a view of entrepreneurship that involves diversity among kinds of individuals, firms, environments, and processes. There is no one type of entrepreneur, no one type of startup, no one type of entrepreneurial environment, and no one way that organizations come into existence. In the ‘Who’ article, my initial discussion of the trait view was an attempt to dissuade scholars from seeking to look for a particular set of traits and characteristics that could identify ‘the entrepreneur’. In Murray Davis’ (1971) way of talking about what is interesting, my intention was not to set up an ‘A’ versus ‘not A’ debate, that is, a debate about the value of exploring entrepreneurial traits and characteristics as the ‘A’ versus ‘not A’. Rather, my intention was to point out that looking for a set of characteristics that would typify ‘the entrepreneur’ would not be successful once one realized the diversity among entrepreneurial: individuals, firms, environments, and processes. If this assumption is correct: that there is a diversity of entrepreneurship, then I think the question becomes ‘what would be the more fruitful way to explore and understand this diversity’?

I think focusing on traits tends to devolve into assuming that there are entrepreneurial characteristics that are applicable across all entrepreneurs. This just doesn’t make sense to me, or, I believe, to be backed up with sufficient empirical evidence. But, looking at behaviors can, I believe, be framed in a way to provide a logic for kinds of activities that, in a broad way, nearly all entrepreneurs engage in when organizing, yet also account for diversity in their activities in specific contexts. And, one of the significant reasons for focusing on behaviors is that the function of the entrepreneur becomes a process, rather than a state of being. Individuals act entrepreneurially at times, and, at other times, they don’t. A behavioral view seeks to explore and understand what occurs when individuals do act entrepreneurially. A behavior view, then, does not treat entrepreneurship as a state of being; it is an activity that one can engage in at various times or not.

Rather than hammer this point over and over again, as I’ll have ample opportunities to do so in subsequent articles that explore entrepreneurial behaviors, I’ll emphasize two other points about this article. First, the article tries to grapple with the ontological nature of entrepreneurship: What is entrepreneurship? How do we define it? How do we know it when we see it? The ‘Who’ article provides seven pages of empirical and normative definitions of entrepreneurship (Chapter 4, this volume, pp.13–20) to challenge readers to consciously identify what they believe the phenomenon of entrepreneurship is actually about. I sense that
we often have implicit assumptions about the phenomenon of entrepreneurship that we often
don’t consciously articulate, and my intuition is that conflicts among findings and views of
entrepreneurship are often about ontological issues rather than about methods or the evidence,
itself. So, when we study or look at entrepreneurship, are we studying or looking at the same
phenomenon? This issue of definitions, and their value in entrepreneurship scholarship will
come up, again and again, in later work.

Second, the article provides a pathway for how scholarship in entrepreneurial behavior
might occur. I think the questions Mintzberg (1973) asks about the nature of managerial work
continue to apply to the nature of entrepreneurial work. Here, I am going to substitute
‘entrepreneur, entrepreneurial, and entrepreneurship’ for ‘manager, managerial, and
management’:

We must be able to answer a number of specific questions before we can expect [entrepreneurial]
training and [entrepreneurial] science to have any real impact on practice:
What kinds of activities does the [entrepreneur] perform? What kinds of information does he
process? With who must he work? Where? How frequently?
What are the distinguishing characteristics of [entrepreneurial] work? What is of interest about the
media that [entrepreneurs] use, the activities he prefers to engage in, the flow of these activities
during the workday, his use of time, the pressures of the job?
What basic roles can be inferred from the study of the [entrepreneur’s] activities? What roles does
the [entrepreneur] perform in moving information, in making decisions, in dealing with people?
What variations exist among [entrepreneurial] jobs? To what extent can basic differences be
attributed to the situation, the incumbent, the job, the organization, the environment?
To what extent is [entrepreneurship] a science? To what extent is the [entrepreneur’s] work
programmed that is, repetitive, systematic, predictable)? To what extent is it programmable? To what
extent can the [entrepreneurship] scientist ‘reprogram’ [entrepreneurial] work? (Mintzberg, 1973: 3)

These two broad themes – (1) What is the nature of entrepreneurship? and (2) How does
entrepreneurship occur behaviorally? – will be, in various forms, the predominant issues
addressed in many of the articles in this book.

There are times in life
When a person rushes to
Pursue hopefulness.3

What is entrepreneurship?
If one is going to study entrepreneurship as the creation of organizations, then, what does
organization creation entail? There are four articles which I believe provide various attempts
to offer theory and insights into the nature of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon: ‘Properties …’
(Chapter 5, this volume); ‘Acting As If …’ (Chapter 9, this volume); ‘What Are We Talking
About …’ (Chapter 8, this volume); and ‘… Emergence Vocabulary’ (Chapter 10, this volume).
Chapter 5 bases itself in organization theory and tries to generate a framework for understanding
what an emerging organization is vis-à-vis what established organizations are. Chapter 9
offers a way to relate the idea of entrepreneurial behavior to ideas in the organizational
behavior field. Chapter 8 offers insights into what scholars already think and assume about the
nature of entrepreneurship. Chapter 10 provides suggestions for how scholars might think
about the nature of entrepreneurship.
The genesis of Chapter 5 begins with a recollection of my first experiences of Jerry Katz. He is a virtual encyclopedia of facts and insights into a world of organization theory and entrepreneurship that my brain did not have the capacity to contain. Being around his command of ideas and facts about entrepreneurship and organization theory was like discovering a treasure chest of rare gold and silver coins and jewels and being overwhelmed with this limitless abundance. And, it is not just his command of the facts and ideas that impressed me, it is his ability to make the connections between them. I often think of two quotes from Charles Eames: (1) ‘Eventually everything connects – people, ideas, objects. The quality of the connections is the key to quality per se’ and (2) ‘The details are details. They make the product. The connections, the connections, the connections. It will in the end be these details that give the product life.’ (I will attribute both quotes to being somewhere in Caplan, 1976.) My interpretation of the Charles Eames’ remarks on connections is that: how and why certain details (facts and ideas) get put together, that is, assembled (or connected), is where there is tremendous value. There are plenty of facts and ideas out there. It is the relationships between these facts and ideas that is critical. I believe the value of Chapter 5 is in how the various details of what emerging organizations are, are actually connected together. The chapter, then, reflects Jerry’s genius.

If, from my view, entrepreneurship is fundamentally about the process of organizing, and particularly about organization creation, then what are entrepreneurs actually creating when they create an organization? Chapter 5 attempts to answer that question. Creating an organization involves assembling four different aspects of what organizations are: intentionality, resources, boundaries, and exchange. Identifying these four properties as fundamental to the process of organization creation, and, suggesting ways in which these properties might be made visible and studied is the gist of the chapter.

I don’t think it is by coincidence that Barbara Bird’s (1988) article on intentions appeared in the same issue of the *Academy of Management Review* as Chapter 5. I think we are in agreement that, typically, the genesis of the organizing process begins with intention (for example, ‘purposefulness, goals’) on the part of an individual or individuals (Reynolds, 2007: 67). There are reasons why organizations come into existence that are either provided by the entrepreneur(s) or are externally co-created through interactions among the entrepreneur(s) and their situations (Chapter 5, this volume: 431). Organizational goals, or a meaning for why the organization exists, which is separate from the entrepreneur(s)’ own goals and intentions, will eventually emerge over time, if the organization is to come into existence. What I am emphasizing here is that organization emergence begins with actions among individuals that will result in ‘organization’ which involves an entity that is separate from the organizers, themselves. It is critical to realize this. While an entrepreneur may begin the organizing effort with particular goals and purposes in mind, as the organization emerges, the organization takes on its own life and meanings: the organizational imperative (Gartner and Bellamy, 2009: 20–21; Hart and Scott, 1975; Scott and Hart, 1989). Organizations that emerge from entrepreneur(s)’ efforts are not the entrepreneurs; just as children are not their parents, even though children come from the same mix of DNA as their parents. Or, for example, an Eames chair is not Charles and Ray Eames. The chair is a manifestation of some aspects of the Eames’ creative process, but, once the chair is made, it exists and has a ‘life’ of its own, irrespective of what the Eames intended the chair to be, or be used for. So, creations are not their creators. So, while individual intentions are likely to be critical aspects of the formation
of an organization, the organization, as it emerges, will assume its own purposes and direction. Organizations are not their organizers. I realize there is a lot of research on the importance of the entrepreneurs’ skills and knowledge to the direction of the emerging venture (for example, Shane, 2000), yet I suggest, at some point, the organization is likely to have its own imperatives and values. Whether my belief is accurate should be empirically explored and verified.

One of the cruxes, then, of the process of organization creation is that an organization must become an entity that is not the entrepreneur, per se (even though, we point out, it is possible to have an organization of one person). The idea of ‘boundary’ as a characteristic of the emerging organization implies that organizations evolve into something separate and distinct, and, that organizations have their own ‘identity’ (Chapter 5, this volume: 432) which reveals itself through such markers as: legal status, tax identification, mailing address, business name, phone number, and so on.

Within the boundary that emerges to identify what is or is not the emerging organization, are resources (for example, human and financial capital, organizational routines, and processes) that provide the energy and impetus to provide value (for example, goods and services) to others through the process of exchange. Since the idea of resources plays such a significant role in entrepreneurship scholarship (see Alvarez and Barney, 2002; Alvarez and Busenitz, 2001) and in chapters in this book, I will not address it here. I will elaborate on the idea and meanings of resources later on in this Introduction.

In order for an organization to survive over time, there needs to be exchanges that occur so that the emerging organization receives the resources necessary to continue operations. While the tendency is to think of exchanges as sales transactions, where an organization exchanges something of value to someone else for a profit, it should also be noted that exchanges such as investments or loans to the emerging organization are other types of transactions where value is exchanged.

All four properties, then, are inter-related to each other, and, as a whole, would characterize the emergence of an organization. What we noted in the article was that scholars tend to use one of the operationalizations (that is, markers) of a particular property to indicate the existence of a new organization. We suggest that scholars be careful in their selection of specific markers for signaling the creation of an organization (that is, Aldrich et al., 1989). As I tend to focus on a level of analysis that is at the level of behavior, the ability to specifically identify when, exactly, an emerging organization is indeed an organization, is a bit tricky, as is the phenomenon itself.

Chrysalis. Pupa.
Ugly names for the forming
Of the butterfly.

