

An extended abstract of:
Toward a Practice Perspective in International Entrepreneurship

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

25 years ago, McDougall, Shane and Oviatt (1994) argued that extant International Business theories failed to explain International New Ventures (INVs), because they focused on firm level analysis. Since then, founders of INVs have been extensively researched in international entrepreneurship (IE) research, although mostly in *static* terms, such as personal characteristics, previous international experience, global mindset or personal networks (Alvi & Carsrud, 2017; Jones, Coviello, & Tang, 2011; Keupp & Gassmann, 2009; Peiris, Akoorie, & Sinha, 2012). Perhaps due to the influence from International Business and the opposition to the original Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), much research undertaken in IE on *processes* of entrepreneurial internationalization has remained at the firm level, without a clear explanation of their micro-foundations (Contractor, Foss, Kundu, & Lahiri, 2018; Felin & Foss, 2009).

The question of *how* individual antecedents are actually translated into firm level outcomes and constitute firm level processes remains a black box, in other words: What do international entrepreneurs *do* during the *process* of entrepreneurial internationalization?

This lack of research is surprising, because in most definitions of IE, activity or practices are central, embodied in such words as “behavior”, “activity” or expressions such as “discovery, enactment, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities” (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005). This gap is also relevant, because research has shown that individual entrepreneurial characteristics can have more influence on performance than firm level characteristics in the field of IE (e.g. Kundu & Renko, 2005). Yet, the “black box” questions of how the actual activity of international entrepreneurs with certain characteristics relates to the more abstract concepts like routines, firm specific advantages, capabilities, organizational learning, the construction of networks and resources, internationalization speed and performance, remain largely unanswered.

Considering that at least one missing link in IE research seems to be the dynamics of how international entrepreneurs interact in networks, strategize, build capabilities and competitive advantage during the different phases of entrepreneurial internationalization, we reiterate previous calls (e.g., Mainela et al., 2014) to apply practice perspectives and theories in IE. Different practice theories have been applied to enhance understanding both in entrepreneurship and in strategic management, where they are well developed as the subfield of strategy as practice.

Considering the strong cross-fertilization between strategic management and IE, we suggest that a strategy as practice approach (SAP) can be useful in IE research in a number of ways. SAP is

usually portrayed as seeking to open up the black box of strategy-making. It is an approach that considers strategy not as a property of organizations, but an activity of its members, and to focus on the study of practices, praxis and practitioners (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2012; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Whittington, 2006). Because of its theoretical foundations SAP and other practice approaches are suited and have increasingly been used to connect micro phenomena via recurrent practices to meso phenomena, such as firms and organizations and macro phenomena, such as institutions (Seidl & Whittington, 2014; Smets, Aristidou, & Whittington, 2017; Suddaby, Seidl, & Lê, 2013), and to higher level processes in general (Burgelman et al., 2018).

In sum, we believe that there are many unlabeled arrows (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van De Ven, 2013) connecting the boxes of useful theoretical models in IE, that these arrows represent human activity, and suggest that research applying a practice perspective would allow us to label them. This would not only enhance our theoretical understanding by providing extant models with micro-foundations and hence accuracy, but also be of practical relevance, since it informs practitioners not only about what resources, characteristics or mindset they have to have or get, but also what other practitioners *do*, successfully or otherwise. The purpose of this paper is therefore to answer the question: How can practice perspectives help us gain a better understanding about the activities, the emergence of routines and practices that connect international entrepreneurs and firm level outcomes and processes in IE? We provide conceptual perspectives and examples of how practice perspectives have been applied in the fields of international business and entrepreneurship and could be applied to enrich extant conceptualizations in IE that draw on the resource-based view, dynamic capabilities, international opportunities, knowledge and learning, and networks.

Keywords: strategy as practice, international entrepreneurship, international new ventures, practice theory

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