

## **Entrepreneurial Project Management – Cross-Fertilization between the Fields**

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### **Introduction**

Entrepreneurship and project management may seem like very differing fields but they share much more in common than initially believed. As academic fields, both have similar histories, significance in academia, nature and a similar theoretical and professional status (Kuura, Blackburn and Lundin, 2014, p. 219). Yet, they have developed apart from one another with little to no interaction between the two. The clear fragmentation of entrepreneurship and project management occurs both in theory and practice. Today, academic research emphasizes publishing in niche journals (Kuura, Blackburn and Lundin, 2014, p. 220) which has contributed to the separation. Similarly, in academia there appears to be a preference for gap spotting over problematization, despite the latter leading to more interesting research and new theory development (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011, p. 40), which is necessary for the emergence of research on entrepreneurship and project management. Similarly, in practice there is a segregation between the two fields as a result of a tendency to rely on ‘experts’ or ‘consultants’, and practice specialties (Kuura, Blackburn and Lundin, 2014, p. 220). However, when it comes to emergent project management approaches there is an inclination for practice to lag behind theory (Bryde, 2003, p. 791). This is especially true for entrepreneurial project management which emphasizes the use of project management concepts, methods and applications for fostering innovation and creativity, which present significant practical difficulties (Bryde, 2003, p. 782). Despite the division, there are several benefits to theory and practice that can result from considering the links between entrepreneurship and project management. As a result, some research has attempted to look into this.

### **Benefits of Cross-Fertilization - Studying the Literature**

In their paper titled ‘Studying Entrepreneurial Project’, Asquin, Condor and Schmitt (2011), call for project research within the domain of entrepreneurship in order to initiate a paradigm shift which would be of great benefit for the field. They argue that the entrepreneurial project exceeds all of the existing entrepreneurship paradigms without contradicting them, and in that way acts as a language that allows for the exchange of knowledge between the entrepreneurial paradigms (Asquin, Condor and Schmitt, 2011, p. 5). They found that methodological deficiencies in research pertaining to entrepreneurial projects has not only limited but impoverished knowledge in the field of entrepreneurship (Asquin, Condor and Schmitt, 2011, p. 8). This suggests that developing research that converges the two domains would be mutually beneficial. For entrepreneurship it allows for development of the academic field, and for project management it presents a potential growth in practical potential, considering the use of project management in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups (Kuura, 2011, p. 160).

Consider, the biggest hindrance in linking entrepreneurship and project management appears to be the fact that the former is viewed as a permanent endeavor while the latter as a temporary one, by definition. However, Kuura (2011) argues that this should not be a problem since most start-ups (or entrepreneurial ventures) have high failure rates and short life-cycles that hardly makes it logical to consider them as permanent endeavors. In that respect, it actually seems more appropriate to view them as a project. Despite the overwhelming benefits of cross-fertilization, creating an established approach that allows for the fusion of the two fields has been more difficult and quite slow.

Lindgren and Packendorff (2003) were one of the first to propose the idea of a project-based view of entrepreneurship. In their paper by the same name, they argued for a paradigm shift in the traditional perspective on entrepreneurship theory by considering viewing entrepreneurial acts as socially constructed events as oppose to acts done by individuals called ‘entrepreneurs’ (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003, p. 87). By focusing on the act itself rather than the individual, entrepreneurship can be viewed as a project and not just a characteristic (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003, p. 99). They went on to further develop this idea in their 2011 paper, by arguing that a project-based view of entrepreneurship required seeing the entrepreneurial process as a temporary one which is considered complete once the entrepreneurial act has been accepted and is no longer viewed as an anomaly (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2011, p. 52-54).

This is not dissimilar to research conducted by Kuura in 2011 which also stressed the need for convergences between the fields on a purely theoretical basis. However unlike Lindgren and Packendorff’s research, Kuura’s paper was able to identify potential streams for integration. Particularly, this was done by arguing that a connection between the two could best be established based on their mutual relationship with innovation (Kuura, 2011). In later research Kuura, along with Blackburn and Lundin, argue this point further stating that while mutual learning can be made possible by taking a number of routes, one of the most apparent linkage streams between the two fields appears to be innovation (2014, p. 226). They call this the mainstream view and claim that attempts to link the two fields primarily through innovation lead to the creation of entrepreneurial projects (Kuura, Blackburn and Lundin, 2014, p. 226).

Other research has focused less on the development of a theory and more on the integration of project management tools and techniques in entrepreneurial ventures. Macheridis (2009) stresses the importance of agility in entrepreneurial projects in his paper ‘Agility in Entrepreneurial Projects’. He argues that entrepreneurship can benefit from project management techniques, particularly agile methodologies, in the creation of successful entrepreneurial projects (Macheridis, 2009, p. 7). Similarly, the use of traditional project management principles and methodologies such as the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) and the Gantt chart, particularly in smaller projects, has been considered (Shirey, 2008, p. 129). They have been shown to play a positive role in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the entrepreneur (Shirey, 2008, p. 131).

The role of networks in the entrepreneurial process was discussed by Birley, whose research found that formal networks are only used once the main elements of the venture have already been established (1986, p. 114). This suggests that the need for project management tools as techniques, namely those pertaining to resource allocation and management, would be

beneficial to the process. But the research does not only stress a one way exchange, as some research suggests that entrepreneurship adds to the existing project management repertoire by forcing the creation of tools and techniques that go beyond managing just cost, time and quality, by considering learning and innovation (Frederiksen and Davies, 2008, p. 488).

### **Moving Forward towards Further Research**

While some research has attempted to identify the need for further cross-fertilization between entrepreneurship and project management, even highlighting the benefits of such an endeavor, further academic research is needed. According to Kuura, Blackburn and Lundin (2014) only 25 publications attempted to link the two fields, which is very small considering the potential discussed. They suggested that the links are stronger in practice than theory so focus should be placed on the practical implications of considering both fields. Macheridis (2009, p. 13) also believes that more practical implications and empirical studies need to be conducted in order to develop and build the theory related to entrepreneurial project research. With so little research being done, there is quite a large gap. Similarly, none of the research has produced frameworks or models that help lead to the development of an established theory on entrepreneurial project management as its own field; particularly in portraying and discussing the use of project management techniques and tools in entrepreneurial endeavors. Subsequently, there is a significant need for further research if the gap between entrepreneurship and project management is to be bridged completely.

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