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Culture, innovation and entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

Innovation and entrepreneurship lie at the heart of the modern economy. Yet, while scholars have long examined the economic drivers of innovation and entrepreneurship, less is known about the cultural forces that shape these dynamics. To the extent that the existing literature has considered how culture shapes innovation and entrepreneurship, it has been viewed as a constraining force which limited and hindered the creation of novelty. This is especially true for economic approaches to entrepreneurship and innovation. With this special issue, we highlight the central role of culture in entrepreneurial and innovative practice—what we refer to as cultural entrepreneurship—and advocate that scholars need to take a broader view of culture to emphasise the symbolic meaning systems that entrepreneurs use as tool kits to facilitate their pursuit of novelty. We discuss how the articles of this special issue employ such contemporary approaches to culture, contributing to the development of an exciting scholarly agenda. By drawing on a variety of empirical settings and methodologies, these articles generate novel and provocative insights about cultural entrepreneurship. Leveraging these contributions, we highlight possible future paths and research questions.

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The study of innovation and entrepreneurship is a diverse, multidisciplinary endeavour at the epicentre of the modern global economy (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006; Gartner, Bird, & Starr, 1992; Thornton, 1999). Yet, the role culture plays in stimulating these important societal processes is often neglected or underemphasised in management and organisational studies (Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001, forthcoming; Sarasvathy, 2008). Spurred by the cultural turn across the social sciences and humanities (Friedland & Mohr, 2004; Weber & Dacin, 2011), conversations on how culture shapes innovation and entrepreneurship are, however, slowly galvanising. This work has drawn on various theoretical approaches to culture that focus on cultural elements such as boundaries, institutional logics, schemas, scripts and values (e.g., Gehman, Treviño, & Garud, 2013; Giorgi, Lockwood, & Glynn, 2015; Perkmann & Spicer, 2014; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012), narratives, vocabularies, discourse and framing (e.g., Bartel & Garud, 2009; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Dalpiaz, Tracey, & Phillips, 2014; Grodal & Granqvist, 2014; Kahl & Grodal, 2016; Zilber, 2007), identity,

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categories and practices (e.g., Durand, Granqvist, & Tyllström, 2017; Kennedy & Fiss, 2013; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007; Navis & Glynn, 2010), and material objects, visuals and images (Jancsary, Meyer, Höllerer, & Boxenbaum, 2018; Rindova & Petkova, 2007). While these recent advances are encouraging, the work has been scattered, and these various contributions are yet to be synthesised into a more coherent and cumulative research programme.

We undertook this special issue of *Innovation: Organization & Management* to focus attention on cultural approaches to innovation and entrepreneurship, and to encourage a broader dialogue among the scholars pursuing these topics. We believe the time is ripe to bring together various cultural approaches to innovation and entrepreneurship in order to cultivate a more synthetic conversation on the primacy of cultural processes (Lounsbury & Glynn, forthcoming). This is especially important as scholarship on innovation and entrepreneurial dynamics is increasingly dominated by economic ideas such as the 'individual–opportunity nexus' (Shane, 2003; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) and the related debate about opportunity discovery or creation (Alvarez & Barney, 2007, 2010; Alvarez, Barney, & Anderson, 2013), which tend to neglect the role of culture (and context more generally) while valorising instrumental action (see Foss, Klein & Bjørnskov, forthcoming; Lounsbury, Gehman, & Glynn, forthcoming).

Below, we provide an overview of contemporary approaches to culture and their importance for research on innovation and entrepreneurship. We then review the articles in the special issue, highlighting how they advance our understanding of innovation and entrepreneurship from a cultural perspective. Finally, we leverage the insights, arguments and findings of these articles to suggest how we may progressively advance scholarship on culture, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Contemporary approaches to culture and implications for innovation and entrepreneurship

While modern conceptualisations and studies of culture are diverse (Giorgi et al., 2015), many scholars continue to think of culture as a constraining set of norms. This approach conceptualises culture as a basket of homogenous norms and generalised value systems that become internalised into individual psyches (Parsons, 1937). This narrow view of culture is pervasive in economics and in scholarship which emphasises rational choice (e.g., Nee & Brinton, 1998). This outdated view of culture is also pervasive in popular approaches to entrepreneurship and innovation that leverage the work of Hofstede (1980) to make reified claims about the entrepreneurial cultures of nation states.

