Editorial: The research-practice gap in entrepreneurship

The field of entrepreneurship research is committed to the advancement of entrepreneurship theory, practice and policy. At the *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development (JSBED)*, we support this commitment by publishing rigorous scholarly contributions with implications for entrepreneurial leaders worldwide. Keeping a keen eye on the theory-practice divide in contemporary academic research, and helping to bridge it, is an important part of this work.

We prefer to publish papers that pose provocative questions: Does our scholarly research inform public policy? Is the prevailing legislation related to business development evidence-based, and should it be? How can entrepreneurship research effectively engage the grand challenges facing society? Can entrepreneurs play a role in solving such challenges, effecting positive change in healthcare, poverty levels and climate change? Does entrepreneurship research really influence how entrepreneurs think?

Entrepreneurial ventures tend to be more accessible and have more needs than larger and more established organizations do. As such, entrepreneurship research has advantages over other fields in the domain of business studies when it comes to generating engaged scholarship that makes an impact. Unfortunately, from a mainstream scholarly perspective, our field still has a long way to go before fully achieving this aim. The disconnect between research and practice is clear to those of us who are active in executive training programs and outreach-based entrepreneurship programs. To communicate effectively in these settings, we often lean on entrepreneurial experiences, rather than drawing directly from entrepreneurship research.

Research on academic career development holds that translating scholarship into practice is largely a game of chance, whereas real impact is a "result of agency and a desire for change" (Fenby-Hulse, 2019, p. 191). Within our field, the impact of research on entrepreneurial practice should be a determinant of topic choice. Too often in scholarly papers in the applied sciences, the practical application of entrepreneurship research is relegated to a sub-section of the discussion. This lens is too narrow since the purpose of entrepreneurial research is to create knowledge that influences the practice of entrepreneurship.

JSBED is a part of a growing number of outlets that make room for scholarship that emphasizes practical application without sacrificing scholarly rigor. Such research makes connections with entrepreneurial practice by (1) summarizing empirical data to emphasize its practical implications, (2) generating qualitative heuristics to guide entrepreneurs and (3) identifying gaps between practice and theory. Critically and pointedly assessing the impact of theory on practice can stimulate the search for new avenues and rich vistas of practical relevance, while supporting the development of original and powerful new theories.

Another way that JSBED is attempting to address this issue is by assembling a board of practicing entrepreneurs from around the world who frequently comment on the practical implications of any paper we are considering publishing. Through these kinds of approaches, the dissonance between scholarship and practice can be ameliorated and transformed into harmony, but it still remains a worthy challenge for the field of entrepreneurship.

As the gap between the importance of practical implications and the attention that they receive continues to widen, society's need for high-impact research continues to intensify.

Unfortunately, scholars are finding fewer incentives and less time to devote to the practical relevance of their work (Eckhardt and Wetherbe, 2014). Tenured and tenure-track professors are keenly aware of the pressures placed on them regarding academic publishing, which can shift one's research focus away from the practical and toward the theoretical. This imbalance can limit the meaningfulness of the connections between entrepreneurship scholars and practicing entrepreneurs. When academics and practitioners share the same values, more conversations occur, and both sides benefit as the research-practice gap narrows.

Thomas Pittz

References

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Fenby-Hulse, K. (2019), "Situating early career researchers within a dynamic research and innovation ecosystem", in *Research Impact and the Early Career Researcher*, Routledge, pp. 179-198.

About the author

Dr. Thomas Pittz is an associate professor of Entrepreneurship and Management in the Lowth Entrepreneurship Center of the Sykes College of Business at the University of Tampa. He is an award-winning educator and researcher whose work broadly focuses on entrepreneurial ecosystems, the impact of strategic openness on innovation, and external knowledge acquisition and exploitation. He has published peer-reviewed articles in outlets such as the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Small Business Economics*, the *International Journal of Project Management* and the *Journal of Small Business Management*. He is the author of two books published by Emerald Publishers Ltd, titled "The Entrepreneur's Guide to Risk and Decisions: Building Successful Early-Stage Ventures" and "Scaling Social Innovation through Cross-Sector Social Partnerships: Driving Optimal Performance." Additionally, he serves as a senior associate editor for the *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development* and as the President and Board Chairperson for the United States Association of Small Business and Entrepreneurship (USASBE). Prior to his career in academia, Dr. Pittz worked in banking, launched a successful entrepreneurial company and led two nonprofit organizations in the Twin Cities area.