
Before We Begin...

Thank you so much for showing an interest in this new edition of *Researching Entrepreneurship*! It's going on 12 years since the first edition was published and 3 years—more when you read this—since I started working on this new edition. During that time, entrepreneurship research has undergone tremendous development. The qualitative and quantitative growth that the field has undergone is just amazing. Understandably, this plus the growing ambition that always tends to set in during a project like this mean that writing this new edition has been a much greater challenge than I first thought. But as I state repeatedly in the book: challenges are fun! If being an academic were easy, it would be boring. As a result, this book is just as much an entirely new book as it is a new edition of an existing one. As a case in point, more than half the figures and tables are new.

The Umpire Strikes Back! was my spontaneous first suggestion for the subtitle when the publisher suggested I come up with one for this new edition. I thought it would be kind of a fun and fitting pun for a sequel where someone takes on the outrageously self-aggrandizing role of telling others how to do their research, especially as entrepreneurship research spans an impossible range of topics, theoretical angles, types of data, and analysis techniques. In the end, I settled for *conceptualization and design*. I think it is still true that “This is a methods book. Of sorts” as I put it in the preface to the first edition. This said, I think the chosen subtitle adequately captures the drift in emphasis. This new edition has less emphasis on data and technique and more on fundamental thinking about what we are really trying to do, when we are doing “research.” I hope the subtitle I finally chose is at least as fair a description of the contents as was my first idea.

So what have I done in more detail? Chapters 1 and 2 present essentially the same argument as before about what entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship research are, but have been thoroughly updated to reflect recent developments, as have all chapters. Chapter 3 has undergone greater changes, not least because the field of entrepreneurship research has become so much more theory-driven since 2004. Chapter 4, on general design issues, has tripled in length from 10 to over 30 pages and now provides a much better introduction to design and methods issues, if I may say so myself (and I may, because this is my book!). Although I sprinkle it with entrepreneurship-specific comments, it is actually an “introduction, but with a twist” that can be applied in other fields of research as well and to other phenomena.

Chapter 5 (on sampling and case selection) has been given a general overhaul and updating while most of its message stays intact. Chapter 6 keeps its title (“Operationalization Issues”) but not much more. So much has happened in this area over the past decade that I decided to essentially start from scratch. Well, maybe 25 % stays essentially the same. The old Chaps. 7 and 8 have been scrapped, not because those topics have become obsolete but because my expertise on them has not been much updated since I wrote the first edition. Instead, I have added chapters on topics where I have done some hard and fun intellectual work in recent years, namely, the dependent variables in entrepreneurship research (Chap. 7) and “entrepreneurial opportunities” and their role in the “entrepreneurship nexus” (Chap. 8). Chapter 9 has doubled in length, and its front part is now the crescendo of a theme that runs through the book: the insufficiency of statistical significance testing and how we need to start to embrace replication and reproducibility if we really want to take seriously our role as developers of solid knowledge. I have also expanded the second half of the chapter with a couple of new replication examples. Chapter 10 on analysis approaches is short as before, but has been duly updated.

So what have I retained from the first edition? In its preface, I wrote “while hopefully retaining enough seriousness and credibility, I will try to refrain from dull academic jargon and unnecessarily heavy style.” In the preface to the paperback edition, I similarly signaled that I tried to avoid “unnecessarily dry style and impenetrable academic jargon.” A formal reviewer of that text noted that some might like this choice of style, others not. I have bet my money on the former and kept the informal and sometimes even joking style, while remaining dead serious about the message. The book will essentially continue in the chatty style of this preface, so if that makes you want to puke, don’t say I didn’t warn you! By the way, when I come to think of it, I realize it is not completely inconceivable that the stretch of long, core Chaps. 4–6 will not exactly come across as an example of lightweight, bedtime reading.

One reviewer of the first edition appreciated as a great strength that the book “provokes reflection and debate, rather than setting out rules to follow and comply with.” I think I kept that as well. I want to encourage you to think—from a somewhat more enlightened position—rather than providing you with firm, authoritative rules of admonition. If you like the latter better, I’m sorry, but (research) life just isn’t that easy/boring. As a consequence, the alert reader will spot some ambivalence as to where I stand on some topics, such as the merits of exploratory research. If you now think you’re up for an orgy in indecision and cowardice, I should rush to ensure you that you will also find a greater number of frank statements about some of our research practices than you are likely to find in print elsewhere.

Another observation made by a formal reviewer of the first edition was that the book had “an element of autobiography about it.” This is still true; in terms of the relative space allotted, the book is biased in favor of the types of topics and research approaches with which I am most familiar, and many examples are drawn from my own journey as a researcher. This is simply because it is with such a focus that there is any hope that I can provide insights you could not just as easily get elsewhere.

However, the enormous growth of entrepreneurship research has forced me to build much more on the work of others this time around, and as a consequence you can “look forward to” a rather long list of references. But sure enough, you will get a dose or two of my pet peeves!