These mainstream approaches to entrepreneurship and innovation have generally ignored the cultural turn that has swept across the social sciences and humanities over the past several decades (Friedland & Mohr, 2004; Weber & Dacin, 2011). Contemporary approaches to culture emphasise the role of symbolic meaning systems in shaping the behaviour of actors, and highlight how these meaning systems are not only constraining, but also an enabling factor which actors can use to achieve strategic goals. Specifically, this line of work has drawn on the notion of culture as a 'tool kit' (Swidler, 1986), but also makes use of practice theory (Bourdieu, 1984;

Smets, Greenwood, & Lounsbury, 2015; Schatzki, 2003), communicative theories of institutions (Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers, & Vaara, 2015), and other strands of cultural analysis that endogenise various forces such as legitimacy and logics 'as themselves culturally constructed' (Weber & Dacin, 2011, p. 287). Further, the move away from the positivist, functionalist and determinist Hofstedean approach to national cultures has given room to several other approaches (for a review, see Angouri, 2018). A prominent approach is a relational, constructivist approach to culture that sees culture and cultural identities, and thus also other cultural resources, as produced and enacted in interactions among various social groups (Soderberg & Vaara, 2003; Tukiainen, 2010; Weick, 1995).

Research adopting a culturally sensitive approach to entrepreneurship—cultural entrepreneurship, in short—exemplifies how contemporary approaches to culture can redirect research away from the self-interest and rational calculation underlying most economic approaches, and instead highlight the interpretive, meaning-making processes that pervade innovation and entrepreneurship (Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Lounsbury & Glynn, forthcoming). Thus, instead of conceptualising culture as an external constraint, contemporary cultural approaches share an emphasis on understanding how entrepreneurs and organisations draw on and employ cultural materials in more pragmatic and strategic ways (Rindova, Dalpiaz, & Ravasi, 2011), and how these resources themselves are construed (Granqvist, Grodal, & Woolley, 2013; Kennedy, 2008; Weber, Heinze & DeSoucey, 2008). This novel perspective on culture has the potential to shed new light on our understanding of innovation and entrepreneurship because it emphasises not only how culture constrains and limits the kinds of innovations actors pursue, but also the enabling role of culture in stimulating new technological recombinations and the creation of new ventures. For instance, cultural entrepreneurship research has highlighted how entrepreneurs construct identity stories that will resonate with key audiences and enable new-venture legitimation (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Martens, Jennings, & Jennings, 2007; Rindova et al., 2011; Überbacher, Jacobs, & Cornelissen, 2015); how collective storytelling can legitimate novel market categories (Navis & Glynn, 2010; Wry, Lounsbury, & Glynn, 2011); and how storytelling itself shifts along with an unfolding entrepreneurial journey (Dalpiaz, Rindova, & Ravasi, 2016; Garud, Schildt, & Lant, 2014). Studies also show how labels (Granqvist et al., 2013; Vergne, 2012), vocabularies (Jones, Maoret, Massa, & Svejenova, 2012; Loewenstein, Ocasio, & Jones, 2012), and analogies and metaphors (Cornelissen, 2012; Navis & Glynn, 2010) provide creative resources for meaning construction around entrepreneurial activities and organisational innovations.

