

1. The attitudes, behaviors and cognition of entrepreneurs: rebels with a cause

Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes [...] You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. (Rob Siltanen, from the 1997 relaunch of Apple, Inc.)

The world is often unkind to [...] new creations. The new needs friends. (Brad Bird, from the 2007 *Ratatouille* movie, Pixar Animation Studios)

1.1 Introduction

We begin with the above two quotations from popular media because they highlight an essential aspect of entrepreneurship: by its very nature, entrepreneurship involves efforts to do something new in the face of challenges. Individuals, whether alone, in teams, or in established companies strive to introduce products, services or business models to the market that are novel in comparison to existing offerings (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). But in their efforts to differentiate their offerings entrepreneurs often must rebel against the status quo. High profile entrepreneurs, such as Elon Musk, are known for going against the grain by doing things like becoming the first non-government entity to launch rockets into space. While the challenging nature of doing something new is inherent in entrepreneurship, it is often much more than simply pushing back against current norms and practices. Instead, these actors are rebels with a cause. Specifically, as entrepreneurs generate ideas and strive to make their visions realities, the goal is to achieve a more advantageous equilibrium for others in a way that benefits them as well. As the above quotations highlight, some of the most useful advances in the arts, politics, medicine, science, technology and so on are the result of entrepreneurs being unwilling to accept the status quo as "the best we can do."

But what is it about how these enterprising individuals think and act that allows them to "rebel" in ways that are productive and result in new introduction that others value? Prior research indicates that entrepreneurs bring unique cognitive resources formed from their education, experience and relationships to specific circumstances and this allows them to envision new innovations (Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010; Gregoire *et al.*, 2010). Importantly, these visions are cognitively evaluated for desirability and feasibility (Mitchell and Shepherd, 2010; Wood and Williams, 2014) and when positive, such evaluations are translated into actions designed to marshal resources in pursuit of "what could be" (Dolmans *et al.*, 2014). All of this occurs under conditions of high uncertainty because whether or not such thinking and action will prove wise or foolish is unknown *ex ante* (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006; McKelvie *et al.*, 2011).

As these discussions highlight, our understanding of how individuals think and act entrepreneurially has matured considerably in recent years. For example, scholars have demonstrated that factors such as cognitive style (Adomako *et al.*, 2016), values (Kirkley, 2016) and team interactions (Chen *et al.*, 2017) significantly influence entrepreneurial efforts. In spite of this, extant entrepreneurship research on the cognitions, attitudes and behaviors of entrepreneurs can be characterized as holding significant untapped potential to provide transformative insights regarding these important economic actors. In response, we are pleased to introduce this special issue of *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research (IJEER)* and the specific articles contained herein, in an effort to better understand the constructs, relationships and dynamics that underpin the introduction of pioneering



products and path-breaking processes that collectively alter the status quo over time. This issue was developed in conjunction with the 2017 United States Association of Small Business and Entrepreneurship (USASBE) annual conference in Philadelphia, PA (hence the theme of “rebels” as Philadelphia’s history is rich with rebels and rebellion dating back to the US fight for independence); we began the process by asking for papers around a theme of “Rebels with a cause: the revolutionary attitudes, behaviors, and cognition of entrepreneurs.”

To facilitate the process, we invited scholars to submit papers that addressed not only the distinctive characteristics of entrepreneurial attitudes, behaviors and cognition, but how, when and why these distinctions lead to pervasive change. In addition, we also encouraged scholars to submit papers that acknowledged the interplay between mind, environment and action (Wood *et al.*, 2014; Mitchell *et al.*, 2011; Shelton, 2010) and to do so across multiple units of analysis such as the individual, team, organization and so on. A unique feature of this special issue was the developmental nature of the review process whereby authors received significant guidance as part of an *IJEER* workshop at the 2017 USASBE conference.

