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Contextual Entrepreneurship: An Interdisciplinary Perspective

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Contextual Entrepreneurship: An Interdisciplinary Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The need to contextualize research in entrepreneurship has become an important theme during the last decade. In this monograph we position the increasing prominence of “contextual entrepreneurship” research as part of a broader scholarly wave that has previously washed across other fields. The challenges and promises we face as this wave carries us forward are similar in many ways to the challenges faced by researchers in other fields. Based on a review of the current context debate among entrepreneurship scholars and a selective review of other disciplines, we outline and discuss issues in theorizing, operationalising and empirically studying contexts in entrepreneurship research. Researchers have made rapid and substantial – though uneven – progress in contextualizing their work. Unsurprisingly, there is healthy disagreement over what it means to contextualize research and how it should be done, which we see as expressions of competing implicit theories of context. We argue that no overarching theory of what context is or what it means is likely to be very successful. Instead, we suggest briefly that it may be useful to adopt and develop what we label a “critical process approach” to contextualizing entrepreneurship research.

1

The Goldilocks Problem in Contextualizing Research: Too Much, Too Little, Just Right?

To claim that something has been “taken out of context” is to suggest that it is fallacious. Who would claim that our research is better when it ignores or otherwise misrepresents the effects of context on the inferences we put forth? Consistent with this logic, there has been growing interest in contextualizing research, with authors across many disciplines promoting the benefits of grounding our theoretical inferences more thoroughly in the places and circumstances of our empirical observations (e.g., Akman, 2000; Akman and Bazzanella, 2003; Bamberger, 2008; Bates, 1976; Dilley, 1999a; Duranti and Goodwin, 1992; Johns, 2001; 2006; 2017; 2018; Scharfstein, 1988; Scharfstein, 1989; Schegloff, 1997; Turner *et al.*, 1994; Van Dijk, 2008; Wyer and Srull, 1986). Over the last decade or so, this wave of interest has washed across the field of entrepreneurship (e.g., Boettke and Coyne, 2009; Hjorth *et al.*, 2008; Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2001; Welter, 2011; Welter and Gartner, 2016; Zahra, 2007; 2011; 2014).

In the current monograph, we expand on this interest in hopes of generating some new insights about why and how we might go about contextualizing entrepreneurship research. While we have few quarrels with the prior work, here we attempt to frame the issues, the progress

that has been made and the substantial challenges that remain with a view toward calling for future work that takes more of what we call a *critical process approach* to contextualizing entrepreneurship research.

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