ABSTRACT. This article provides a review and evaluation of The Blackwell Handbook of Entrepreneurship.

Donald Sexton, teaming this time with Hans Landström, has edited his fifth volume of state-of-the-art in entrepreneurship research readings, The Blackwell Handbook of Entrepreneurship. For twenty years, Sexton has been a backbone for the profession, not so much for his own invaluable research contributions but rather as a keen observer and expert synthesizer of the latest scholarship and emerging trends. Well in advance of Venkataraman’s (1997) call to create a distinctive domain of entrepreneurship research, Sexton’s state-of-the-art conferences and subsequent books have been invaluable in identifying to interested scholars the domain of entrepreneurship research and in enhancing the field’s legitimacy. Sexton’s determination to periodically bring together influential scholars in the field to take stock of the “state-of-the-art” of entrepreneurship and package the outcome of those meetings has done much for advancing the distinctness and legitimacy of the entrepreneurship domain.

In 1980, he produced his first edited volume in the series with Calvin Kent and Karl Vesper entitled the Encyclopedia of Entrepreneurship. This initial roadmap to what was truly a research frontier focused on the psychology of the entrepreneur, venture financing, and the economic impact of small business to the U.S. economy. In 1986, he collaborated with Raymond Smilor to produce The Art and Science of Entrepreneurship based on the conference of the previous year. This volume captured the ways in which the field had converged on the topics of financing, growth, research methodology, and the processes of entrepreneurship. By 1990 and the third state-of-the-art conference, research in the area had truly mushroomed. Sexton’s subsequent book, co-edited with John Kasarda in 1992 and entitled The State of Entrepreneurship, demonstrated just how far and how quickly research in the field had expanded, both in terms of topics of emphasis and methodological complexity. In some ways, this volume generated the most interest since it coincided with national recognition of entrepreneurship as a significant contributor to the economic vitality of the nation.

In the 1997 book, entitled Entrepreneurship 2000, Sexton again teamed with his colleague Raymond Smilor on the outcome of the conference of that year. The field had once more made advances in the areas of financing, growth, research methodology, and the processes of entrepreneurship. However, a sizable literature had also developed in areas such as the ethnic dimensions of entrepreneur, family business activity, harvesting firm value, and entrepreneurship edu-

Final version accepted on November 3, 2000

Joshua B. Powers
Indiana State University
Department of Educational Leadership
School of Education,
Terre Haute, IN 47809
U.S.A.
E-mail: jopowers@indstate.edu

Patricia P. McDougall
Indiana State University
Johnson Centre of Entrepreneurship
School of Business
Bloomington, Indiana 47405-2100
U.S.A.
E-mail: mcdougal@indiana.edu
cation and as such, played a prominent role in the book. This latest volume in the series once again serves both as a milepost and roadmap into new territory. Not only does it synthesize the burgeoning literature on financing and achieving growth, but it addresses a recurrent but generally more subtle theme that has appeared in all of the earlier volumes, the topic of international entrepreneurship. Like entrepreneurship's older organizational behavior and strategy siblings, advancements in entrepreneurial research have also largely been based on studies conducted in exclusively U.S. settings. Entrepreneurship scholars (McDougall and Oviatt, 2000; Dana et al., 1999; Giamartino et al., 1993) have repeatedly lamented the dearth of international entrepreneurship research and the often theoretical and interpretive parochialism of U.S.-based scholars conducting cross-border and non-U.S. research. Clearly, Don Sexton was listening since this latest work in the series devotes much of its space to the theme of international entrepreneurship. In fact, The Blackwell Handbook of Entrepreneurship breaks new ground for the series by involving the first non-U.S. based co-editor and a majority contingent of Canadian and European scholars as authors of over one-half of the chapters, many of which are devoted to topics within the developing European entrepreneurship arena. Reflecting the growing research interest in international entrepreneurship, many of the chapters offer a multi-cultural perspective.

Similarly to his previous books, this volume is divided into sections. Following a brief introduction to the chapters of the book, the first section, entitled Setting the Stage for International Research in Entrepreneurship, provides a contextual overview of the latest thinking on research methodology in the field as well as an introduction to the public policy issues of small business management. The second section, chapters five through nine, is entitled Government Impacts on Entrepreneurship. This series of chapters describe, compare, and contrast the role and influence of government on entrepreneurship in Europe. The role and influence of government is an issue of considerable importance to European entrepreneurs, as European governments are typically much more involved in their country's business sector than is the United State government. The third section, Financing Growth, covers chapters ten through thirteen and investigates what has been learned about financing growth and how that knowledge might inform new research streams in the sub-field. The fourth section, chapters fourteen through twenty, is entitled Achieving Growth: Internal and External Approaches and describes the diversity of ways that growth is achieved and the internal and external factors that influence it. The concluding section of the book, similar to the earlier state-of-the-art texts, is a succinct one chapter summary by the book editors of the main points made by the contributing authors and closing comments on what may be on the horizon.

Howard Aldrich, a contributor to all five volumes in the series, sets the stage in chapter one by exploring in his piece entitled Learning Together: National Differences in Entrepreneurship Research the ongoing debate about the parochial, if not ethnocentric perspective, of American researchers applying U.S. developed theory as if it were universally applicable. However, rather than simply adding to the chorus of voices calling for more informed research, Aldrich masterfully enlightens us to the ways that American and European researchers share similar as well as different values regarding inquiry. For example, while North American entrepreneurship researchers are more likely than their European counterparts to assume models to be universally applicable, both are about as likely to downplay causal models or to tackle questions deemed important or practically relevant. Aldrich goes on to suggest that increased collaboration among the two camps will be mutually enhancing to the field and for addressing such concerns as the lack of adequate databases, longitudinal data, and theory development and testing. In sum, Aldrich contends, the advancement of entrepreneurial science depends on open and frank dialogue across the divide rather than dogmatic claims (or inferred claims) to intellectual or methodological superiority.

By putting words to action, Sexton and Landström selected as the second chapter an article authored by two Swedish entrepreneurship researchers, Per Davidsson and Johan Wiklund. Entitled, Conceptual and Empirical Challenges in the Study of Firm Growth, the authors argue that