In looking back at the article in Chapter 9 in this volume, I admire our attempt to comprehensively address the nature of entrepreneurial behavior. Even before the publication of her book *Entrepreneurial Behavior* (Bird, 1989), Barbara and I had engaged in many conversations about how to move research efforts forward on the behavioral aspects of entrepreneurship. I had met Jennifer Starr while I was ‘slumming’ off-and-on at Wharton with infrequent day trips up from Georgetown University in Washington DC to see what Ian and Venkat were up to with their growing herd of doctoral students. Jennifer and I had begun a
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series of collaborations on the nature of entrepreneurial work (see Gartner and Starr, 1993). So, when Lanny Herron, Harry Sapienza, and Deborah Smith-Cook provided an invitation to participate in a series of special issues in *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* on different disciplinary perspectives on entrepreneurship, it seemed an opportune time to combine our efforts and interests in entrepreneurial behavior.

Here are some quick points that I see as highlights of the article: (1) entrepreneurial behavior is an aspect of the process of organizational emergence; (2) just as ideas about the nature of behaviors in organizational behavior are muddled, so are perspectives on entrepreneurial behavior; (3) recognizing variation as inherent in the process of organizational emergence will require a recognition of variation in relevant entrepreneurial behaviors; (4) the study of entrepreneurial behavior requires a significant willingness to be open to a broad range of methods and perspectives in order to appreciate the variation and nuances in these activities; (5) more data collection rather than more theorizing is needed; and (6) entrepreneurial behavior is inherently imaginative and future oriented as characterized in the words ‘as if’.

Emerging organizations are thoroughly equivocal realities (Weick, 1979) that tend towards non-equivocality through entrepreneurial action. In emerging organizations entrepreneurs offer plausible explanations of current and future equivocal events as non-equivocal interpretations. Entrepreneurs talk and act ‘as if’ equivocal events were non-equivocal. Emerging organizations are elaborate fictions of proposed possible future states of existence. In the context of the emerging organization, action is taken in expectation of a non-equivocal event occurring in the future. (Chapter 9, this volume: 17)

In hindsight, we missed a significant opportunity to connect this ‘as if’ perspective to the philosophical ideas in Vaihinger’s (1924) *The Philosophy of ‘As If’*. My simplistic reading of Vaihinger’s work suggests that individuals must create a belief system and act ‘as if’ this belief system were true in order to live. Living life ‘as if’, therefore, is imaginative: we consciously or unconsciously create a fiction of the world. I suggest that living life requires a certain form of entrepreneurial thought and activity for all individuals. In living ‘as if’ we construct our reality, and live it whether this ‘fiction’ is true or not. Truth, then, is less important than plausibility, particularly when having plausible beliefs might spur actions that bring views of a future reality into existence (Weick, 1984). I am drawn to the idea of ‘as if’ as an aspect of entrepreneurship because the creation of organizations does require entrepreneurs to offer plausible stories of the future that others may join (as customers, suppliers, employees, investors, and so on) or not. I think these plausible future stories become real to others when entrepreneurs are able to live them out. There is a performance aspect to entrepreneurship that needs to be captured in the study of entrepreneurial behavior. Whether the performance of entrepreneurship can be ‘scripted’ (which might be thought of as planned), or considered as improvisational (which might be labeled as effectual [Sarasvathy, 2008] or bricolaged [Baker and Nelson, 2005]), the future of an organization comes into existence through action. Understanding entrepreneurial behavior is therefore critical to understanding the process of organization creation. Finally, it should be noted that Sarasvathy (2008) brings up important insights into Vaihinger’s logic of ‘as if’ as it applies to entrepreneurship, and while she suggests that ‘as if assumptions are an appropriate way of generating useful hypotheses’ (p.193), she proposes an effectual perspective based on ‘even if’. I am ambivalent about her use of ‘even if’ as a more encompassing idea of the ‘as if’ perspective, but I do appreciate her
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genius in recognizing that entrepreneurs see constraints in the emergence process, and ‘even if’ those constraints exist, are willing to act imaginatively in new ways that bring about new worlds.

Act ‘as if’ and it
Maybe. Possibility
Sees itself through me.

My initial experiences with the academic journal review process involved submitting manuscripts for review which then began a dialogue among the author, editor(s), and reviewers about a variety of ontological (what is the phenomenon) and epistemological (given a particular definition of the phenomenon, what, then, is known about it) issues. What am I doing research on, and, what do we know about it? In the first decade of my research, many of the concerns about the articles I submitted for review stemmed from, what I believed to be, unconscious beliefs about what entrepreneurship is. I would get back comments from reviewers such as: ‘That is not entrepreneurship’ and ‘The kinds of firms you are studying are not entrepreneurial firms’. Rarely did reviewers offer insights into what their own beliefs and views about entrepreneurship might be, except to indicate that my definition of entrepreneurship was not theirs nor did the kind of phenomenon I was studying represent their view of the entrepreneurship phenomenon. And, rejections resulted. This led me to explore this question: ‘What is entrepreneurship?’ And, more specifically: ‘What do academics mean when they talk about what entrepreneurship is?’

The article ‘What Are We Talking About When We Talk About Entrepreneurship?’ (Chapter 8, this volume) was a systematic attempt to surface the unconscious views that various academics held about their beliefs about entrepreneurship. Without belaboring the methods used to engage academics in the process of uncovering definitions of entrepreneurship, the results of this effort identified eight broad themes, or issues, that would characterize aspects of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon: the entrepreneur, innovation, organization creation, creating value, profit or non-profit, growth, uniqueness, and the owner/manager. The gist of this article tends to be misread, as far as I can tell, by many scholars. These eight themes are points of disagreement among academics regarding their views of what entrepreneurship is. For example, some scholars believe that entrepreneurship must involve innovation, while other scholars do not. Some scholars believe that entrepreneurship must involve organization creation, while others do not. Some scholars believe that entrepreneurship involves creating value, is for profit only, must grow, be unique, and involve ownership, while other scholars do not. Is there an agreed upon definition of entrepreneurship? No. Are there issues where there is significant disagreement about the nature of entrepreneurship? Yes. The eight themes merely outline the parameters for delineating the boundaries for discussing what might differentiate entrepreneurship from other types of phenomenon. Conversations about entrepreneurship circle around these eight themes, rather than around other kinds of words and ideas. Entrepreneurship scholars typically don’t talk about ‘plastics’ or ‘crop rotation’ or the ‘weather’ when they talk about entrepreneurship. I’m not sure whether this point is obvious or not. The article does not come up with a definition of entrepreneurship, per se. It comes up with a way to identify whether a scholar is having a discussion about entrepreneurship, or not. These eight themes are broadly the points of discussion that entrepreneurship scholars will
Ivan Bull was very kind to invite me to participate in a conference on entrepreneurship theory that he hosted at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in October 1991. I hoped to use this conference as a way to actualize certain fantasies I had about a vision of the nature of entrepreneurship. I had wanted to conduct a multi-media event that combined clips of films and some photos into a presentation on ways to see aspects of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship: ‘Aspects of Organizational Emergence’. If you can think, historically, about the state of the art in computers and presentation equipment in 1991, then this fantasy was a difficult task to accomplish. Showing something on a screen typically required the use of overhead projectors with acetate (plastic) sheets. Showing a film clip required either a film projector or a videotape machine. I remember my presentation as a fiasco of shuffling between various machines to project still and moving images, and having nothing work according to plan. What I wanted the audience to see never occurred.

The article ‘Words Lead to Deeds: Towards an Organizational Emergence Vocabulary’ (Chapter 10, this volume) is a significant reworking of my original intentions to provide a visual experience that could evoke new ways to talk about the phenomenon of entrepreneurship. So, when you read this article, behind the words are images from Robert Irwin installations (Irwin, 1985) and clips from the films ‘Powers of Ten’ (Eames and Eames, 1968/1977) and ‘Tops’ (Eames and Eames, 1969). To see the image in imagination was the goal never achieved. For ‘Words Lead to Deeds’ I was left with the challenge of developing a vocabulary of words that described the phenomenon of entrepreneurship that I could see, but not show.

This is my favorite article in the entire collection. This is partially to do with memories of my original vision, and partially to do with how playful and ironic the article is for evoking a sense of entrepreneurship. The article is ‘light’ (Kundera, 1984). The framework of the article is loosely based on Wallace Stevens’s poem ‘Notes towards a Supreme Fiction’ (Stevens, 1954/1990: 380–411). The definitions of the words about organizational emergence (Chapter 10, this volume: 232), and my commentary on them offer some very powerful insights into some of the paradoxes and conundrums of entrepreneurship and the challenge of studying it. I hope readers will appreciate the double entendre in founder (that is, one that establishes; as well as, to become disabled, to give way, to come to grief, fail). To found is to establish and give way – come to grief (Shepherd, 2003). And, the play on words with emerge (to become manifest), emergence (the act of emerging) and emergency (an unforeseen combination of circumstances that calls for immediate action). This could be another way to talk about the entrepreneurial aspects of ‘Knightian uncertainty’ (Knight, 1921). Entrepreneurs are those
unforeseen combinations of circumstances where entrepreneurs act. The use of Max Apple’s short story ‘Peace’ (Apple, 1989) is a beautiful depiction of these ironies in entrepreneurship: Jay Wilson founds and founders, the entrepreneurship emerges through emergency.

Much of the story of ‘Peace’ revolves around exploiting an opportunity to purchase 600,000 Star Wars plastic swords (originally retailing for $7.95) for 10 cents each. Jay’s original business partner’s advice: ‘Buy them, then stab yourself 600,000 times’. Jay moves forward with the purchase, and soon comes to realize that the swords appear to be unsellable at any price. I find the dialogue Jay has with Abraham, the individual who originally sold him the swords as a profound commentary on entrepreneurship.

Jay seeks out Abraham, furious:

‘… you set me up. You knew how much cash I had. You led me straight to those swords and set the price just at the top of my budget. Do you get the whole sixty?’
‘No,’ Huang said, ‘only half.’
‘You bastard.’
‘Not bastard. Straight business.’
‘You knew nobody wanted them. You offered them all over town.’
‘All over the world,’ Haung said. ‘Dime. Very cheap price. Required very big risk …’
‘You just took my money,’ Jay said. ‘You knew I’d never be able to sell.’
‘No. I knew Abraham Huang could not sell. Maybe Jay Wilson sell. This is business.’ (Apple, 1989: 60)

‘Maybe Jay Wilson sell’ – each individual makes decisions about their future circumstances. We can’t really predict, exactly, what will occur, either for ourselves, or for others. There is room for the imagination and for situations to evolve in non-predictable ways. And, so it is with Jay Wilson’s experiences in ‘Peace’. The story has a happy ending. Through what appears to be a sense of hopelessness at not selling any of the swords, Jay is desperately running home when he sees a procession of priests and ministers that leads him toward an experience that presents him with an idea for a way he can sell the swords at a profit. And it comes to pass. All 600,000 swords are purchased for 2 dollars each for use in a peace event – Turn Star Wars into ploughshares. Through what appear to be random circumstances (being exactly at the right place at exactly the right time) with an active imagination of how the Star Wars swords might become something else, the emergency emerges and becomes an entrepreneurship. Not all entrepreneurship stories are so dramatic.

