Is There an Elephant in Entrepreneurship? Blind Assumptions in Theory Development*

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Abstract

This article uses the six key specification decisions for entrepreneurship research (purpose, theoretical perspective, focus, level of analysis, time frame, and methodology) outlined in Low and MacMillan (1988) to explore unstated assumptions in entrepreneurship theory development. An article by Shane and Venkataraman (2000), "The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research," is analyzed and recommended as a model for clarity. A recommendation is made that the field of entrepreneurship needs to develop communities of scholars identified with specific research questions and issues.

> *In the farthest reaches of the desert there was a city in which all the people were blind. A king and his army were passing through that region, and camped outside the city. The king had with him a great elephant, which he used for heavy work, and to frighten his enemies in battle. The people of the city had heard of elephants, but never had the opportunity to know one. Out rushed 6 young men, determined to discover what the elephant was like.*

The intention of this article is to reflect and speculate on the status and uses of theory in entrepreneurship research using Low and MacMillan's (1988) review of the entrepreneurship field as a starting point. Their review covered six key specification decisions that scholars should consider when conducting entrepreneurship research: purpose, theoretical perspective, focus, level of analysis, time frame, and methodology. One key insight from their article is that "These design specification decisions are interrelated, and cannot be made independently" (p. 140). Apropos this insight, this paper will explore how the choice of theoretical perspective in entrepreneurship hinges on assumptions made about these other specification decisions.

As a way to begin this exploration, my point of departure for discussing entrepreneurship theory begins with Low and MacMillan's advice for scholars in entrepreneurship that "the field will be better served in the future if the issue of theoretical perspective is addressed directly and unstated assumptions avoided" (1998, p. 146), I concur. The thesis of this article is that theory development in entrepreneurship research depends on whether we are conscious of the assumptions we make about this phenomenon. Some evidence suggests that entrepreneurship scholars are not

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conscious of their assumptions. Gartner (1990) found that entrepreneurship scholars held very different beliefs about the nature of entrepreneurship, and that they had very different views of what entrepreneurship, as a phenomenon, consisted of. Implicit in those findings was a fear that research based on these different views would result in a cacophony of results and ideas. Synthesizing different results without some common conscious sense of the fundamental attributes of entrepreneurship would merely add another layer of confusion. At that point, I believed that "Only by making explicit what we believe can we begin to understand how all of these different parts make up a whole" (Gartner. 1990, p. 28). I am not sure that the entrepreneurship field has reached some sense of theoretical clarity during the past decade.

Since the Low and MacMillan (1988) article, there has been a bonanza of efforts at generating theory in entrepreneurship. The Interdisciplinary Conference on Entrepreneurship Theory held in January, 1991, at the University of Baltimore resulted in a two-volume set of articles published in Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice (1991, 1992a). The Theory Building Conference on Entrepreneurship held at the University of Illinois in October, 1991, resulted in a one-volume set of articles in the Journal of Business Venturing (1993) as well as an edited book (Bull, Thomas, & Willard, 1995). Other theory-development efforts included a "virtual conference" on models of organization formation in Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice (1992b, 1993), and some of the Gateway Conferences (Katz & Brockhaus, 1993, 1995; Katz, 1997). In addition, Don Sexton continued to bring scholars together to discuss and review research in entrepreneurship in conferences at the University of North Carolina in 1990 (Sexton & Kasarda, 1992) and at the Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City in 1996 (Sexton & Smilor, 1997). And. to top it off, there was the publication of the results of a forum held at Carnegie Mellon University in 1997 of internationally distinguished scholars who thoughtfully ruminated on the future of entrepreneurship research (Sarasvathy, 2000). These citations are by no means comprehensive (see Brazeal & Herbert, 1999).

Despite the creation of more theory in entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship scholars have noticed the difficulty of integrating entrepreneurship theory-development efforts into any coherent scheme. The following quotes are representative of these concerns:

> One interesting observation that emerged from this exercise is that each discipline has its own unique way of viewing entrepreneurship which remains relatively unaffected by the perspectives of other disciplines. In other words, we see evidence that many "uni-" rather than one or more "multi-" disciplinary views of our field currently exist" (Herron, Sapienza, Smith-Cook, 1991, p. 7)

> Despite the number of published papers that might be considered related to the theory of entrepreneurship, no generally accepted theory of entrepreneurship has emerged. ... Despite the potential for richness and texture that such a diverse mix of disciplines brings, a major weakness is that, in many cases, researchers from one discipline have tended to ignore entrepreneurship studies by researchers in the other disciplines (Bull & Willard, 1993, p. 184, citing Wortman, 1992).

