A Case for Comparative Entrepreneurship: Assessing the Relevance of Culture

Anisya S. Thomas*
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Stephen L. Mueller**
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

As international entrepreneurship gains momentum as a significant and relevant field of research, scholars need to address methodological issues that can facilitate the triangulation of research results. In this paper, we examine the relationship between culture and four personality characteristics commonly associated with entrepreneurial motivation. By demonstrating systematic variation in entrepreneurial characteristics across cultures, we raise important questions about the boundaries of international entrepreneurship research and the challenges of transcending them.

The study of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship has recently undergone a metamorphosis as scholars from diverse fields such as sociology, anthropology and business strategy apply their disciplinary concepts to the antecedents and consequences of new venture creation. Much of the impetus has derived from the growing acceptance of the idea that entrepreneurship, both within the context of existing firms as well as those of the start-up variety, spurs the expansion of business, creates new employment potential and fuels economic growth. Inspired by phenomena such as the explosion of growth in Silicon Valley

*Dr. Anisya Thomas is Associate Professor of Management and International Business at Florida International University. Her research interests include international strategic management and entrepreneurship.

**Dr. Stephen Mueller is Assistant Professor of Management and International Business at Florida International University. His research interests include international comparative management issues and entrepreneurship.

A previous version of this paper was awarded the Best Empirical Paper award at the 1998 USASBE meetings and appears in its Proceedings. The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Professor Jan Luytjes who was instrumental in initiating the cross national collaborative team that gathered the data used in the project. We are also grateful to our collaborators in the various countries whose effort and cooperation were essential to the completion of this project. We also thank Ivo Zander and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful and helpful comments.

*Dr. Anisya Thomas is Associate Professor of Management and International Business at Florida International University. Her research interests include international strategic management and entrepreneurship.

**Dr. Stephen Mueller is Assistant Professor of Management and International Business at Florida International University. His research interests include international comparative management issues and entrepreneurship.

A previous version of this paper was awarded the Best Empirical Paper award at the 1998 USASBE meetings and appears in its Proceedings. The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Professor Jan Luytjes who was instrumental in initiating the cross national collaborative team that gathered the data used in the project. We are also grateful to our collaborators in the various countries whose effort and cooperation were essential to the completion of this project. We also thank Ivo Zander and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful and helpful comments.


Palgrave Macmillan Journals is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve, and extend access to Journal of International Business Studies.

www.jstor.org
and the attendant innovativeness and wealth creation, entrepreneurship is now a vigorous field of inquiry not only in North America, but in Europe, Asia, and South America as well.

However, the absence of a strong theoretical foundation has contributed to the fragmentation of entrepreneurship research, often resulting in studies that examine the same or similar issues from diverse disciplinary perspectives while ignoring others. It is only recently that scholars have begun to address the need for integrative typologies and paradigms that can provide a coherent platform for diverse research efforts [Hisrich, 1990; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Wortman, 1987]. Contemporary theoretical work in entrepreneurship exhibits a concerted awareness of the necessity for frameworks that will facilitate the synthesis of existing research and the generation of new studies that address the gaps [Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Van de Ven, 1992; West, 1997].

The study of entrepreneurs has recently been internationalized to include research on new venture creation beyond the boundaries of a single country and the comparison of psychological, societal, and economic factors that motivate or impede the start-up of new firms. In the research domain of international entrepreneurship, the need for synthesis is even more critical. Encompassing research over almost two centuries, the field has included both the study of rates of entrepreneurship as well as the traits of entrepreneurs. The heritage of economics which can be traced to Cantillon [circa 1700] and Schumpeter [1934] has investigated demand conditions which increase the rates of entrepreneurship as well as the contributions made by entrepreneurs to the economic development and vitality of a country. Another important stream of research related to international entrepreneurship originated with the work of Weber [1904] and was elaborated by McClelland [1961] who posited that the abundance of individual entrepreneurs is a key supply condition leading to economic success in so-called achieving societies. Today, however, expanding interest in international entrepreneurship highlights the need for comparative studies which investigate both the demand and supply conditions that encourage entrepreneurial activity in various countries or regions.

International comparative research is particularly relevant in light of the renewed interest in entrepreneurship by government policy makers and business leaders worldwide. In the advanced industrialized nations, increased entrepreneurial activity is seen as a means to revitalize stagnating industries, to provide new jobs to compensate for employment problems created by corporate restructuring and downsizing, and to generally enhance economic flexibility and growth [Birch, 1979; Birley, 1986; Swain, 1985]. Furthermore, entrepreneurship has been rediscovered as a catalyst for technological progress [Baumol, 1986; Hagen, 1962; Kilby, 1971; Schumpeter, 1934] where entrepreneurial ventures are seen as incubators for product and market innovation [Reynolds, 1987].

In less developed countries, entrepreneurial activity is often encouraged as an avenue to stimulating economic growth [Harper, 1991]. New ventures are seen as replacements for crumbling state-owned enterprises, some of which are legacies of colonial rule. New ventures also tend to be more labor intensive thereby creating job opportunities. In addition, new ventures offer the promise of empowering marginalized segments of the population. Consequently, national incentive