Said before (but worth repeating again and again): The language of entrepreneurship matters.

Words are windows for seeing what was earlier hidden or missing. The variety of words we use to talk about organizational emergence will provide us with the requisite variety to see and understand the variation in this phenomenon. (Chapter 10, this volume: 238)

Opportunity:
From Porta – Doorway; Passage
Through. Fortune opens.

And...another way to talk about the process of entrepreneurship: empirical evidence on entrepreneurial behavior
I view much of the effort I spent during the decade of the 1990s as focused on generating
evidence and insights into the process of how entrepreneurs create organizations. All of the papers in this section involve collaborative efforts among very good friends of mine. There are so many special moments that are embedded in and around all of this work. The stories that are conveyed for each of these articles are merely a patina on the depth of the joy and delight I have had over the years in conversations, dinners, and adventures. Reader and Watkins (2006) hint at the importance of friendships in both collaborative research and in the generation of citation patterns (which reflect what articles a scholar tends to pay attention to). I believe that so much of what could be written about the development of particular scholarly articles and lines of research could be based on the nuances of the relationships among the co-authors. I will try to keep my stories to a minimum here.

The Duchesneau and Gartner article (Chapter 7, this volume) is an exploration and replication of the methods and ideas in Van de Ven, Hudson, and Schroeder’s (1984) study that compared six low-performing and six high-performing educational software ventures. We closely followed their multi-level framework (entrepreneurial, organizational, and ecological factors) in a study of the Fresh Juice Distribution business. Don Duchesneau had called me one day to ask whether I would supervise his dissertation. He was living in Florida. I told him that he would need to meet me and talk, face-to-face, before I could make a decision. He responded ‘Are you available if I can fly up tomorrow?’ I was and he did. How different it is to be working on a dissertation with an entrepreneur who has resources. Don had started a number of Fresh Juice Distribution (FJD) businesses, and his wide-ranging contacts in the industry were the foundation for his dissertation: a broad exploration of the history of many of the FJD firms that subsequently succeeded (13 firms) or failed (13 firms). We had twice as many firms that were the basis for the Van de Ven, Hudson, and Schroeder (1984) study. This article is carved from Don’s dissertation efforts.

While the paper covers a range of individual, behavioral, and strategic factors that play a role in new venture success or failure, the factors I want to emphasize here are the behavioral ones. We identified eight types of behaviors that could differentiate between the successful and unsuccessful firms: clarity of the business idea (clear); breadth of vision (broad); number of startup behaviors undertaken (many and varied); time spent in planning (lengthy); the breadth of the planning process (very broad); engaging in market research (some versus none); using professional advisors (yes); and whether the firm was purchased as a way to gain entry into the FJD business (no). Of these behaviors that led to success, one behavior will tend to consistently surface in later research as both a primary factor in success at getting into business, but also as a factor in succeeding in business: planning. I want to make sure that readers understand that the process of planning is not the same as writing a business plan. And that, even in writing a business plan, there is both the process of planning and the process of writing the document itself. While there seems to be a growing concern about the value of business plans, the evidence here, and in subsequent research presented later, suggests that the process of business planning (for example, gathering evidence, talking to customers, analyzing competition, identifying a viable business model) is a necessary component of both success at starting a business and success at staying in business. This article makes a strong case that business planning (the process) matters. What confounds the issue of whether business plans matter is in fathoming the evidence scholars collect about business plans: whether the entrepreneurs actually undertook the process of business planning, or whether their efforts were entirely devoted to writing a document without gathering evidence gained from a
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business planning process. Business plans that represent business planning efforts tend to be significantly correlated with success.

There are two other findings that I think are interesting. First, is the observation that individuals who tended to purchase firms were less likely to do the significant ‘due diligence’ required in the purchase process; purchasers tended to rely solely on the past performance of these firms for sale, and rarely undertook efforts to understand the changing competitive dynamics of the industry. Sellers were offering firms that were on a trajectory to fail while buyers were making assumptions (based on past performance) that these firms would continue to have potential. This is additional evidence in support of the many findings about Akerlof’s (1970) ideas about the ‘market for lemons’: the information asymmetries in buying and selling under uncertainty. The second point is that industries evolve over time (nothing new here, but still worth saying) and that behavior that worked at one moment in the industry’s life cycle may not work at later times. Context matters.

Success beckons. Those
Who come later must follow
A different path.

Always, the first image that comes to mind when thinking about Kelly Shaver and Betsy Gatewood is spending an afternoon at Monet’s house in Giverny, those indelible images: the bright pinkness of the house facade, thousands of multi-colored roses, and the cool placidness of the water lily ponds. One of many wonderful adventures we have had together. My resume bears so many marks of their involvement in my life. And, my life bears more profound signs of their constant and supportive friendship and camaraderie.

‘A Longitudinal Study of Cognitive Factors Influencing Start-Up Behaviors and Success at Venture Creation’ (Chapter 11, this volume) is deeply embedded in Betsy and Kelly’s skills and competencies. The article does so many different things well. It is one of the first longitudinal studies that measures the relationship between an entrepreneur’s initial cognitive perspectives and subsequent success at starting an ongoing firm. It provides a comprehensive framework of identifiable and measurable behaviors for studying the entrepreneurial process. And, it offers important insights into the relationship between cognitions, behaviors, and success at getting into business.

I will briefly point out the paper’s insights on the cognitive side. The paper is grounded theoretically, in attribution theory, and, as such, links it to a foundation of theory and empirical evidence that extends beyond entrepreneurship scholarship, per se. It is a social psychology article, first. Indeed, I believe ‘A Longitudinal Study …’ is perhaps one of the best psychologically-based entrepreneurship articles of the 1990s. The article lays out a way to think about entrepreneurship in an attributional way. It provides a method for identifying attributional perspectives in an entrepreneur’s statements. And, it shows how those statements influence subsequent persistence in starting new ventures. The article also demonstrates how the construct of ‘locus of control’ can be thoughtfully applied in a rigorous way to the study of entrepreneurs. The major finding worth pointing out is that females who offered internal/stable attributions (for example, ‘I have always wanted to be my own boss’) and males who offered external/stable attributions (for example, ‘I have identified a market need’) were
significantly more likely to succeed at getting into business than those individuals who offered other types of attributions.

The summary of reasons for getting into business found in Table 2 (Chapter 11, this volume: 377), paints in broad brush strokes a picture that individuals engage in entrepreneurial activity for a variety of reasons: identified a market need, desire of autonomy, to make more money, utilize skills and experience, and the desire to accomplish something (plus many others). Different types of reasons for different types of people can matter differentially. That insight may seem obvious, but its implications are more far reaching if one has a perspective that variation in entrepreneurship is fundamental to the phenomenon.

The list of new venture creation behaviors described on pages 389 and 390 of the article (ibid.) is, from my point of view, one of the more comprehensive and detailed lists of entrepreneurial behaviors that exist in the entrepreneurship literature. While the behavioral aspects of the article were not the primary focus of the article, the generation of this list of behaviors and how they were utilized could benefit scholars interested in developing more evidence for the value of a behavioral view of entrepreneurship. The list is based on a thorough exploration of prior theoretical and empirical research on entrepreneurial behavior as well as a rigorous field test using Small Business Development Center counselors/advisors to evaluate the validity and reliability of the behaviors as measures of entrepreneurial activity. The 29 behaviors that resulted from this effort are divided into five major categories of activities: gathering marketing information, estimating potential profits, finishing the groundwork for the product/service, developing the structure of the company, and setting up business operations. I wish this list of activities had become the list of behavioral activities in subsequent longitudinal data collection efforts on nascent entrepreneurs (for example, Gartner, Carter, and Reynolds, 2004; Gartner et al., 2004; Reynolds, 2007; Reynolds and Curtin, 2008). These 29 behaviors are able to grasp, in a much more comprehensive and detailed way how the process of venture creation might actually be seen, in context, and measured. It recognizes that some broad behaviors, such as ‘marketing to customers’ involves a variety of activities: (1) gathering information on who would be my customers; (2) making sales/revenue projections; (3) marketing the product or service itself; (4) supporting customers with installation and adjustment; and (5) supporting customers with training. And, therefore, implicitly recognizes that these marketing behaviors span many of the five categories of activities. Certainly, there are a number of other behaviors that could be identified as involved with ‘marketing to customers’ (for example, I would have added ‘selling to customers’ as separate and in addition to [3] marketing the product or service). Be that as it may, this list of 29 behaviors is where I would begin in building a set of identifiable activities that would appear to capture the essence of what individuals are doing when they engage in the process of starting new businesses.

The finding that nascent entrepreneurs who start businesses were more likely to devote substantially more hours to activities involved with ‘setting up business operations’, that is, engaging in the tangible activities of operating a business (for example, purchasing inputs, organizing these inputs, and selling the outputs) is a precursor to later work (Chapter 12, this volume) that generated a similar insight: visible actions that signal concrete business operations increase chances for the development of on-going businesses. (Visible) actions matter.
I can, even now, in my head, so clearly hear Nancy Carter’s voice on the phone as she said: ‘We have the data that can explore your ideas about entrepreneurial behavior. Do you want to join up?’ My involvement with the development of the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics began with Nancy Carter’s reaching out to include me in the work she and Paul Reynolds were doing on the study of nascent entrepreneurs over time. As has been described in other venues (Gartner et al., 2004; Reynolds, 2000), the article ‘Exploring Start-Up Event Sequences’ (Chapter 12, this volume) was (at least for me) the genesis for the intention to develop a sufficiently large generalizable sample of individuals who were identified early in the process of starting ventures who could be followed for a number of years until their efforts resulted in business startups or not. I had suggested earlier (Gartner, 1989) that entrepreneurship research needed generalizable longitudinal data on the entrepreneurial process, so that we could determine what kinds of characteristics, skills, attitudes and behaviors might actually have some influence on success at getting into business. Being able to measure ‘change over time’ is critical. And, Nancy and Paul had this kind of data: individuals contacted during their initial efforts at startup, and then, six to 18 months later. While it was a very small random sample – 71 cases – this was large enough to glean some important insights into the process of venture creation.