I believe that entrepreneurship scholars need to recognize the very significant differences in the beliefs we hold about entrepreneurship. Recognizing that there are differences in beliefs might be a way for entrepreneurship scholars to begin to see how these differences might be aspects of the same whole. Alternatively, there may be irreconcilable differences among our views of entrepreneurship that might result in the entrepreneurship field splintering into more parsimonious and coherent research foci. There may not be a theory of entrepreneurship that can reflect all entrepreneurship scholarship, as currently practiced.

It seems to me that efforts at theory development in entrepreneurship have some similarity to the "Blind Men and the Elephant" story. Six blind men touch different parts of the elephant and come away with very different descriptions of an elephant's characteristics. The story offers a syllogism for thinking about the problems of integrating differing views of a large and complex phenomenon. I have included this story as a part of this article for two reasons. First, in attempts to locate the story, I have encountered many permutations and versions (e.g. Adams, 1994; Brazeal & Herbert, 1999; Waldo, 1961, 1978). Rather than assuming that readers of this article are thinking of the same "Blind Men and Elephant" story, I have included the version that I am referring to. Second, the "Blind Men and Elephant story presents some koans (i.e. paradoxes to enlighten) about discovery and synthesis. The story offers a form of commentary on my effort to discuss attempts to integrate diverse theoretical perspectives in entrepreneurship research.

I plan to explore the way that assumptions are made in entrepreneurship theory development by reviewing Shane and Venkataraman's "The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research" (2000). I will use the six specification decisions from Low and MacMillan (1988) as the framework for this discussion. Each specification decision will be defined and used to investigate key issues in the Shane and Venkataraman (2000) article. I believe that the Shane and Venkataraman article is a significant theoretical contribution to the entrepreneurship area, and that it has important implications for entrepreneurship scholarship that cannot be ignored. Not only is it the work of two very gifted scholars, but the work might also be seen as the continuing reflections of the editor of one of the major journals in the entrepreneurship area about where the field might be headed (Venkataraman, 1994, 1997). I think that discussion and debate about Shane and Venkataraman (2000) can help shape the direction of entrepreneurship research, and enable scholars in our field to make conscious decisions about the efficacy of their research contributions. I hope we can critically look at the direction of our field and continue to maintain the collegiality and friendliness that has been a hallmark of our research community.

The first young man, in his haste, ran straight into the side of the elephant. He spread out his arms and felt the animal's broad, smooth side. He sniffed the air, and thought. "This is an animal, my nose leaves no doubt of that, but this animal is like a wall." He rushed back to the city to tell of his discovery.

Specification of Purpose

Low and MacMillan (1988) indicate that specification of purpose involves explor- ing "the specific as well as larger purpose of the study" (p. 140). Much of their discussion of purpose involves determining the attributes of entrepreneurship by investigating previous entrepreneurship definitions (e.g. Knight, 1921; Gartner. 1985; Schumpeter, 1934; Stevenson, Roberts & Grousbeck, 1985) and proposing the following purpose for entrepreneurship research: "seek to explain and facilitate the role of new enterprise in furthering economic progress" (p. 141). They suggest that research in entrepreneurship would be advanced if studies were explicitly liked to this overall purpose. How has this purpose changed in the intervening twelve years?

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) lay out the purpose of entrepreneurship re- search by describing what entrepreneurship research should focus on, as well as indicating what it should not. They define the field of entrepreneurship as

> the scholarly examination of how, by whom, and with what effects, opportu- nities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and ex- ploited (Venkataraman, 1997). Consequently, the field involves the study of sources of opportunities; the processes of discovery, evaluation and exploita- tion of opportunities; and the set of individuals who discover, evaluate and exploit them ... scholars of organizations are fundamentally concerned with three research questions about entrepreneurship; (1) why, when, and how opportunities for the creation of goods and services come into existence; (2) why, when, and how some people and not others discover and exploit these opportunities; and (3) why, when, and how are different modes of action used to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000, p. 218).

This specification of purpose significantly narrows the field of entrepreneurship research, as currently practiced. For example, they propose that entrepreneurship research should not focus on "the relative performance of individuals or firms in the context of small or new business" (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000, p. 217) and they indicate that this type of research is more appropriate within the domain of strategic management.