Oh, another thing: even though the entrepreneurship research community has grown a lot, it is still the case that “the world market for a book by the title *Researching Entrepreneurship* is so limited that one can guarantee that it won’t make its author rich. The upside of that is that you can trust it is an honest book. I write it because I want to share my experiences and not with the intent to maximize profits; hence I do not have to compromise with my convictions in order to reach my goals.” One wealthy colleague used the expression “glutton for punishment” to describe my work on this book, while another likewise wealthy one used the term “labour of love” (sorry, he’s Australian, so he did not say “labor”). I accept both characterizations.

For whom is this book intended? I like to think of it as a dialog with both emerging and established peers. Research students, doctoral programs, and courses focusing on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship research are obvious primary targets. Those oriented toward related topics like small business, innovation, regional development, or organization/management/strategy more broadly may also find many aspects of the book useful. I think established colleagues might enjoy parts of the book, too. For example, the first two chapters if they are not already familiar with the argument, as well as the new, more conceptually oriented Chaps. 7 and 8. I would very much want every social science colleague there is to take Chap. 9 to heart. Other parts would offer fewer new content ideas, but may have value as refresher as well as inspiration for how to approach various issues in doctoral courses and supervision. This said, there are passages where I blush at the thought of a colleague thinking that *I* am thinking that *they* need *me* to tell *them* this or that basic point about research. No, that was not my intention.

Research students and fellow academics aren’t the only target groups for this book, though. Analysts in market research firms and among opinion pollsters, in policy-making and policy-preparing offices, consultancy firms, statistical agencies, and business associations can also find large parts of the contents to be valuable, even if not every page and every sentence are a perfect fit for their needs. This is particularly the case if they have an interest in enhancing their professional competence at telling good evidence from bad and if their topical interest is directed toward entrepreneurship, small business, innovation, or economic and regional development issues.

Returning to pet peeves, when you write up a work like this over an extended period of time, you tend to somehow drift into discussing the same issues regardless of the main theme of the current chapter. I have weeded out some repetition of that nature, but deliberately let some stay. This is for the following reasons. First, some messages deserve and need some repetition—back in the days I taught marketing, they used to say you need to be hit by a message at least three times for it to have any effect at all. Second, although I have maintained the ambition (fantasy?) that it should be “a bearable experience to read it from cover to cover,” the fact remains that books like this one “tend to be used rather than read.” The repeated points

belong in various contexts, and many users will only use a chapter or two at a time (or at all). Hence, please try to patiently endure the instances of repetition. I hope you will appreciate that at least I vary the phrasing; you won't find any sloppy cut-and-paste jobs.

Something else you will not find much in this book is philosophy of science arguments or references. This said, I have sneaked in the odd reference to ontology and epistemology in this new edition (and even discuss ancient Greek philosophy in one of the many footnotes—don't miss them; they're where half of the gems are!). Philosophy of science has its place and its points, but it rarely gives you much to really hold on to when conducting empirical research (because that is not what philosophers of science do and therefore they simply don't have that experience and expertise). I stay far short of being an expert on philosophies of science, but I'm not completely ignorant, and I agree that reflection on the foundations of knowledge production is both important and admittedly lacking in a lot of mainstream research. Although I don't find it totally convincing in terms of logical coherence, *scientific realism* is the school of thought that probably comes closest to the practically workable middle ground that I find most useful for guiding empirical research. This said, I do not believe in having a *faith* when it comes to philosophy of science (see, non-believing *is* obviously my faith). I can think of no more narrow-minded and unacademic attitude than thinking that "all the good guys think like us." So I tend to be an eclectic and pragmatic skeptic, accepting and refuting arguments from several camps.

Many people and organizations have contributed to this book. Far too many, in fact, for it to be possible to mention them all individually. To those mentioned in the preface to the first edition, I need to add at least the Australian Research Council and the Talbot Family Foundation for financial support. Many wonderful research students, postdocs, and other colleagues at QUT/ACE, JIBS, University of Louisville, the AoM Entrepreneurship Division, and beyond have inspired, critiqued, and in other ways contributed to this work. Among the most important recent research collaborators not mentioned in the first edition we find Scott R. Gordon, Lucia Naldi, and Paul Steffens. Although we do not publish much together, I also need to specifically mention two of the giants in the field, who have had great influence on my scholarship as well as on our entire field, in different but equally important ways: Paul Reynolds and Dean Shepherd. Throughout the book itself and its reference list, I show my appreciation to many others not specifically mentioned here or in the original preface. I would also like to acknowledge Robyn Denton's help with a couple of figures.

I will this time change my habit of not dedicating my books to someone near and dear, which I have followed because of the awkwardness of "giving" people something that does not interest them. My change of mind is due to the fact that the delightful human being who is now my wonderful wife, Thu Nguyen, is herself such an oddball that she voluntarily read and commented not only on this edition but also on drafts of the 2005 paperback edition back in the days when our relationship was only professional. Honey, this one's for you! It took a couple of periods of

separation to get the damn thing finished, but it'll make the G & T taste even better, and I'm sure we'll continue to have good conversations and laughs about this book, just like we have about everything else. Thanks for making it sheer bliss to wake up every morning. You know you'll always have my unconditional love.

Brisbane, Australia

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