The highlight of the article that I think is most intriguing is Figure 1 (Chapter 12, this volume: 160) and the analyses of this graph. As context, one finding from many of the various longitudinal studies on nascent entrepreneurs is that there is a significant portion of individuals who begin the startup process that seem to be continually ‘still trying’. I sense this proportion of individuals hovers around 30 percent of all people who say they are engaged in the process of business startup. The ‘still trying’ appear to be ‘always trying’, but never quitting or getting into business. Figure 1 shows vividly that the ‘still trying’ group appears to engage in significantly fewer activities that would either propel them into business, or provide insights that their business concepts would not work. Many of the ‘still trying’ are therefore, actually ‘not trying’. They are talkers not doers: saying they are trying, but not. While some kinds of businesses will take a very long time to come into existence, on average, sustained activity (working more than 30 hours a week at the startup process) will result in an entrepreneur either getting into business, or quitting the startup process within about two years. Supporting the finding described earlier in Gatewood, Shaver, and Gartner (Chapter 11, this volume), individuals who took actions that made the venture real (that is, formed legal entity, asked others for money, hired employees, purchased facilities and equipment) were more likely to get into business. I continue to support the speculation we offered that those individuals who ‘gave up’ were doing so because they found that their business idea proved to not work. Not all opportunities that are pursued will necessarily work out. And, only through investing time and resources into developing those ideas can entrepreneurs find out whether they will work. Also, then, if one looks at the numbers (not just in this study, but, in other studies of the startup process), it should be pointed out that most venture creation efforts are not successful. (In general, about 70 percent of the individuals who begin the process of business startup either quit or are ‘still trying’.) Entrepreneurship is primarily about pursuing ideas that don’t work.
Since this article has a lot of visibility given its use as a foundation piece for the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics, I’m not sure I can add much more to the ongoing discussion of its insights and value.

Give yourself to the Process until it works or Not. Effort Matters.

If I recollect this correctly, Karl Vesper once told me that he felt that one of the primary drivers of the rise of the entrepreneurial economy in the United States beginning in the 1980s was the influence of Inc. Magazine. Whether Inc. Magazine caused more entrepreneurial activity (which I believe it did because it provided an awareness of the phenomenon in an engaging way), the magazine did have its pulse on entrepreneurship, particularly in capturing aspects of emerging high growth businesses (for example, the Inc. 500, and the Inc. 100). For me, the magazine reflected the vast creativity and diversity in entrepreneurial activity. Inc. Magazine profiled companies and ideas that seemed to go beyond what one what thought is possible. Much of the fun of reading the magazine was in learning about how such seemingly bizarre ideas could develop into viable businesses (for example, Animalens, Inc. – rose colored contact lenses for chickens).

For a number of years the magazine ran in-depth profiles of emerging companies that also included evaluations and recommendations from experts (venture capitalists, industry experts, industry competitors, and entrepreneurs). These evaluations piqued my curiosity about the ability to predict whether an emerging entrepreneurial venture would succeed or not. Much of what academics in entrepreneurship appear to do is develop predictive models of entrepreneurial success, so, I wondered whether my colleagues and I could develop a model that might predict the success or failure of emerging ventures better than other types of experts. The Inc. Magazine articles gave us this occasion. ‘Predicting New Venture Survival: An Analysis of “Anatomy of a Start-up.”’ Cases from Inc. Magazine’ (Chapter 13, this volume) used 27 magazine articles in the Inc. Magazine series ‘Anatomy of a Start-up’ as the data, and we cobbled together an 85-item questionnaire to code every possible aspect of the entrepreneurial situation that might influence whether the startup would succeed, or not. While there are many methodological issues that can be pointed out as concerns in how the research was conducted, the results, I think, offer some insights that are valid and plausible, as well as point in the direction of later ideas in the narrative arena. Successful startups required entrepreneurs to change over time (in skills, abilities, and actions) that are easy to talk about in the stories portrayed in the magazine articles, but difficult to account for in the quantitative methods used. Entrepreneurs were interacting with various stakeholders (suppliers, customers, funders) over time to, as we now would currently label, ‘co-create’ (Fletcher, 2006, 2007; Sarasvathy, 2008) their startups. The interactions are easy to talk about in a story, difficult to account for in a quantitative model. The discussion reflected this concern about the interactive changes of entrepreneurs over time in the insights we offered about the differences in predictions among the investors and the entrepreneurs. The comments that investors offered in making their evaluations about the possible success of a startup rarely offered a sense of future contingencies that the entrepreneur might surmount, so, these evaluations tended to be more pessimistic about the possibility of success. I ascribe this pessimism to the sense that when an investor
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provides resources to a startup, the investor loses a certain amount of control over the entrepreneur, and, ultimately, the success of the venture will depend on the capabilities and skills of the entrepreneurs (though there is much debate in the entrepreneurship literature about this). So, an investor makes a bet on the current situation with the trend line moving out based on the given fact pattern. Investors seemed to believe there was less of a chance that entrepreneurs would change. The expert entrepreneurs tended to suggest ways that entrepreneurs in these startups might come up with new ways to adjust the current fact pattern, and often believed that the entrepreneurs in the startup stories might creatively come up with fixes to current or future problems. I link this view to the issues discussed earlier in the short story ‘Peace’. Random things occur that are impossible to predict, but those situations can be taken advantage of in ways that move a startup forward in positive ways. Entrepreneurs count on these occurrences. The stories in the magazine articles reflect that, as well. Again, quantitatively modeling random occurrences, and new behaviors and insights from entrepreneurs: difficult. Narrative methods seem to have more space to recognize what actually happens.

Finally, I was so very pleased that the editor and chief of Inc. Magazine, George Gendron, thought that the article was insightful enough to write a column in the magazine about it ‘The seven habits of highly effective start-ups’ (Gendron, 1999: 11).

We live and act now.
The day before tomorrow.
Our dreams are not there.

One of the joys and frustrations of working with the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (Gartner et al., 2004) is that the dataset is so ‘vast’. The number of questions about the startup process is really overwhelming as there are so many different facets of the startup phenomenon that are accounted for. Yet, this ‘vastness’ of items in the PSED is also a joy for providing a researcher with a way to tinker with various ideas and issues that might come up about the nature of entrepreneurship. ‘The Career Reasons of Nascent Entrepreneurs’ (Chapter 14, this volume) was one of the articles that emerged from a number of different efforts among my colleagues and I.

Kelly Shaver, Betsy Gatewood, and I had taken a strong interest in exploring the reasons nascent entrepreneurs offer for starting new ventures in the PSED dataset, Question 104: Why do you want to start this business? This is an open-ended question that we felt would offer both variety and a depth of insights into the motivations that nascent entrepreneurs ascribe to their efforts. Our first major effort at exploring these open-ended responses (Shaver et al., 2001) was actually begun in 1999, and the coding process for analyzing the open-ended responses was tedious and time-consuming, though ultimately rich in insights (see Chapter 20, this volume). I recall that our feeling was, during the coding process, that there had to be other fixed response questions in the PSED dataset that might be similar to the kinds of responses we were getting in the open-ended analyses. These fixed-response questions might be more ‘analyzable’. There were such questions. The paper ‘Doing it for yourself’ (Gartner, Shaver, and Gatewood, 2000), which won the National Federation of Independent Businesses Award at the 2000 Babson Entrepreneurship Research Conference, was the result. Once these results became visible, in conversations with Nancy Carter we realized that she
had been the person who had originally championed these questions in the PSED dataset, and, that she had additional literature on the logic of these questions that would be valuable to furthering this line of inquiry (see Carter, Gartner, and Shaver, 2004). It was at this point that we joined forces for the paper ‘The Career Reasons of Nascent Entrepreneurs’ (Chapter 14, this volume).

As I’ve pointed out earlier (Chapter 4, this volume), one of the fundamental issues that continually crops up in exploring the nature of entrepreneurship is the question of whether entrepreneurs are different from other kinds of individuals, and, more specifically, whether entrepreneurs have different reasons for why they are motivated to start businesses that are different than the kinds of reasons that other individuals offer for getting jobs. I sense that it has crossed most people’s minds that they would assume that entrepreneurs would start businesses for different reasons than people who look for employment. The urtext on this discussion is Shaver and Scott (1991), who lay out a model for how and why the reasons that individuals have in their minds might influence their behaviors (to start a business). Exploring career reasons, then, is important for discerning whether reasons matter as a basis for taking entrepreneurial action. (And, I hope one might see the connections between ‘reasons’ and Barbara Bird’s ideas [1988] about intentions.)

We explored six different categories of reasons that people give for getting into business (self realization, financial success, roles, innovation, recognition, and independence). There were no differences between entrepreneurs on self-realization, financial success, innovation, recognition, and independence, which were the four major reasons that both groups gave for making career choices. These would typically be, one would assume, the categories that entrepreneurs would be different on. Rather, there were small differences on the two lesser categories of roles and recognition. We speculated that these results suggested that entrepreneurs cared less about what others thought about the career choices they made and felt there was less of a need to worry about following family role models in deciding on their entrepreneurial activities. While differences on these categories were significantly different between the two groups, their priority among all respondents was significantly smaller (that is, all respondents cared less about roles and recognition than about financial success or self-realization). Our primary conclusion was that differences between entrepreneurs and others on these career reasons was qualitatively minor, and, essentially, there aren’t differences in the reasons that entrepreneurs and others give for choosing careers. Given that the PSED sample involves asking entrepreneurs during the process of startup about their reasons for getting into business, I would weight this finding heavily against any beliefs that entrepreneurs pursue new venture creation for reasons any different than those who look to pursue other career paths.

Score from one to five
Why you are here in this world?
Only six dreams matter?

I believe that no prospective activity, particularly that of entrepreneurship, could ever occur without some glimmer of intention and thought (Bird, 1988; Katz and Gartner, Chapter 5, this volume). Therefore, if one believes that there would be intention inherent in entrepreneurship, there would be, by necessity, some aspect of ‘planning’. Business planning is a method for recognizing and solving problems that an entrepreneur faces during the emergence of a new...
venture. As such, it is a complicated set of activities and awarenesses that we tend to dump into the jumble of the label of ‘business plan’. Yet, it doesn’t take much imagination to realize that the process of business planning could (or not) involve a myriad of activities and decisions: finding customers, determining customer needs, selling products/services to customers based on assumed determined needs, getting feedback from customers, identifying and acquiring resources to develop and operate the venture, setting up the venture, finding employees and suppliers, and so on. Research on business planning, therefore, often seems like a confusion of contradictory findings and conclusions because our concepts of what people are doing when they engage in ‘business planning’ is as varied as our beliefs about who entrepreneurs are.