The specification of purpose in Shane and Venkataraman (2000) is very different from the multitude of topics and issues that appear to encompass current entrepre- neurship scholarship as described in the Academy of Management Entrepreneur- ship Division Domain Statement for the National Academy of Management Meeting Call for Papers:

> Specific Domain: the creation and management of new businesses, small businesses and family businesses, and the characteristics and special problems of entrepreneurs. Major topics include: new venture ideas and strategies; ecological influences on venture creation and demise; the acquisition and management of venture capital and venture teams; self-employment; the

owner-manager; management succession; corporate venturing and the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic development.

Can there be a theory of entrepreneurship that could encompass such diverse organizational forms as new, small, and family businesses? Can there be a theory of entrepreneurship that could encompass such diverse occupational settings as self-employment, owner-management, and management succession? Are these parts, as described in the domain statement, aspects of some kind of whole of entrepreneurship? Or, are these various topics, just that-different topics with no underlying connections? I do not believe that scholars in the entrepreneurship field (i.e. scholars that convene in such places as the Academy of Management Entrepreneurship Division, the Babson/Kauffman Entrepreneurship Research Conference or RENT) are exploring topics that have a similar theoretical underpinning. There is, simply, no theoretical way to connect all of these disparate research interests together.

It would be difficult to ascribe the Shane and Venkataraman (2000) definition of entrepreneurship to the majority of the research currently undertaken by scholars in the entrepreneurship field. While Low and MacMillan (1988) suggest a focus on "new enterprise," a label that might encompass both emerging and established firms. Shane and Venkataraman (2000) are looking at individuals and opportunities. By implication, one would surmise that they believe that a focus on established firms (new or small) is not critical for understanding entrepreneurship. Indeed, it is interesting to note that Shane and Venkataraman do not cite the literature on entrepreneurial orientation (e.g. Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Miller & Friesen, 1982) at all.

My position on the focus of entrepreneurship research is that entrepreneurship is about "organizing," and this phenomenon has a greater likelihood of being understood through the study of firm creation (Gartner, 1985, 1988, 1990, 1993). I approach entrepreneurship from a social psychological perspective (Weick, 1979, 1995), and I am willing to celebrate studies of firm creation from other disciplinary perspectives (Gartner & Gatewood, 1992), as well. I agree with Shane and Venkataraman (2000) that their focus on individuals and opportunities is complementary to the study of firm creation (p. 219). What seems less complementary to both of these views is the study of new, small, and growing firms.

> *The second young blind man, feeling through the air, grasped the elephant's trunk. The elephant was surprised by this, and snorted loudly. The Young man, startled in turn, exclaimed, "This elephant is like a snake, but it is so huge that its hot breath makes a snorting sound." He turned to run back to the city and tell his tale.*

Specification of Theoretical Perspective

Low and MacMillan (1988) view the development of theory in entrepreneurship from two perspectives: strategic adaptation and population ecology. They suggest that the strategic adaptation perspective in entrepreneurship emphasizes the

freedom of individuals to make decisions involving the identification of opportunities, the assembly of resources to exploit those opportunities, and the strategies inherent in pursuing those opportunities through firms. In contrast, the population ecology perspective emphasizes environmental factors as both precursors to entrepreneurial activity and as mechanisms for selecting new firms that more appropriately conform to the dynamics of a particular niche. In both perspectives, Low and MacMillan imply that entrepreneurship researchers take a more dynamic view of entrepreneurship as a process that occurs over time.

The theoretical roots of Shane and Venkataraman (2000) are spread among a broader base of disciplinary perspectives, though their logic tends to come from theoretical perspectives in economics (e.g. Arrow, 1962; Baumol, 1989; Casson, 1982; Hayek, 1945; Kirzner, 1997; Schumpeter, 1934) and in language taken from ecological views (Aldrich, 1990; Singh & Lumsden, 1990) that celebrate the dynamic processes of firm formation. Shane and Venkataraman, while recognizing the contributions of other disciplines and perspectives, point out that the field of entrepreneurship, to be considered useful as a unique field of social science, must have "a conceptual framework that explains and predicts a set of empirical phenomena that are not explained or predicted by the conceptual frameworks already in existence in other fields" (p. 217). Implicit in this statement is a belief that the entrepreneurship field will develop its own theory.