It is with this in mind, that we introduce the sum of our efforts. Together, the five manuscripts selected for this special issue represent the collective work of 12 scholars from nine institutions. These contributions provide a variety of perspectives across different units of analysis, and the net effect is a set of articles that address two broad themes: revolutionary thinking and transformative action. In retrospect, we find it interesting that the focus of the special issue on rebels with a cause is more on the cause than on the rebel. Although we would not have predicted this initially, we are excited about papers that begin to understand underlying mechanisms that enable revolutionary and transformative outcomes in the lives of entrepreneurs. In this sense, the papers that are published in this special issue make contributions to prior research, but also serve as a helpful platform for future research.

In this introductory piece, we begin by highlighting some key linkages to prior research. We then briefly discuss the specific contributions of each of the papers in the special issue. Finally, we highlight future research opportunities that exist in the investigation of the revolutionary cognitions and behavior of entrepreneurs, many of whom we like to think of as rebels with a cause. As just noted, the “with a cause” aspect of the framing of the special issue involves a focus on extending what we know about how entrepreneurs are revolutionary in their thinking and transformative in their actions. To this we now turn.

2. Ingenuity of enterprising individuals

As part of extending knowledge of mechanisms whereby entrepreneurs are revolutionary in their thinking and transformative in their actions, we first highlight relevant extant knowledge as a way of then identifying the gaps that the papers in the special issue seek to fill. Specifically, it is well documented that entrepreneurs think and behave in ways that are unique. Whether being extraordinarily alert to potential opportunities for profit (Kirzner, 1979), enacting completely new markets via pioneering technologies (Shane, 2000) or scratching together a new offering using the resources at hand (Baker and Nelson, 2006), entrepreneurs engage the world in ways that are often puzzling to observers. Part of this can be seen as the result of differences between observers and entrepreneurs in their socially situated cognition (Mitchell *et al.*, 2011). These differences in how the entrepreneur interprets and understands the environment in which he or she is situated reflects the ingenuity of entrepreneurs. We see this ingenuity as central to the notion of introducing something new to the market. While there are many factors that influence why and how this unfolds (e.g. Baron and Ensley, 2006; Gregoire and Shepherd, 2012; McKelvie *et al.*, 2011), we see some key factors that are germane to the articles in this special issue. These factors flow from life circumstances, experience and learning that accumulates over time and that shape the socially situated actions of entrepreneurs as we now discuss.

There is substantial body of research on the relationship between life circumstances and entrepreneurship. This work typically takes one of three perspectives. The first perspective adopts an approach that looks at historical events that become an integral part of the entrepreneur's identity and how those influence entrepreneurial activity. The second perspective adopts a focus on major changes/shocks that have occurred for the individual and the ways in which the individual respond in relation to using entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial thinking to adjust. And a third perspective reflects how lived experience shapes an individuals' entrepreneurial motivation and action (see Cacciotti *et al.*, 2016).

From the first perspective, prior research has demonstrated how life circumstances create a situation that is conducive for entrepreneurship. For example, Aldrich and Cliff (2003) propose a framework that highlights how the embeddedness of entrepreneurs in a family system can shape the new venture creation process. Likewise, Kolvereid (1996) found that whether a parent worked as an entrepreneur for the majority of their working life influenced attitudes, subjective norms and perceptions of control, which in turn influenced an individual's intentions to become an entrepreneur.

From the second perspective, prior research highlights how significant changes in an individual's circumstances can lead an individual to be more entrepreneurial in their thinking as a way to adjust. For example, Aldrich and Cliff (2003) suggest that the process of coping with major life changes such as marriage, the birth of a child or divorce "can stimulate recognition of new products and services to fulfill unmet needs" (p. 579). In a similar vein, Wood *et al.* (2013) find that the loss of a job and the subsequent duration of unemployment also lead to greater entrepreneurial intention. And even past attempts at entrepreneurship that have failed may engender the entrepreneurial thinking and action. As Ucbasaran *et al.* (2013) highlight, "many entrepreneurs who have experienced business failure not only develop strong intentions to start subsequent businesses [...] but actually do so" (p. 187).