My career has tried to tackle the issue of the value of business planning in a variety of ways. Besides my original dissertation work, which tried to account for the activity of business planning as one aspect of the startup process (Chapter 6, this volume), I’ve tried to parse out various insights into how business planning is part of the process of solving problems that entrepreneurs face as they create new ventures (see Gartner, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1988; Gartner and Thomas, 1993). Business planning is a series of activities that entrepreneurs undertake to purposefully move their venture ideas into the context of an ongoing venture. As this is a process, business planning is not only an activity that occurs at one point in time, but, also, across time (for most entrepreneurs engaged in that activity). With that perspective in mind…

The genesis of the work on the value of business planning as it is explored through the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics came about because of layover at Heathrow for a flight back to Chicago after the Babson Entrepreneurship Research Conference in Glasgow in 2004. Jon Liao was waiting for the same flight back, and we struck up a conversation about issues involved in the PSED, particularly issues involved with the behavior variables, and one idea led to another, and we began a collaboration on a series of projects involved with the value of business plans for venture success (Gartner and Liao, 2005, 2007; Liao and Gartner, Chapter 16, this volume, 2008). As both Gartner and Liao (2007) and Liao and Gartner (2008) offer comprehensive reviews of the business planning literature as it relates to entrepreneurship, I’ll summarize those overviews by suggesting that while the results about the value of business planning appear to be mixed (as to its efficacy), the results do tend to lean towards a conclusion that engaging in the business planning process (for example, indicating ‘yes’ to the question: Did you do a business plan?) improves the likelihood of developing an ongoing venture. The results from Chapter 16 in this volume bear this conclusion out: entrepreneurs who engaged in any form of business planning were 2.6 times more likely to have either started a business or still be in the process of starting a business than those individuals who quit the process.

What I find interesting about the paper are the interactive effects between when planning activities occur and perceptions of environmental uncertainty. We found that when entrepreneurs perceived uncertain environments, they were more likely to continue to persist in venture creation if they engaged in planning, while if environments are perceived as certain, then they were more likely to persist in venture creation if they engaged in planning late in the venture creation process. In one sense this result is obvious: planning helps reduce perceived uncertainty that can then help entrepreneurs take action in a particular direction. Planning clears the fog so that a path is revealed. Yet, what is more interesting is that planning can be a way to make sense of what one already knows and has accomplished. I believe, inherently, that individuals need at points to make sense of what is happening to them before they can,
again, move forward. I think this reflects the dual nature of planning: it enables one to make sense of the past and helps guide one’s future. Both are needed. At some points retrospection is helpful, and at other points, prospection is helpful. It all depends on context (Gartner, Chapter 1, this volume).

What I conclude from my forays into the data of the PSED is that action matters more than the reasons that people might offer for why they take action. As later articles will reflect, I lean towards thinking of our situations as socially constructed. And, I emphasize the word ‘construct’. It is the act of assembly, of putting together. It is what entrepreneurship is: organizing. And, that involves action.

The trail ceases at
A bramble or horizon.
Either way: Forward.

Opportunity vocabulary

Did the Shane and Venkataraman (2000) article on the importance of opportunity to the phenomenon of entrepreneurship fundamentally change the way we think about the nature of entrepreneurship, or not (Arend, 2014)? I believe: it did and it didn’t. I believe that they were able to legitimate the entrepreneurship field in a way that helped bring it significant scholarly attention and effort. I believe that the entrepreneurship field needed such a platform to launch many substantial theoretical and empirical research projects (Gartner, 2001). We are better for their article because the field is larger and populated with more enthusiastic and skilled scholars. What didn’t happen from the article immediately, was – or what didn’t occur in many subsequent theoretical and empirical research efforts were – efforts to address the conundrum of opportunity, itself: what is an opportunity? Now, there is much more interest and thought about ‘what opportunities are’ (see Dimo Dimov’s work: 2007a, 2007b, 2011), so, I’ve included two articles in this volume that are, essentially, commentaries on the nature of opportunity. I believe that the focus on opportunity has many of the same ontological problems that a focus on the nature of entrepreneurship has previously undertaken. Rather than: What do we talk about when we talk about entrepreneurship? (Chapter 8, this volume), the question is: What do we talk about when we talk about opportunity?

‘The Language of Opportunity’ (Chapter 15, this volume) came out of the first ‘Movements’ conference organized by Chris Steyaert and Daniel Hjorth with the generous support of funds from Magnus Aronsson at ESBRI in Stockholm, Sweden. The original intention of this paper was to ‘tweak’ Scott Shane, who I hoped would be at the conference, as a response to the article he had written in Organization Science: ‘Prior Knowledge and the Discovery of Entrepreneurial Opportunities’ (Shane, 2000). As I’ve written elsewhere (Gartner, 2012), I’ve had a long love–hate relationship with this article. I think it is brilliant, yet I’ve always been unsatisfied with ‘what is missing’ from the article as Scott offers compelling insights into the process of opportunity discovery. What is missing for me was evidence that entrepreneurs actually thought and talked in the same ways that they were depicted in the case studies. As the article only offered selected excerpts of interviews, I felt there were other stories and insights that simply weren’t being told. What this means is this: if I ask an entrepreneur the question ‘how did you discover your opportunity?’ I will get an answer, of some sort, where the entrepreneur tries to provide me with what I want: a story about discovery. If I tell the
entrepreneur to respond to this: ‘Tell me the story of how you got into business’, the entrepreneur tries to provide me with what I want, as well: a business startup story. If I ask an entrepreneur to respond to this: ‘Tell me about the last five years of your life’. I might get a story that has very little to do with the startup of a business. I can say, very emphatically, that entrepreneurs will tell very different stories in response to those three questions. If we ask about the discovery of an opportunity, entrepreneurs respond with a story about discovery. If we ask about the creation of their businesses, then, they respond with business creation stories (that rarely talk about the word ‘opportunity’ per se). So, if we ask about discovery, we find it. If we ask about creation we find it.

In other words, if scholars talk about opportunity in certain ways, it is likely that our language will constrain our ability to consider other possible meanings that might be used by others, particularly those individuals who engage in the phenomenon of opportunity: entrepreneurs. (Chapter 15, this volume: 104)

The entrepreneurs I have talked with simply didn’t think or talk in the manner of the evidence presented in Scott’s ‘Prior Knowledge’ article when the questions are about the creation of businesses, rather than the discovery (or creation) of opportunities. The focus of ‘The Language of Opportunity’ was to present evidence that suggested that entrepreneurs don’t think or talk about opportunities, at all. The idea of ‘opportunity’ is our language, the language of scholars studying entrepreneurship. We create meanings that then become the meanings that we seek to find entrepreneurs using as well. I’m more interested in the meanings that the entrepreneurs, themselves, use for making sense of their own experiences.

A few issues in this book chapter are worth noting. We offer two perspectives on the nature of how opportunities emerge: discovery and enactment. We suggest this dichotomy in 2003, a few years before Alvarez and Barney’s (2007) article on the discovery versus creation dichotomy was offered. The enactment perspective is built on links to a literature on how opportunities are perceived that stems from the sense making (Weick, 1979) and strategic identity literatures (see Daft and Weick, 1984; Dutton and Jackson, 1987; Jackson and Dutton, 1988). What has always baffled me in discussions of the nature of opportunity in the entrepreneurship field is that the strategic identity literature on perceptions of opportunities and threats has been, for the most part, ignored. Why is that? In the strategic identity literature, opportunities are not only given a theoretical framework for how and why they are perceived as opportunities, the concept, itself, is defined, measured and tested in a variety of settings. Why has the entrepreneurship field failed to recognize these previous contributions and sought, instead, a path to ‘reinvent the wheel’?

My conjecture is this: to recognize the prior research contributions from the strategy, organizational behavior and organization theory fields to the study of opportunities might call into question whether the study of opportunities is really the distinctive domain of entrepreneurship scholarship. If opportunities have been thoughtfully explored by other disciplines, then, there is less of a case to be made that the study of opportunities is a unique attribute of entrepreneurship scholarship. Be that as it may, there does seem to be an a-historical sensibility in the entrepreneurship field that tends to ignore what has been done before.

As Chapter 15 is about the language used by entrepreneurs when they talk about opportunity (or not), we first explore the meanings behind what a language would be like if they were to use a ‘discovery’ vocabulary:
In terms of the language that would depict the opportunity discovery perspective, obviously, the word ‘discovery’ suggests that information can be found, noticed, made visible, exposed, or seen ... Opportunity discovery, therefore, involves seeing in its many forms, the objective characteristics of circumstances ... We would initially, at this point, suggest that if entrepreneurs do in fact, discover opportunities, we would expect that their language would reflect the use of such ‘discovery’ words as: see, notice, find, look. (Chapter 15, this volume: 108)

The language for enactment involves, in its own way, a sort of intellectual sophistry, in that enactment, and language about the experience of enactment, has an inherent retrospective view of past and current actions.

If an entrepreneur recognizes an opportunity, as such, it would be only as an aspect of the retrospective sense making that follows action ... What the idea of retrospective sense making implies is that the ‘discovery’ of an opportunity would merely be a realization, and, therefore, a labeling of an ongoing set of entrepreneurial activities, one of which would be, ‘the recognition of an opportunity.’ In the opportunity enactment perspective, ‘discovery’ is a bracketing of a cacophony of experiences and activities that entrepreneurs are engaged in. (ibid.: 109–10)

Enactment, therefore, is different than creation.

Chapter 15, in a crude way, attempts to analyze 443 written responses from nascent entrepreneurs in the PSED1 dataset (Gartner et al., 2004) in response to this question: ‘Briefly, how did the original idea for starting a business develop?’ We used a word count program to analyze the frequency of words (across all 443 statements) that described their experiences. What we found was that discovery language (for example, words like: saw, find, found, look, notice) were in only 38 of the 443 statements (about 9 percent). The word discovery was never used. We suggest, based on the frequency of certain words that were used, that entrepreneurs tended to talk about the development of their businesses in words that described their own desires and abilities: ‘I’ ‘want’ ‘my’ ‘own’ ‘business’. And, for those entrepreneurs who used discovery language, their statements tended to be framed retrospectively.

