CALL FOR PAPERS

HSR Special Issue
Entrepreneurial Groups: definition, forms, and historic change

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In this special issue, we focus on entrepreneurship as collective action undergone by entrepreneurial groups, which can be broadly defined as a small number of people investing time, resources and effort to pursue an entrepreneurial project. With positioning entrepreneurial groups as distinct social entities that collectively function as entrepreneurial actors, we respond to recent trends in the field. Lately, entrepreneurship research is rethinking its unit of analysis – a debate so fundamental in its impact that it may ring in a paradigm shift. The realization is growing that entrepreneurship is most often undertaken collectively no matter how entrepreneurship is defined: by some researchers as the continuous process that revolves around identifying, evaluating and exploiting business opportunities (Ács and Audretsch, 2010; Gartner, 2004; Shane, 2008) and by others as a process in which opportunities are created and worked upon (Alvarez and Barney, 2010). With the focus on the activity vs on the actor, however, such a process approach has not been able to grasp the interactions of a collective approach in entrepreneurship (Gartner, 2010; Davidsson, 2016). Focusing on the collective calls to revisit the one key question that Gartner (1988), at the inception of the field, famously had discredited as the wrong question: Who were and are the entrepreneurs?

Recently, empirical findings of a number of fragmented research streams highlight the need to conceptualize the collective actors of entrepreneurship in a relational way (Ruef and Lounsbury, 2007). Here are a few examples: Research on start-ups illustrates how former co-workers and co-students often come together to jointly pursue entrepreneurial opportunities as teams (e.g. Visintin and Pittino, 2014; Wright and Leuven, 2009; Iacobucci and Rosa, 2010). Family business research has vividly shown how kinship relationships provide the basis for the provision of resources and support to undertake the entrepreneurial process (Sharma et al., 2012; Colli, 2003; Astrachan and Shanker, 2003; Hamilton et al., 2017). Studies on the working conditions of self-employed, and in particular of female entrepreneurs, point towards the relevance of spousal support for the shape and success of business ventures (e.g. Jennings and McDougald, 2007; Eddleston and Powell, 2012). Ethnic entrepreneurship studies, including historical ones, in countries where migration is on the increase, suggest the importance of relatives and the local community for migrants’ business ventures (e.g. Ma et al., 2013; Casson and Godley, 2005, 2010). And studies on the crossroads of business history and strategic management have pointed out that emergence of new industries is a collective effort undergone by groups and institutions (Khaire, 2014; Khaire, M., & Wadhwani, D. R., 2010). These empirical contributions demystify ideas of the lone entrepreneur. Instead they suggest that the performance of an entrepreneurial project was and is based on the recruitment of an entrepreneurial group or in other words the binding of different types of relationships for a common cause.

A significant milestone towards the emergence of a relational perspective is based on the seminal work of sociologist Martin Ruef (Aldrich and Ruef, 2006; Ruef, 2002; Ruef and Lounsbury, 2007; Ruef, 2010). Drawing from extensive empirical work using the US Panel Study of Entrepreneurship (PSED), Ruef argued that the emergence of a business goes hand in hand with the creation of an entrepreneurial group (Ruef, 2010). During their constitution
groups negotiate roles of who owns, controls, manages and supports the organization (Kim et al., 2013). Theoretically, Ruef situated entrepreneurial groups between social embeddedness theory (e.g. Granovetter, 1985; Ferrary and Granovetter, 2009) and economic network analysis (e.g. Ibarra, 1993; McPherson et al., 2006; White, 1992). This unique sociological concept also makes up leeway in understanding how group constellations influence the innovativeness of an organization. Thus entrepreneurial groups are appropriate subjects to study entrepreneurial actions and entrepreneurial outcomes.