From the third perspective, prior research has highlighted how individuals' lived experience and perceptions of the world shape their motivations and actions. For example, work on corporate entrepreneurship shows that the large, established firm environment affects the way individuals think and learn about entrepreneurial initiatives (Corbett and Hmieleski, 2007; Corbett *et al.*, 2007). Additionally, Koellinger *et al.* (2007) note the role of subjective perceptions in explaining why certain individuals engage in entrepreneurial action and other individuals do not. Likewise, Cacciotti *et al.* (2016) highlight how internal cognitive evaluations and external social cues influence the experience of fear of failure and lead to a variety of potential behavioral responses (i.e. action, inaction or repression). In a related way, Minniti and Bygrave (2001) present a model of entrepreneurial learning in which entrepreneurs "process information, make mistakes, update their decisional algorithms and, possibly, through this struggle, improve their performance" (p. 6).

What these streams have in common is a focus on how specific aspects of an individual's situation can lead to receptiveness to entrepreneurial thinking and action. This receptiveness and the action that results can then lead the individual to introduce something new, and perhaps revolutionary, to the market. The socially situated nature of individual circumstances, major life changes and current experiences can result in an increased awareness of an attractive opportunity (pull entrepreneurship) or a feeling of pressure to improve one's current position (push entrepreneurship) (see Schjoedt and Shaver, 2007). In each of these cases, the entrepreneurial action results from a latent desire to take control via entrepreneurship (Croson and Minniti, 2012).

3. Rebels with a cause

As our discussion, thus, far highlights, entrepreneurs leverage entrepreneurial ingenuity to enable change. The situated nature of how and where this process unfolds is a topic of great

interest for entrepreneurship scholars. The articles in this special issue represent continued steps in understanding such change and, as we have noted, can be organized around two broad themes: revolutionary thinking and transformative action. In that spirit, we briefly highlight each of the five papers in the special issue as they relate to these two themes. Each of the papers offers an original contribution while also stimulating opportunities for future scholarship related to improving our understanding of how enterprising individuals navigate the complexities of rebelling against the status quo.

3.1 Revolutionary thinking

When it comes to revolutionary thinking immigrants can be some of the most innovative actors in the economy. As such, immigrant entrepreneurship has emerged as an important topic of research. Zhang and Chun add to the conversation by investigating the formation of entrepreneurial identity among immigrants. Their approach uniquely draws on in-depth qualitative interviews with Chinese immigrants in Canada who left behind careers as skilled workers, and the prestige associated with their positions, to immigrate to another country and become self-employed. The qualitative interviews provide rich data that revealed immigrants transition to entrepreneurial identities through three processes: exploring possible selves, building entrepreneurial mindsets and developing narratives.

In uncovering these processes, Zhang and Chun document in some detail, that the process of identity transformation is often long and fraught with insecurity and self-doubt. They go on to provide evidence that enterprising immigrants overcome this via a predictable set of dynamics such as developing narratives about a new identity as an entrepreneur. Based on these insights, the authors synthesize identity theory and entrepreneurship research in a way that provides unique insights into how immigrant entrepreneurs reinvent themselves as they transition to self-employment. This opens new opportunities for research at the intersection of identity and entrepreneurship as it relates to ways in which individuals conceptualize themselves as actors capable of enabling change.

Adding to this, Cruz, Fluminense, Falcao and Barreto study communities of Brazilian immigrant entrepreneurs in Florida. These authors use a capital theory approach through the perspectives of Bourdieu's economic, human and social capital to identify different types of entrepreneurship by Brazilians residing in Florida communities. The authors bring to the fore issues concerning why, how and when Brazilian citizens pursue new business ventures. To achieve this, the researchers utilized a comparative case study approach, that included in-depth interviews with 80 entrepreneurs where they triangulated the data using secondary sources and surveys. This empirical approach enabled the construction of detail profiles of individual Brazilian entrepreneurs, settled in two locations of Florida: Pompano Beach (Miami area) and Orlando. By comparing these two entrepreneurial communities of the same ethnicity, the study taps into dynamics often overlooked in traditional single community studies.