The second issue that Chapter 15 focuses on is the role of action as a precursor to realization. While I’ve indicated earlier in this Introduction that intention is usually inherent in taking action, there is evidence from the PSED data that a significant percentage of nascent entrepreneurs (45 percent) engage in startup actions without intentional conscious interest in starting a business. As would be evident from an enactment perspective, many nascent entrepreneurs are involved in various activities, that, retrospectively, they realize are on a path towards business creation. Using ideas in Friedel (2001) about the process of discovery among Nobel scientists, we play with the word ‘serendipity’ (loosely defined as accidental discovery) to suggest that discovery is, in the end, ‘noticing’ something of value within the process of ‘doing science’. The basic idea of Shane’s article (2000) is correct, prior knowledge bounds the ability of individuals to notice opportunities. But, prior knowledge is based on actions and activities which are within the realm of each individual’s choices and interests. Isn’t Pasteur’s statement: ‘in observation, chance favors the prepared mind’ another way of stating the prior knowledge argument? Yet, when one looks at the process of science, it is based on a myriad of mundane activities that doing science involves. The surprise of discovery is merely a marker along the way of science-as-practice. By analogy, then, doing entrepreneurship would be denoted, at times, by ‘discovery’ realizations. I ask then, why should these realizations of
discovery be a more important focus compared to the realizations of other events or activities in the entrepreneurial process?

What is the nature
Of experience without
Words to describe it?

‘Opportunities as Attributions: Categorizing Strategic Issues from an Attributional Perspective’ (Chapter 20, this volume) offers prior theory and measures of various opportunity constructs from the strategic issue identification literature (see Daft and Weick, 1984; Dutton and Jackson, 1987; Jackson and Dutton, 1988), and grounds this research in the larger literature of attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1985). The article opens the door to the depth and breadth of prior scholarship on opportunity and identifies a number of ways that the opportunity construct has been operationalized. Prior scholarship on opportunity from the strategic issue identification literature is significant. It really is a wonder that it has been ignored, as it does provide a comprehensive foundation for any research efforts on opportunity that are currently undertaken. To ignore this literature, I believe, is a great mistake for the entrepreneurship field.

Opportunities, broadly, are situations that are perceived to be positive, controllable, and involve personal gain. Seen from an attributional perspective, opportunities tend to be internal/variable (I can take effort to solve the problem) and internal/stable (I have the ability to solve the problem). Opportunities, then, are positive situations (desirable) that individuals perceive as feasible (they have the abilities and can undertake effort to achieve their desires).

We explore the attributions that nascent entrepreneurs offer in response to these open ended questions: ‘Briefly, how did the original idea for starting a business develop?’ And, ‘what major problems have you had in starting this business?’ We found that nascent entrepreneurs tended to describe opportunities as internal (stable and variable) and problems as variable (internal and external). Opportunities, from an attributional perspective, come from within the individual: Ability (internal/stable) is something that entrepreneurs already have, and effort (internal/variable) is something that entrepreneurs can do. Problems are seen as either something that can be solved with effort (internal/variable) or outside of one’s control – bad luck (external/variable). Obviously, there is an overlap in perceptions where opportunities can also be perceived as problem (internal/variable) situations and the difference being that opportunities are perceived as positive situations whereas problems are perceived as negative situations, yet both will require effort to solve. The article ends at the same place as ‘The Language of Opportunity’ article does:

We wonder whether asking entrepreneurs whether they discovered or created their opportunities forces them to conceptualize their past experiences to account for discovery or creation having occurred, even if they did not. If some other process has taken place, a question about discovery or creation is unlikely to uncover it. There is an opportunity, then, to devote more attention to the language used to talk about the nature of opportunity. If we seek a science of the imagination (Gartner, 2007 [Chapter 18, this volume]; Schendel and Hitt, 2007), approaches to understanding the phenomenon of opportunity may depend on ideas, methods and observations that are not within the repertory of our current scholarly norms. (Chapter 20, this volume: 312–13)

And this, then, leads us to the final set of articles that attempts to take on that task.
Entrepreneurship as Organizing

Begin where you are.
Go to where you hope to be.
Feasibility.

Other paths to understanding entrepreneurship
Chapters 17, 18, 19 and 21 in the book offer a sense of the kinds of struggles I currently confront as an entrepreneurship scholar and some ideas about ways I’m trying to move forward towards understanding what entrepreneurship is (yet, also cognizant of David Hume’s aphorism: ‘No ought from is’). The order in which these articles will be discussed will begin with a framework for thinking about the nature of entrepreneurship ‘Entrepreneurship as Organizing: Emergence, Newness, and Transformation’ (Chapter 19, this volume), segue into a plea for a broader and more cacophonific use of theories and methods in entrepreneurship scholarship ‘A “Critical Mess” Approach to Entrepreneurship Scholarship’ (Chapter 17, this volume), and end with two meditations on the value of narrative methods and ideas in the entrepreneurship field: ‘Entrepreneurial Narrative and a Science of the Imagination’ (Chapter 18, this volume) and ‘A New Path to the Waterfall: A Narrative on a Use of Entrepreneurial Narrative’ (Chapter 21, this volume).

Chapter 19, ‘Entrepreneurship as Organizing’, is loosely based on evolutionary ideas in organization studies (see Aldrich and Ruef, 2006). What Candy Brush and I tried to emphasize in this chapter was a more nuanced sense of how the process of organization emergence actually happens. In simplistic terms, the evolutionary perspective tends to place a great deal of emphasis on selection and retention mechanisms, and, particularly, on the power of selection to shape the outcomes of the venture formation process. There is often an inherent assumption that the selection process occurs in situations where selections are made among ‘blind variations’ that have been generated: entrepreneurs generate various differences (in behaviors, processes, organizations, markets, products, and so on) and the environment selects out certain of these efforts as survivors. My sense of ‘blind variation’ is the assumption that entrepreneurs don’t know which variations will be successful: they are blind in knowing the outcomes of their intended actions. In our model of organizing, we hint at a more active role for entrepreneurs in the venture formation process. Our belief is that entrepreneurs have some capability to ‘select’ their own selection mechanisms, that is, entrepreneurs can choose certain kinds of environmental factors that will impact their prospective venture’s changes of future success. Entrepreneurs, then, are ‘less blind’ and have some forbearance in determining their own futures. How might this work? If we assume that all emerging ventures will need some set of resources (Chapter 5, this volume) as an aspect of their creation, then, entrepreneurs have options for choosing the kinds of resources and the ways in which those resources might be acquired. Studies of venture capital often look at the kinds of firms that are selected for investment, but what is rarely considered are all of the entrepreneurs who decided against venture capital investment as a way to enable their firms to emerge and develop. Some entrepreneurs might decide to grow through internally generated cash flows, while others might find ways to get customers or suppliers to finance critical resources (that is, having customers pay up-front for a consulting contract or for the cost of work in process). The environment, then, is not ‘fixed’ as a set of constraints on the entrepreneur; rather the entrepreneur’s imagination and creativity play a role in determining the context in which a purposefully selected environment impacts the emerging firm. So, rather than a straight-line
Entrepreneurship as Organizing

march from enactment to selection to retention, we see cycles of entrepreneurial activity between enactment, selection, and retention. These cycles of emergence, newness, and transformation, then, are the primary avenues for entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurship, then, operates in the in-between, of the three major processes involved in organizational evolutionary theory. Emergence is between enactment and selection, newness is between selection and retention, and transformation is between retention and enactment. So, for example, in our model, then, in the process of emergence entrepreneurs learn from their activities about what works or not, and make choices about how the emerging firm might be more able to survive in different situations versus others. Obviously, these choices are bets made on ambiguous future states. Certain bets will pay off, and others won’t. The point worth emphasizing is that entrepreneurs are likely to play a larger role in their fates than most evolutionary models recognize. This is not to say that such activities will lead to success, in fact, in most cases, these emerging efforts will fail. Firms are, indeed, selected out to survive. Yet, it is not about whether the majority of efforts fail, it is that some efforts succeed. It is the idea in Wallace Steven’s poem, ‘The Well Dressed Man with a Beard’: sometimes it all depends on something so slight as a cricket’s horn that makes all of the difference. Such small nuances are hard to pick up in the ways we do research, but it is in these very small, very subtle choices and actions that organizations actually emerge, survive, and are transformed. So, evolutionary processes in organizations, then, are less deterministic, more interactive, more conscious, and more amenable to entrepreneurial effort than what our results often suggest. We see the outcomes of selection and retention, but we don’t see the processes: the false starts, the surmises, guesses, attempts, hypotheses, and so on that play out along the way. (So, that thought should provide a glimmer of why I’ve drifted into narrative approaches: stories provide ways to allow recognition of those issues.)

The second aspect of the paper worth noting is the reanalysis of the articles used in Busenitz et al. (2003) to offer another way to look at past trends and future directions in the entrepreneurship field. In the Busenitz et al. article, 97 entrepreneurship articles published between 1985 and 1999 that were selected from leading management journals are categorized into four broad categories and the intersections among those four categories: modes of organizing, opportunities, individuals and teams and environments. We use those same articles, then, and segment them across type of organizing (emergence, newness, and transformation) by level of analysis (individual, firm, environment) to show that 75 percent of these articles are firm level studies and that 53 percent of these studies focus on newness. And, that only 22 percent of the entrepreneurship identified looked at the process of organization emergence (at any level of analysis). Most of mainstream entrepreneurship research appears to be focused on existing firms struggling with liability of newness issues, rather than on either emergence or transformation. Certainly, given that the articles used in the study were from 1985 to 1999, the focus of research may have significantly changed. Given that the PSED and GEM efforts were becoming more widely used after this time period, we may see a shift towards a larger percentage of research at both the individual and environmental levels, as well as a larger focus on emergence and transformation in these years after 1999.

Between here and there
Hermes guide of souls, giver
Of luck, plies his trade.
Are you familiar with Kabuki Theatre? It is a very stylized form of Japanese theatre that involves intricate sets, elaborate costumes and make-up on the actors, and a unique choreography of movement and speech, as ways to tell stories about the human condition. Now, think about all of the other ways that people have staged dramas and performances. Kabuki Theatre is just a small portion of how the human condition can be portrayed and (en) acted. I believe that many of the traditional forms of academic scholarship in the entrepreneurship area have similar characteristics to Kabuki Theatre. Journal articles have a stylized form that limits what can be said (and known) about entrepreneurship. The research methods that entrepreneurship scholars use, while elegant and rigorous (in certain ways), have often taken on a form of orthodoxy similar to the limitations of Kabuki. I feel the entrepreneurship field seems to be caught up in ways of knowing and ways of writing about what we know that have serious limitations. We are doing Kabuki Theatre in our scholarship while there are many other ways in which we might know and talk about entrepreneurship.

