

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2010 AMR DECADE AWARD: DELIVERING ON THE PROMISE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A FIELD OF RESEARCH

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I examine the impact of the 2010 AMR Decade Award article on the entrepreneurship field over the past ten years, identifying aspects of “The Promise of Entrepreneurship As a Field of Research” that have been largely accepted by the field, those that the field has challenged, and those that the field has found to be unclear. I also correct errors made in the earlier work and discuss how the field of entrepreneurship has evolved in response to the publication of the original article.

In 2000 Sankran Venkataraman (Venkat) and I published an article entitled “The Promise of Entrepreneurship As a Field of Research.” At the time, we had no idea what impact it would have on the field, and we were prepared for a response of deafening silence. Contrary to our worst fears, however, the article was noticed. Over the ensuing decade the article has been heavily cited, praised, criticized, and debated. Our recent receipt of the 2010 AMR Decade Award for the article confirmed that it has significantly impacted the field of entrepreneurship.

Getting the award, however, didn’t answer a question I have thought about often over the past ten years: What has the article been cited for? For our definition of entrepreneurship? Or for our argument in favor of a distinctive domain for the field or our position that the heart of entrepreneurship is a nexus between individuals and opportunities? Or has it been for something else entirely?

Moreover, the award didn’t tell us anything about how the field responded to the article. What parts of the argument have scholars strongly agreed with? What aspects have they vehemently disagreed with? What dimensions have they thought were confusing and difficult to understand?

Because the award did not answer these questions, I jumped at the chance, provided by Amy Hillman, to write a paper discussing how the article has influenced the field of entrepreneurship over the past decade. I wanted to know which aspects of the article had the greatest

impact and which did not. In addition, I wanted to correct errors that I now believe Venkat and I made in the 2000 article, highlight some of the issues raised by the debate over the article that has ensued in the literature, and point out places where the article has triggered the most and least progress in advancing our understanding of entrepreneurship.

To write this review, I looked at the 2,586 articles Google Scholar lists as citing “Promise” to see how it was cited. Leaving aside the many “gratuitous” citations—articles that cited “Promise” to make the point that “entrepreneurship is important” or to justify a claim that was tangentially related to “Promise,” or articles that simply listed the 2000 article in the reference section but never actually cited it in the text—I identified the aspects of “Promise” that each author cited. My view is that the citing articles focused primarily on four dimensions of our article: (1) the discussion of entrepreneurship as a distinctive scholarly domain with its own research questions and theories; (2) the definition of entrepreneurship as a process rather than an event or embodiment of a type of person; (3) the discussion of the nexus of opportunities and individuals; and (4) the discussion of means-ends relationships, innovation, and new combinations.

After categorizing what aspect of “Promise” the citing authors were discussing, I (subjectively) evaluated whether the authors agreed with the article, disagreed with it, or thought our arguments were unclear. Below I offer my personal interpretation of the field’s reaction to the article. In doing so I highlight where consensus