There does seem to be a shift in theoretical perspectives, but mostly, it seems, in terms of level of analysis. Low and MacMillan (1988) are looking at theories on organizations (strategic adaptation) and environments (population ecology), while Shane and Venkataraman (2000) seem to focus on theories that are more likely to explain individual behavior from the perspective of economics. I do not perceive any inherent bias in Shane and Venkataraman that would suggest that they would not include any theoretical perspective that would help in understanding individuals and opportunities.

> *The third young blind man walked into the elephant's tusk. He felt the hard, smooth ivory surface of the tusk, listened as it scraped through the sand, then as the elephant lifted the tusk out, he could feel its pointed tip. "How wonderful!" he thought. "The elephant is hard and sharp like a spear, and yet it makes noises and smells like an animal!" Off he ran.*

Specification of Focus

Low and MacMillan (1988) indicate that the specification of focus deals with identifying the specific phenomena that should he investigated in entrepreneurship research. They review prior research on the personality and social context of entrepreneurs and stress the importance of studying entrepreneurship in a contextual and process-oriented way. Implicit in their review is an emphasis on the entrepreneur as the focus of entrepreneurship, though they recognize that the activities of entrepreneurs are not only based on the characteristics of the entrepreneurs

themselves, but on the influences of organizational, environmental, and creation processes as well (Carsrud, Olm, & Eddy, 1986; Gartner, 1985).

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) are explicit in describing their specification of focus for entrepreneurship research:

> We differ from these frameworks in (1) our focus on the existence, discovery, and exploitation of opportunities; (2) our examination of the influence of individuals and opportunities, rather than environmental antecedents and consequences; and (3) our consideration of a broader framework than firm creation (p. 219).

I believe that Shane and Venkataraman are attempting to address Low and MacMillan's suggestions for a greater contextual and process-oriented focus. I interpret the specification of focus in Shane and Venkataraman as requiring research that must recognize opportunities *and* individuals, not just individuals, and that the exploitation of opportunities is a process that can be seen in situations beyond firm creation. The critical difference in Shane and Venkataraman's view of entrepreneurship compared to the focus of prior entrepreneurship scholarship is the emphasis on opportunity (their characteristics and how they are discovered and exploited). Yet, one might assume that opportunity is an aspect of the context of entrepreneurship (Gartner, 1985; Low & MacMillan, 1988; Vesper, 1990), so that prior scholarship recognized opportunity, but did not emphasize it.

> *The fourth young blind man reached low with his hands, and found one of the elephant's legs. He reached around and hugged it, feeling its rough skin. Just then, the elephant stomped that foot, and the man let go. "No wonder this elephant frightens the king's enemies," he thought. "It is like a tree trunk or a mighty column, yet it bends, is very strong, and strikes the ground with great force." Feeling a little frightened himself, he fled back to the city.*

Specification of Level of Analysis

Low and MacMillan (1988) see entrepreneurship occurring across five levels of analysis: individual, group, organization, industry, and society. They suggest that important insights about entrepreneurship can be gained when researchers are able to conduct studies that are multi-level in nature. Shane and Venkataraman (2000) do not appear to offer a specification of level of analysis in their arguments, though their use of citations to other scholarship would seem to imply that they would concur with a view of entrepreneurship that was multi-level in nature (pp. 225–226). While their discussion of the discovery and exploitation of opportunities centers on arguments that appear to require the actions of individuals (pp. 221–224), they expand their insights from individuals to firms and institutions via modes of exploitation (p. 224).

The fifth young blind man found the elephant's tail. "I don't see what all the excitement is about," he said. "The elephant is nothing but a frayed bit of rope." He dropped the tail and ran after the others.

Specification of Time Frame

Low and MacMillan (1988) indicate that entrepreneurship is a process that occurs over time, and that researchers should attempt "wide time frame research" to account for the broadest range of factors affecting this process. Their examples of the time frame used in entrepreneurship research range from a focus on the start-up process (Gartner, 1985; Stevenson et al. 1985) to stages of growth in fully launched organizations (Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Greiner, 1972). There appears to be no direct way to ascertain how Shane and Venkataraman (2000) consider time frame in the context of their theoretical framework. I would assume that an appropriate time frame would account for the generation of opportunities, their discovery, and exploitation. The life of the opportunity (its inception, evolution, and eventual demise), therefore, would seem to be the boundaries for time in their framework.