The ‘Critical Mess Approach’ (Chapter 17, this volume) is one of a series of efforts (Gartner, 2004b, 2006) to ponder the challenge of trying to engage in the phenomenon of entrepreneurship from a variety of perspectives, methods, and venues. The genesis of the idea is imbedded in the logic offered for a special issue on qualitative methods that Sue Birley graciously asked me to be involved in. In our introduction to that special issue (Gartner and Birley, 2002), we offered the story of a bibliophile, Michael Zinman, and his strategy for collecting books:

You don’t start off with a theory about what you’re trying to do. You don’t begin by saying ‘I’m trying to prove x.’ You build a big pile. Once you get a big enough pile together – the critical mess – you’re able to draw conclusions about it. You see patterns. (Singer, 2001: 66)

My intention in this article is not to denigrate the need for a focus on particular topics and issues in entrepreneurship with specific methods. Rather, I ask that scholars be more omnivorous in their interests in entrepreneurship as a phenomenon. I believe our sense of what appropriate data is for engaging in entrepreneurship scholarship is somewhat limited, and, as a field, we need to collect more sources of information and collect this information in ways that we have not traditionally used. If an inherent aspect of the entrepreneurial phenomenon is ‘variation’, then, we are more likely to find variation by being open to a wider variety of methods, data sources, and perspectives. This belief is based on Weick’s (1979: 193) dictum ‘Complicate Yourself’, complicated problems and situations need complicated people. Studying entrepreneurship requires that.

Classification
Begins with collection. Then
A thoughtful sorting.

Finally, two articles in this collection (that is, ‘Entrepreneurial Narrative’, Chapter 18, and ‘A New Path …’, Chapter 21) suggest an approach to studying entrepreneurship that involves narrative methods and an openness to using a variety of narrative sources for ‘data’. In some respects, we come full circle back to those articles presented earlier in the collection (that is, ‘River City’, Chapter 2, and ‘Oz in Organization’, Chapter 3) where story becomes the focus of scholarly inquiry for exploring the nature of entrepreneurship. ‘Entrepreneurial Narrative’ and ‘A New Path …’ describe an epiphany of sorts in the progression of my career in
entrepreneurship scholarship. I want to be clear that my interest in narrative and narrative methods in entrepreneurship scholarship is not an abandonment of traditional methods. I still do Kabuki theatre. And, I still believe in the value of many of the traditional methods and approaches to entrepreneurship scholarship as valid and insightful ways to understand the entrepreneurial phenomenon. So, my plea, now, is not either/or, it is ‘and’. I am not taking sides between narrative approaches and traditional approaches. Narrative methods and narrative data help ‘complicate yourself’.

The article ‘Entrepreneurial Narrative’ (Chapter 18, this volume) is an introduction to a special issue devoted to various analyses of the same story: the creation of a toy store (Allen, 2007). I believe the special issue offers a profound introduction into the power of narrative and narrative methods for exploring entrepreneurship. For me, the experience of seeing how narrative approaches could see so many different aspects of entrepreneurship within a single story was like the experience of watching Dorothy go from her black and white Kansas world to the Technicolor wonders of the Land of Oz. I won’t review all of the articles in the special issue here, so I encourage you to locate the special issue and read it. The articles are breathtaking in their scope and insights. The experience was a turning point in my development as a scholar in the entrepreneurship field.

What I believe is worth reemphasizing now, in Chapter 18, is the attempt to champion narrative perspectives and methods as being ‘ontologically complete’. Narrative methods have their own rules: their own ways of knowing and understanding, and particularly, skills in discerning, that are different than traditional logio-scientific methods and practices. What must be understood is that both methods (logio-scientific practices and narrative practices) do not end up in the same place. They are two different forms of knowing and understanding. They are two different paths that do not have the same destination. To study entrepreneurship through narrative methods and ideas does not provide the same kinds of insights that traditional logio-scientific methods will offer. Both approaches offer insights, and, these insights will be different.

A new path to the Waterfall will take you to A different place.

The last article in the collection ‘A New Path …’ (Chapter 21, this volume) begins with an allusion to T.S. Eliot’s poem Four Quartets (Eliot, 1943), but the title of the article ‘A New Path to the Waterfall’ is taken from the title of a book by Raymond Carver (1989) and a line from one of the poems in the book: ‘Looking for Work’ (Carver, 1989: 19). Raymond Carver is primarily known for his short stories that often describe revelatory moments in the mundane experiences of everyday life. (And, I suggest you find his perfect story ‘A Small, Good Thing’ as a way of seeing another way that entrepreneurship is and becomes.) The poem ‘Looking for Work’ describes the sensibility of aspiration within the reality of the commonplace. I wanted the tenor of the article to reflect that.

A significant portion of the ‘A New Path …’ article is essentially a much shorter autobiographical reprise of many of the ideas I have discussed in this Introduction. There are some nuances and some differences in the issues discussed, but I believe the general ideas are essentially the same: the struggle to grasp the complexities, variation, and subtleties of
entrepreneurship as a phenomenon. What should be reemphasized here, are two points. First, the kinds of quantitative scholarship published in most academic journals need to be more transparent in making visible the details of the data used. I suggest that scholars who publish articles in academic journals make their data available to others immediately upon publication of the article. I believe that one of the values of secondary datasets such as the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics is that scholars can reexamine the findings of any of the studies using that data. We need more opportunities for others to closely examine our work. I believe that having multiple perspectives that use the same data, as well as replications of previous studies, helps us as a community of scholars to better learn from each other. The critical mess of scholarship requires not only the addition of more findings about the phenomenon, it requires adding to the pile the data upon which those findings are based. I do recognize the difficulties and costs of sharing data among our colleagues, but I believe there are creative ways that collaborative efforts among scholars could be enhanced if more efforts to share data and information were undertaken. I also make the same suggestion for qualitative research efforts. Interview data and field notes need to be made more visible to other scholars. In my own research efforts in the narrative area, I’ve tried to use readily available texts (that is, books) and published interviews that can be found on the Internet.

The second point to make is: the need for different paths for the dissemination and discussion of scholarly work in entrepreneurship. I fear the increasing hegemony of such lists as the Financial Times Top 45 (a selected list 45 academic journals that the Financial Times uses to evaluate a business school’s research rank) as a primary indicator of knowledge dissemination. I find it ironic that while the phenomenon we study involves the creation of new markets, new forms of production and new products and services, we would then be willing to submit to institutional frameworks where we would limit ourselves to publishing in a limited number of outlets. How sad. I believe one of the strengths and reasons for the growth of the entrepreneurship field has been the creativeness of the scholars within this field to develop new journals, handbooks, and other kinds of publications as valid and respected sources of knowledge in our field (Katz, 2003). I hope this continues and that the entrepreneurship field be open to embracing radical methods and outlets (that is, not just using the Internet as ways to disseminate information, rather to pursue such venues as visual art, performance, plays, novels, short stories, poems, and ‘events’). While I have some fear that the development of new scholarly forms and outlets might fail to build a scholarly community (Gartner, 2013), I am more fearful that our community will fail to innovate and be open to the many different ways we might share and express our insights into the entrepreneurial phenomenon.

Do I have answers? No. Am I lost? Yes: ‘In the dark wood … in the middle way … risking enchantment’ (Eliot, 1943). But, isn’t that what scholarship is about? Not having the answers and being willing to find them (or to have them find you)?

When you are lost the
Forest knows where you are. You
Must let it find you.6

Conclusion
As this Introduction is, for the most part, a summary and some sense making of the articles in the book, this conclusion is, therefore, a summary of the summary.
I realize I have been very fortunate to grow up in the entrepreneurship field as it, itself, grew up. So, I have been lucky to have enjoyed so many opportunities to publish my ideas in a variety of journals and books using such a wide range of methods, ‘data sources’ and genres. Certainly, I’m a product of my times. Soon: a historical artifact. (I have many instances of being at some academic conference and a young scholar will come up to me and say with a beaming smile: ‘I thought you were dead!’ Soon, yes, as we all, eventually, will be history.)

So, ever aware of Bloom’s dictum that begins this Introduction: if I were to hope that there were any ideas and thoughts from my work that might ‘stick’ (Heath and Heath, 2007), and realizing the futility of this hope, here are a few ideas that I still hope will stick with you, anyway.

**Entrepreneurship as organizing**

I believe that the phenomenon of entrepreneurship is, essentially, an ‘organizing’ process (Gartner, 1985; Schumpeter, 1934; Weick, 1979). So, what essentially differentiates entrepreneurship from other kinds of creative acts (such as art or innovation) involves the Schumpeterian–Weickian sensibility of ‘combining’, that is, organizing something: individuals, firms, environments, groups, products, markets, and so on. Entrepreneurship as organizing should always evoke this view of putting things together (broadly defined). The sensibility, then, is behavioral (Schumpeter) and cognitive (Weick), as a social process. Entrepreneurship is not something that one does alone: it must always involve others (Chapter 5, this volume).

I’ve used such words as ‘emergence’ to hint at how this combining/organizing process occurs. I believe the articles in this book, as a whole, then, are efforts to come to some understanding of the various aspects of what ‘entrepreneurship as organizing’ means, both theoretically and empirically. It has been 30 years since Gartner’s 1985 article (Chapter 1, this volume): has the idea of ‘entrepreneurship as organizing’ reached a better sense of clarity? Does the idea resonate as some true insight into the phenomenon?