Nevertheless, a theoretical perspective of entrepreneurial groups is still in its infancy. A major constraint in theorizing about entrepreneurial groups is an often ahistoric perspective on entrepreneurship that only few scholars have begun to overcome (e.g. Jones and Wadhwani, 2007; Kirsch et al., 2014; Wadhwani et al., 2014). The emerging paradigm of a relational approach to entrepreneurship treats the empirical phenomena as new whereas historical studies suggest that entrepreneurial groups have been present all along, but have taken different forms across time and cultures. A historic perspective calls to attend to the historic circumstances of group formation and change. Further, an overly strong focus on the emergence of organizations constraints theory building about entrepreneurial groups. Ruef, for example, does not provide an understanding of how entrepreneurial group dynamics unfold beyond the act of founding (Burton, 2011). Avenues to a longer-term perspective open up the debates on habitual and transgenerational entrepreneurship (e.g. Birley and Westhead, 1993; Ucbasaran et al., 2006; Rosa et al., 2014; Nordqvist et al., 2008; Cruz and Nordqvist, 2012; Zellweger et al., 2012). Overall, the collective engagement in entrepreneurship requires a longitudinal perspective both in the sense of changing compositions of entrepreneurial groups over time and in the sense of changing historical understandings of trust, loyalty and solidarity among family members, friends and other tie relations that affect group relationships (e.g. Harlaftis, 2007).

**Objective and scope**

Through this call, we aim to portray and integrate various historic and current forms of collective engagement in entrepreneurship. We adopt the view that the concept of entrepreneurial groups can function as an overarching term for various tie compositions among group members such as spouses (i.e. copreneurs), family members (i.e. entrepreneurial families), friends, or members of migrant communities that jointly engage in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial groups come in dyads, triads and larger numbers; they differ in the way they define roles, their power structure, and their capacity for innovation; and these configurations are dynamic. While the term ‘entrepreneurial teams’ implies stable and cooperative relations, the term entrepreneurial groups encompasses multiple forms of relations even those that are temporary and hierarchical.

We invite authors to exhibit the social and historic circumstances of group formation and their development, to clarify relational dynamics among group members, and to capture those mechanisms by which their entrepreneurial capacity is mobilized. By scrutinizing various historic and current forms of entrepreneurial groups, we intend to further a discussion about the collective actors of entrepreneurship.

Essentially, with this special issue we contribute to the development of a collective approach to entrepreneurship that acknowledges entrepreneurial groups as distinct social entities. We specifically look for studies which (1) consider the full trajectory of entrepreneurial groups from their constitution to their dissolution or particular episodes and transitions; (2) recognize typical social dynamics and trajectories in entrepreneurial groups; (3) reflect upon historic and social sciences methods that allow the study of entrepreneurial groups.
Subject coverage

Examples of relevant research questions for this special issue include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Under what conditions do entrepreneurial groups form and evolve?
- What are typical types and trajectories of entrepreneurial groups?
- What kind of dynamics unfold within entrepreneurial groups?
- What is distinctive about entrepreneurial families in comparison to other types of entrepreneurial groups?
- Can we observe differences in the way family, friendship or communal ties function among group members?
- How do changes in family, friendship or community norms and practices affect group formation and trajectories?
- What is the innovative capacity of different types of entrepreneurial groups?
- What are the effects of ownership transitions on the trajectory of entrepreneurial groups?
- What kind of data is necessary to study the development of entrepreneurial groups and how can it be obtained?
- What kind of methods can be useful to study the dynamics of entrepreneurial groups?

The contributions of this special issue scrutinize the viability of the entrepreneurial groups concept to understand entrepreneurial activities.

Submission guidelines and timeline

We will consider both empirical and conceptual papers. Full papers must be in a word-compatible format and e-mailed to Isabell Stamm (isabell.stamm@tu-berlin.de). The first page must contain the title, author(s) and contact information for the corresponding author. Papers suitable for publication will be peer-reviewed through the editors and invited guest reviewers. For additional guidelines, please consult the sections on Instructions for Authors and Manuscript Preparation for HSR at: http://www.gesis.org/en/hsr/faqs/faqs-for-authors/guidelines/

Submission Deadline is November 15, 2017.

You will receive notification of acceptance to the special issue by December 1st, 2017. If accepted, the editors will provide feedback promptly along with an invitation to a paper development workshop on February 16, 2018 in Berlin. Please reserve the date. At the workshop you will receive additional feedback by authors and invited commentators to prepare a final draft due by April 2018.

About the journal

*Historical Social Research* (HSR) is an international, interdisciplinary journal bringing together historians and a range of social scientists researching key contemporary topics and addressing core conceptual challenges. It was founded in 1976, and is published by GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. The wide range of topics covered in previous issues includes Risk and Social History, Markets and Market Societies, New Political Economy, and Political Elites and the European Integration.

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