The sixth young blind man was in a hurry, not wanting to be left behind. He heard and felt the air as it was pushed by the elephant's flapping ear, then grasped the ear itself and felt its thin roughness. He laughed with delight. "This wonderful elephant is like a living fan." And, like the others, he was satisfied with his quick first-impression and headed back to the city.

Specification of Methodology

Low and MacMillan (1988) suggest a variety of methods for entrepreneurship research that would lead to the use of hypothesis testing and theory development. Given earlier recommendations about the necessity of a process-oriented approach to entrepreneurship research, they extol longitudinal studies. As a way to test hypotheses, they recommended more efforts towards experimental designs. In general, their goal is to "pursue causality more aggressively. The field must move to the stage where exploratory case analyses or cross sectional census taking studies that are not theory driven and do not test hypotheses are no longer acceptable" (1988, p. 155). Shane and Venkataraman (2000) suggest that many different methodologies will be needed to explore the questions raised in their framework. With regard to theory development, I would assume that many methods would be appropriate for theory creation and testing, and that the study of entrepreneurship is not dependent on any one method.

But finally, an old blind man came. He held left the city, walking in his usual slow walk, content to take his time and study the elephant thoroughly. He walked all around the elephant, touching every part of it, smelling it, listening

to all of its sounds. He found the elephant's mouth and fed the animal a treat, then petted it on its great trunk. Finally he returned to the city, only to find it in an uproar.

Each of the six young men had acquired followers who eagerly heard his story. But then, as the people found that there were six different contradictory descriptions, they all began to argue. The old man quietly listened to the fighting. "It's like a wall!" "No, it's like a snake!" "No, it's like a spear!" "No, it's like a tree." "No, it's like a rope!" "No, it's like a fan!"

Is Entrepreneurship an Elephant?

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) are courageous to demarcate the boundaries of entrepreneurship research as "the scholarly examination of how, by whom, and with what effect, opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and exploited" (p. 218). Their framework does appear to address the concerns of Low and MacMillan (1988) to avoid unstated assumptions regarding the six key specifications for entrepreneurship research. I believe that their article indicates that a theory of entrepreneurship that could encompass the variety of research efforts and ideas that reflect current entrepreneurship scholarship is unlikely. Is there an elephant in current entrepreneurship scholarship? Can the study of the parts of current entrepreneurship scholarship lead to a comprehensive theory in entrepreneurship?

No.

The conundrum, as I see it, is that the totality of current academic entrepreneurship research does not espouse (nor can it espouse) an entrepreneurship theory, per se; rather entrepreneurship research espouses a diverse range of theories applied to various kinds of phenomena. There is no theory of entrepreneurship that can account for the diversity of topics that are currently pursued by entrepreneurship scholars. I challenge scholars in the entrepreneurship field to present a theory that could embrace all of the topics in the current Academy of Management Entrepreneurship Division Domain Statement. There is no elephant in entrepreneurship. The various topics in the entrepreneurship field do not constitute a congruous whole.

I do not see a way for scholars to generate a theory of entrepreneurship based on so many different research topics that seem to constitute the field of entrepreneurship. All of the disparate findings that compose our field are unlikely to be connected into a coherent whole. Rather than attempt to generate a comprehensive theory of entrepreneurship, I suggest efforts towards more modest goals, similar to what Shane and Venkataraman (2000) have undertaken.

The old man turned and went home, laughing as he remembered his own foolishness as a young man. Like these, he once hastily concluded that he understood the whole of something when he had experienced only a part. He

> *laughed again as he remembered his greater foolishness of once being un-*
> *willing to discover truth for himself, depending wholly on others' teachings.*

Theory as Community

Questions about how scholars develop and advance entrepreneurship, as a legitimate field of study (Amit, Glosten, & Muller 1993; Brazeal & Herberg, 1999; Bull & Willard, 1993; Herron, Sapienza, & Smith-Cook, 1991; Shane & Venkataraman man, 2000; Venkataraman, 1997), are very similar to discussions of the development of academic fields in the social sciences. For example, one can find similar concerns and debates about the development of organization theory (Martin & Frost, 1996; McKinley & Mone, 1998; Pfeffer, 1994, 1995; Van Maanen, 1995a, 1995b), political science (Green & Shapiro, 1994; Ordeshook, 1993), and strategic management (Camerer, 1985; Mahoney, 1993; Montgomery, Wernerfelt, & Balakrishnan, 1989). In addition, since 1988, there have been thoughtful efforts at exploring the nature of theory development within organization studies, as a whole (Academy of Management Review, 1989, 1999). Developing the field of entrepreneurship, and more specifically, developing theory in entrepreneurship, needs to be seen within the wider scope of these debates and efforts within the social sciences. We are not alone.