**Variation and taxonomy**

As entrepreneurs are in the process of generating new combinations (organizing their world), they intrinsically generate ‘difference’. I realize that there is a discussion in the academic literature on differences between ‘replicators’ (those that repeat what others have done before) and ‘innovators’ (those that are doing something entirely new). I think that replicators and innovators are on a continuum, with no entrepreneurial effort being a pure form of one or the other. Once we consider the variable of time in the entrepreneurial process, we must see that starting a similar business will be different because the original business was started in the past. Things change. So, starting a fast food restaurant (that is, McDonalds) today, is still different than the same fast food restaurant started in the past. They are different because the world has changed. Maybe not in blatantly overt ways, but there have been changes in the environment that make any startup different from all those that have preceded it. I’ve used the dictum: ‘there is no average in entrepreneurship’ as a way to get at this sensibility. Entrepreneurship always involves some process of creating difference (because of changes in time, location or the specific resources utilized, customers change as well as their preferences and desires). So, there will always be differences among every entrepreneurial effort.
What this implies for entrepreneurship scholarship is the requirement to recognize the many, many different ways that entrepreneurship occurs. I suggest, at this point, that we err on the side of discovering diversity in entrepreneurial efforts. It might seem that we would then devote much of our scholarship to looking at what appear to be unique events, yet, I think that it is in these unique events that we will make our most important discoveries about how variation in entrepreneurship actually occurs and, by implication, how chances for the creation of unique value is created. I believe the entrepreneurship field has focused too much on ‘selection’ and the winners that we see after selection processes have taken their toll. We would be better served by looking at how many different ways that emerging entrepreneurial efforts were undertaken. I believe there is significant value in understanding how and why these differences in entrepreneurial efforts manifest themselves. And, frankly, in order for selection mechanisms to work, the mechanisms that will eventually pick the ‘winners’ from the ‘losers’, the selection process needs something to select. I believe the more diversity in entrepreneurial efforts, in general, will increase the chances for providing better outcomes. Difference matters. Variation matters. And, while most new entrepreneurial efforts do not work out in specific instances, there is some evidence that others learn from these various attempts. So, failing matters. And, even if there isn’t any learning, the generation of different ways to do things, even when those efforts don’t work, still provide a repertoire of possibilities (Gartner, 2014a). Trying matters. The stuff of success is built on the many attempts that didn’t work. Has the entrepreneurship field comprehensively covered all of the different ways that entrepreneurial efforts fail? Are we recognizing all of the anomalies and outliers? Do we have methods to see where the differences among entrepreneurial efforts actually differ? Recognizing difference, then, leads to appreciating the value of taxonomy. If we start with the idea that, inherently, all entrepreneurial efforts are different from each other, then, with some sense of humility, we should seek to then understand where the commonalities are among these efforts. I believe the field, as a whole, has too easily embraced categorization schemes that may not offer nuanced insights. While I have often used industry classification codes as a way to identify similar kinds of entrepreneurial efforts, I continue to wonder how much insight was lost in these groupings. And, in many of these studies ‘outliers’ have been eliminated, as they tend to skew averages and standard deviations within these groups. Maybe the interesting insights are in these outliers?

If we are concerned about differences, we should be careful when we group cases together. Taxonomic methods are sensitive to differences and commonalities. So, I would like to see more systematic efforts to both identify the diversity in entrepreneurial efforts as well as thoughtful ways the see the commonalities among these efforts. I don’t have a solution to these issues. I do know that taxonomic practices are critical for helping the entrepreneurship field to move forward.

Uncertainty, prediction, and the imagination
What intrigues me about the world of organizing is seeing that these processes are loosely coupled (Weick, 1976). That is, the connections between events are less deterministic than one might imagine. There is significant room for situations to be unpredictable: weird things happen. No one seems to behave as we thought. Yet, one of the values of science involves the world of ‘if then’: If these circumstances occur, then we would predict this outcome (with some sense of statistical confidence). As scholars we ascertain those factors that influence
Entrepreneurship as organizing situations and then assume that events will unfold accordingly. Often things do not. Maybe we ascribe it to the ‘error term’ in our equations. Or the sense that our predictive models are probabilistic: chances are events can play out in different ways from what we predict (but, still, even with the differences, we assume the rightness of our predictive model to predict). Yet, I believe that things turn out differently for a different reason.

I believe that one reason for the unpredictableness of entrepreneurship involves the role of the imagination in entrepreneurial action. Human beings have the capacity to think about their futures in ways that are not necessarily connected to their current situations. And, they can act on their beliefs about whether they can set into action the reality that they see in their minds. Imagination changes everything. Prediction often depends on ascertaining the factors that comprise the past and present, while imagination evokes a belief in factors of the future (that are yet to be made real, but have the possibility of being so; Gartner, 2014a).

Entrepreneurship, as a creative act, involves ways that individuals are able to involve others in their future dreams (Chapter 9, this volume). I’m not sure how to explore this idea using my current research skills. I drift towards narrative because I sense that narrative methods and perspectives are more sensitive to how people imagine and articulate the future in what they say and do. Accounting for imagination is, by far, the most critical issue for scholars to truly understand the nature of entrepreneurship.

Behavior matters

I will define behavior as the words and actions that individuals undertake: speaking (and writing) and doing. Entrepreneurial behavior involves words and actions undertaken by individuals in the process of organizing. I like Chris Steyaert’s idea of ‘entrepreneuring’ (2007) because it captures the sense that entrepreneurship is inherently a process. It involves activities: the behaviors of individuals, solely and among others. People are doing stuff. Entrepreneurship is not a noun in the same way that organization is not a noun (Weick, 1979). The phenomenon of entrepreneurship is not static. It evolves over time. While many of the articles in this book identify a number of the behaviors that individuals involved in the process of entrepreneurship undertake, the goal in the back of my mind has always been to notate these actions in ways that they could, in some respects, be replicated. Ideally, I imagine something similar to Labanotation in dance (this is before video recordings of dance could be used as documentation). What really happened when a particular organizing effort emerged? To be able to accurately depict the choreography of the words and actions and interactions among all of the individuals involved would be my ideal. This is the kind of information I would like to work with and the kind of information we need if we are to get a sense of how behaviors matter in the process of organization emergence. I am hoping for important strides in both theorizing and empirical research on entrepreneurial behavior. As the imagination works through action, depicting action is crucial.

Other ways of knowing

As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, much of academic scholarship in entrepreneurship takes the form of journal articles or book chapters that use very specific forms (formats, structures, language) of conveying information and insights. Are these forms the only ways we can talk about the phenomenon? I don’t believe this to be so. I have been turning, ever so slowly, towards a path that explores entrepreneurship with the kinds of methods and insights
used in the humanities: creative writing (fiction and other forms), rhetoric, philosophy, aesthetics, history, performance, and the arts. I believe that pursuing a path using the humanities and the arts will offer new ways to know about entrepreneurship as well as new ways of talking about the phenomenon (see Steyaert and Hjorth, 2002).

My experiences with entrepreneurs lead me to believe that these individuals are often linguistic innovators in their own right. In order for them to imagine and construct the future they often invent their own language to help others see what is in store for them. Scholars often do not appreciate or celebrate that the practice of entrepreneurship by entrepreneurs involves the creation of concepts, metaphors and ideas. Entrepreneurs are scholars of their own situations. They offer hypotheses about the future, they have theories about their situations, and they have a literature of beliefs and experiences that provide a foundation for their actions. We need to pay attention to them in ways that can ‘let them speak’ rather than imposing our world-view.

The questions we ask entrepreneurs reflect our agendas and beliefs about the nature of entrepreneurship. I find that entrepreneurs work diligently to fit their sensibilities and ideas into our constructs. We get what we ask for rather than finding out what they might really believe and think. And, then we talk about what we find in ways that are only graspable by other scholars who have an ability to read in the stilted forms we write in. Ugh. So, there needs to be more space in academic scholarship for ways to let entrepreneurs speak for themselves.

As an example of the power of paying attention to entrepreneurs, I would point to the most significant theoretical development to happen in entrepreneurship over the past 20 years: Sarasvathy’s (2001, 2008) theory of effectuation. This theory is based on close observation and conversations with entrepreneurs. She provided a context for entrepreneurs to share their own insights and perceptions in a way that let them speak for themselves. This, I believe, is the power of using methods that recognize entrepreneurs as the theorists and scientists that they are.

And, I would love to see, and for the scholarly community to appreciate, a wider array of forms for talking about entrepreneurship. Currently I am spending a lot of time with the film The Social Network (Fincher, 2010), and its portrayal of the founding of Facebook. As the film is a fictionalization of The Accidental Billionaires (Mezrich, 2009), a biography of the founding of Facebook, one can toggle between the two works to compare and contrast how both works come to some sense of the organizing process, as well as their views of what constitutes a significant event in Facebook’s emergence. What intrigues me with the film and book is in parsing out what there is to learn. I think the film and book have a theory about the entrepreneurial process, and these works present evidence to support that theory. They offer a sequence of events about how entrepreneurship occurs. They present a model of factors that influence the organizing process. As millions of individuals have seen this film (probably fewer have read the book), I wonder what kinds of insights they gain from these experiences? Is The Social Network one of the primary ways that individuals in our society learn about entrepreneurial processes?

I believe the film, then, is a different way to understand entrepreneurship. And this method of conveying insights is a valid form of knowing (Bruner, 1986). So, while the theory and sights in The Social Network don’t appear as a series of bullet points on PowerPoint slides, or as a framework in a journal article, I believe there is just as much insight in this fiction. But it’s conveyed in a different way, as part of the critical mess of various ways we grasp what it
is, and what it means to live our lives in an ambiguous world where we are always walking through the doorway from the present into the future. I’m intrigued by how others imagine how the imagination works. So, it may take imagination (and the forms that imagination often takes, for example, fiction) in order to grasp what imagination is and how it works.

I believe the entrepreneurship field will be more vibrant, insightful, persuasive, and relevant to entrepreneurial practice if we are open to more ways of understanding (Gartner, 2014b). I am looking forward to seeing how this will manifest itself.

Finally, this chapter was likely an exercise in not knowing myself: of probably missing what was truly important, of seeing the wrong things, and of being interested in issues that no one else found as important as I, but …

I did the best I Could with what I had. What more Can be said for now?7

Notes
1. I believe it is particularly important to point out that my research efforts take place within the context of supportive friends and colleagues. I don’t think of my writing as being a singular affair. I write with and for others and they write with and for me. So, ideas and interests blend in these efforts. I’m a product of their generosity.
2. Or, as Zhang Ruitu wrote long ago: ‘As you have passed many years writing books behind closed doors, the pines long ago have all grown scales like old dragons’.
3. The poem is a play on the words in this quote – ‘You know’, Giono said to me, ‘There are also times in life when a person has to rush off in pursuit of hopefulness’ (Giono, 1985: 51).
5. I think the Inc. 500 has a lot of insights that scholars should take more advantage of. For example, Gideon Markman and I did an article (Markman and Gartner, 2002) that tapped just a bit of the information Inc. Magazine has collected on high growth firms in the United States to look at the relationship of growth rates with profitability.
6. The haiku is based on the poem ‘Lost’ by David Wagoner (1976).
7. A play on this quote from Joe Louis: ‘I made the most of my ability and I did my best with my title’.

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