Specifically, the picture that emerged as a result of these efforts is that immigrant entrepreneurs' capital provisions and social identities hold sway over their market choices. The findings also reveal the different motivations of Brazilian entrepreneurs within these communities for engaging in revolutionary thinking manifest as new venture creation. Notably, the majority of the interviewees were deemed to be "opportunity driven" such that the motivation for starting a business came from the recognition of alluring business opportunities as opposed to a lack of options for traditional employment options. Together, these findings add insights on immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship (see e.g. Sanders and Nee, 1996) and, thus, serves as a building block for future comparative studies on immigrant communities.

Stambaugh and Mitchell shift the focus to entrepreneurship as a journey (McMullen and Dimov, 2013; Sserwanga and Rooks, 2014) where individuals create expertise in the fight to avoid failure. In this paper, aptly titled "The Fight is the Coach" the researchers take a truly novel approach to investigate failure and learning in entrepreneurial ventures. Learning can

be costly and in this study the authors examine learning that occurs before an entrepreneurial failure event, and factors that could affect the level of learning during the failure event itself. Their conceptual work draws on the literatures of entrepreneurial learning through failure, entrepreneurial cognition and deliberate-practice expertise development to suggest that the struggles the entrepreneur encounters can be viewed as a form of coaching.

Their theory complements entrepreneurship research at the nexus of learning (Corbett, 2005, 2007) and failure (Shepherd, 2013) by taking a broader consideration of the process and context of failure. This is important because learning and failure are typically treated as distinct phenomena and Stambaugh and Mitchell highlight the value of synthesizing these two dynamics by introducing the notion that significant learning is possible before and during the actual failure event. By segmenting entrepreneurial failure in this manner, this paper's explanation incorporates differences in individual responses during the process of failing that could affect levels of learning. The paper applies the concept of deliberate practice in a "quasi-practice" setting; that is, within a real-life setting in which the "fight" to avoid entrepreneurial failure serves as the "coach" for learning. This approach paves the way for future empirical research that provides an improved understanding of learning as function of engaging in the revolutionary thinking that underpins transformative action.

3.2 *Transformative action*

While revolutionary thinking is central to disrupting the status quo through entrepreneurship, to fully understand entrepreneurship-based change requires an understanding the mechanisms of the transformative actions of entrepreneurs. There are two papers in the special issue that speak to this. The first is an informative study by Meek and Williams who explore the reasons why entrepreneurs choose to exit from their firm or persist. In other words, they explore why some abandon transformative action while others carry on in the face of adversity. Their approach moves beyond financial performance as a predictor of exit (Wennberg *et al.*, 2010) and hence brings forward a number of nuanced insights. Using a unique multi-year case study, Meek and Williams draw on participant observation, autobiographical and interview data to provide insights into how nascent entrepreneurs persist despite outward appearances suggesting limited progress. The case study data revealed new insights that coalesce into a theoretical model on entrepreneurial persistence through stage gates and opportunity variation. In essence, these authors demonstrate that persistence involves overcoming stage-gate barriers, and that entrepreneurs use their full and part-time job experiences to overcome the impediments blocking their fledgling entrepreneurial endeavors. In some cases, this involves taking incremental steps forward as motivation for nascent entrepreneurs to persist even though there has been little outward evidence of progress. These findings extend theories of persistence, entrepreneurial action and career anchors by suggesting that nascent entrepreneurs who are slowly making progress toward start-up may be seeking (consciously or not) congruence between different possible future venture configurations and their preferred work environment. Ultimately, their model of entrepreneurial persistence adds clarity to how entrepreneurs navigate the perils of engaging in transformative action.

In a second paper tied to transformative action, Noack, Miller and Guidice capitalize on the realization that while the management literature has long-studied organizational commitment, little is known about such commitment within a new venture context. This lead to questions about the co-founders and their commitment to joining a new venture vs pursuing a more traditional and stable career path. To address this, these authors utilize equity ownership distribution decision of the founding team to examine how current employment situations and alternative job prospects impact the relationship between co-founder perceptions of distributive justice and organizational commitment. They do so by surveying 117 co-founders via Amazon M-Turk, a relative new approach that is gaining traction in the literature.