I believe that the development of theory involves the creation of a community of scholars in dialogue about a specific set of problems and issues, and who hold similar beliefs about the relevance of certain methods for solving these problems (Latour, 1987, Pfeffer, 1994, 1995). The development of theory involves the identification of "why" regarding a specific phenomenon (Sutton & Staw, 1995; Whetten, 1989). Fundamental to this process is the identification of the boundaries of the phenomenon to be studied. The Shane and Venkataraman (2000) article offers such boundaries for the study of entrepreneurship (p. 218).

In developing entrepreneurship as a field of research, it is very important to consider the value of pursuing a strong paradigm (Aldrich & Baker, 1997; Vander Werf & Brush, 1989). I believe that the creation of an identifiable community of scholars, who pursue similar research interests will result in the creation of a strong paradigm. I believe the Shane and Venkataraman (2000) article is a conscious attempt to develop a community based on similar research interests. This community may be more likely "to create a systematic body of information about entrepreneurship" (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000, p. 224).

What is the alternative? I believe that an unwillingness to discuss the entrepreneurship field's unstated assumptions and an unwillingness to define the boundaries of the field will continue to promote a weak paradigm for entrepreneurship scholarship. The result for scholars in entrepreneurship will continue to be collegiality without community. Scholars in entrepreneurship will continue to be a collection of diaspora from other fields of organization science that use "entrepreneurship" as a label to study whatever they want. What is the "why" in current entrepreneurship scholarship? What are the fundamental issues that the

entrepreneurship field seeks to address? The Shane and Venkataraman (2000) article offers some direction.

Can a systematic body of knowledge about entrepreneurship be developed without a willingness among all entrepreneurship scholars to state, specifically, their assumptions about what constitutes entrepreneurship, as a field of study? Once these assumptions are stated, can entrepreneurship scholars recognize that the entrepreneurship field is not cohesive? And, is the entrepreneurship field willing to consciously devolve into different topics of interest?

It might seem bit brash to openly suggest that scholars in the entrepreneurship field need to "choose sides" and actively divide into more homogeneous groups. Yet, I believe that informal communities of entrepreneurship research scholars already exist. Broad topic areas such as new venture creation, firm growth, venture capital, corporate entrepreneurship, management succession, family business, technology transfer and development are the kinds of subjects that certain entrepreneurship scholars already have strong interests in. Few entrepreneurship scholars would appear to be allied to all of these topic areas, and few entrepreneurship scholars appear to have research efforts in all of these topic areas. It would not be difficult to undertake an analysis of citations of key articles in each of these topic areas to identify the scholars with strong research affinities to these topics. Making these affinities visible, through conferences, symposia, edited books, special issues of journals, would be one approach towards creating a community of researchers that can actively engage in the creation of a systematic body of information.

I believe that theory development in entrepreneurship depends on this. The six key specification decisions for entrepreneurship research in Low and MacMillan (1988) can be seen as a framework for helping scholars in the entrepreneurship field choose specific topics and then develop theories, methods, ideas, and questions that are appropriate. The six key specification decisions are interrelated. The successful development of theory in entrepreneurship will occur when scholars are willing to concurrently identify purpose, focus, level of analysis, time frame, and methodologies.

Theory development in entrepreneurship research will require a willingness to discuss and debate our conscious and unconscious assumptions. Indeed, vigorous debate might help us all see more clearly what our unconscious assumptions about entrepreneurship are. I believe that the Shane and Venkataraman (2000) article is a courageous step in the right direction. I hope others will be willing to join them in developing a community of scholars to explore the questions and issues they have laid out.

> *But he laughed hardest of all as he realized that he had become the only one in the city who did not know what an elephant is like*[1].

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[1] The story of the "Blind Men and the Elephant" is taken from a number of Sufi and Indian sources: Backstein, Karen. (1992). *The Blind Men and the Elephant.* New York City: Scholastic; Quigley, Lillian. (1959). *The Blind Men and the Elephant*. New York City: Charles Scribners Sons; Sax, John Godfrey. (1963). *The Blind Men and the Elephant.* New York City: McGraw-Hill; Shah, Idries. (1967). *Tales of the Dervishes.* New York City: E.P. Dutton.

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