Findings from this empirical effort confirm organizational commitment literature in the new venture context by documenting a positive relationship between perceptions of distributive justice and organizational commitment. However, when co-founders report having a second (or primary) job, in addition to the new venture (often called hybrid entrepreneurship, Raffiee and Feng, 2014), the relationship is mitigated. Yet, higher levels of alternative employment options appear to strengthen the primary relationship between justice and commitment. Noack and collages conclude, then, that perceptions of fairness and justice appear to provide valuable implications for founders, seeking to bring on co-founders, concerned about organizational commitment and employee buy-in. The implication is that founders should take caution when engaged in transformative action that requires bringing on co-founders who have another job. This is because these hybrid entrepreneurs' levels of commitment will likely be impacted in ways that may negatively affect the new venture.

4. Forging a new road

As noted previously, the focus of the special issue on “rebels with a cause” has ended up being more on the cause than on the rebel. The papers in this special issue have accordingly focused more on underlying mechanisms that enable revolutionary and transformative outcomes in the lives of entrepreneurs than on these specific outcomes. When viewed collectively, the papers in this special issue highlight potential gains from a more explicit and more nuanced treatment of the mechanisms that underlie revolutionary thinking and transformative action through “rebellious” by disrupting the status quo. Specifically, the papers in this issue highlight how some of the underlying causes of the disruption are personal in that they flow from one's own life circumstances (e.g. immigration), major changes/shocks (e.g. failure) or lived experience/perceptions (e.g. perceptions of distributive justice).

These papers provide an interesting perspective on some of the underlying causes and mechanisms, but in doing so they do not focus as much on how the outcomes can truly be classified as rebellions. Rather, they address the questions initially posed related to how groundbreaking entrepreneurial activities arise from certain attitudes, behaviors and cognition that enable entrepreneurs to imagine and transform the future. We are delighted with the contributions of the papers in this special issue. But we nonetheless still see opportunity for future research to further develop on the theme of rebels with a cause. For example, there remain opportunities to better understand the linkages between the emotions of entrepreneurs and the revolutionary thinking and transformative entrepreneurial action that can result (see e.g. Foo, 2011; Foo *et al.*, 2009; Baron, 2008).

Building on the work of Stambaugh and Mitchell, we also see opportunities to further develop a process perspective that links the mechanisms that underlie entrepreneurial thinking and transformative action to the broader environment (see e.g. Corbett *et al.*, 2007; Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2001) to further develop an understanding of the interplay between mind, environment and action (Wood *et al.*, 2014; Mitchell *et al.*, 2011; Shelton, 2010). Zhang and Chun's work within the immigrant entrepreneur community opens up additional avenues of research at the crossroads of identity and cognition. Their research demonstrating how immigrants imagine new possible selves provides a springboard for future investigations that look at the emergence of identity through entrepreneurial cognitions. Similarly, Cruz, Falcao and Barreto also provide future researchers on immigrant entrepreneurship behavior with important questions through their examination of cognition, context and behavior (Bandura, 1991; Corbett and Hmieleski, 2007). Their work opens up avenues exploring how social capital, human capital and economic capital interact with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991) to better understand the evolution of immigrant entrepreneurs.

Noack, Miller and Guidice's work on the balancing the tradeoffs of employment vs starting a venture provides a baseline for the examination of the cognition of part-time and hybrid entrepreneurs. Future research based upon this work could examine numerous issues

surrounding psychological ownership, venture commitment, persistence and the effect of co-founders vs single owners. Finally, with Meek and Williams also focusing on persistence questions of what micro-foundations and activities gird the concept of entrepreneurial persistence come to the fore. Their study also opens up avenues for research on not just how one's career history relates to entrepreneurial persistence, but how one's accumulated life history, cognitions, behaviors, actions and learning can affect a willingness to persist.

5. Closing comments

Entrepreneurs help transform the world by creating social and economic value. At the foundation of their ability to do so lies their cognition which supports their revolutionary thinking and transformative action.

This paper and the five accompanying works that examine various facets of the human and social dynamics of entrepreneurship shed light on the unique ingenuity and astuteness of entrepreneurs. We believe this body of work provides entrepreneurship researchers with new insights on how entrepreneurs do what they do while also providing scholars with thought-provoking paths for future research.

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Further reading

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