In sum, instead of cultural dopes, new approaches to culture conceptualise entrepreneurs and innovators as 'skilled cultural operators' who creatively leverage varied cultural resources to advance an entrepreneurial agenda. Research has also begun to explore how cultural elements are produced and taken into use in various situations (Garud et al., 2014; Granqvist et al., 2013). While there remain important differences across contemporary approaches to culture and action (Giorgi et al., 2015), we thus seek to encourage with this special issue a focus on how the complementarities across different approaches might enable a more synthetic as well as deeper dialogue on the cultural dynamics of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Articles in this special issue

We have assembled an intriguing set of articles that highlight how contemporary approaches to culture may be harnessed to generate new insights about entrepreneurial and innovative processes. These articles draw on a variety of exciting empirical settings, and make contributions to our understandings of cultural entrepreneurship both conceptually and across multiple levels of analysis. Jointly, the articles not only build on but also challenge current research, provoking and calling for alternative points of view. In the following, we provide an overview of each contribution to this special issue.

In 'Entrepreneurship by design: The construction of meanings and markets for cultural craft goods', Khaire argues that design is an important aspect of cultural entrepreneurship. Drawing on a case of conflicting craft and market logics among craft-based retailers in India, she shows that design functions as a narrative device to confer meaning and value on unfamiliar and underappreciated craft objects. Thus, Khaire extends the cultural entrepreneurship literature by highlighting the importance of materiality to legitimation processes. In her case, design functions as a material manifestation of storytelling, imbuing products with the necessary meaning and relevant attributes that contribute to consumers' perception and acceptance of their economic value.

The relationship between the symbolic and the material is also emphasised in Friedland's thought-provoking article, 'Taking Sigmund Freud to the Guggenheim: The religio-erotic productions of Frank Lloyd Wright'. Friedland draws on the institutional logics perspective (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012) to explore how Wright's architectural creations were shaped by the various institutional logics he was exposed to over his lifetime. However, taking on conventional institutional accounts of the effects of logics and the relationship of the symbolic to material practices, Friedland looks to psychoanalysis and feminist theory to reinterpret the creation of an iconic innovator. Friedland argues that one of Wright's architectural masterpieces—the Guggenheim Museum—resulted from the perversities of the particular family logic he experienced in his youth, especially the way his own sexuality deviated from his family's paternalistic codes. While Friedland's article makes many theoretical provocations that arguably further muddy the waters of cultural analysis, it points to the need for more in-depth cultural analyses of entrepreneurs and innovators. In contrast to rational choice approaches, Friedland argues for the need to excavate the institutional biographies of innovators in order to understand how experiences with logics imprint and profoundly shape behaviour and material expression.

A cultural approach to individual entrepreneurial behaviour is also central to 'Who is more likely to walk the talk? The symbolic management of entrepreneurial intentions by gender and work status', by Klyver and Thornton. In this article, cross-country individual-level data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor project is used to show how cultural legitimacy moderates the conventionally understood relationship between self-efficacy and entrepreneurial action. Klyver and Thornton draw on the cultural entrepreneurship and institutional literatures to theorise how loose coupling and symbolic management affect individual entrepreneurship. Their findings show that men and those in employment are more likely to loosely couple and symbolically manage entrepreneurial intentions to create new businesses than women and the unemployed, who are more likely to tightly couple words and actions. By focusing on the relationship

between entrepreneurial talk and action at the individual level, their work theoretically contributes to the micro-foundations of cultural entrepreneurship, while highlighting how cultural processes affect entrepreneurial behaviour.

In 'Framing innovation practices in interstitial issue fields: Open innovation in the NYC administration', Heimstädt and Reischauer examine the framing practices of public service administrators in order to facilitate open innovation. Drawing on an in-depth qualitative analysis of the New York City administration, the authors found that actors had different positions within the field—insider, outsider and interstitial—and that, depending on their position, they used different framing tactics—reflective frame blending and supplemental frame blending—to enhance the cultural resonance of open innovation practices. This article expands our understandings of cultural entrepreneurship by emphasising how institutional entrepreneurs can use framings strategically to align with existing cultural understandings.

In 'When the petting zoo spawns into monsters: Open dialogue and a venture's legitimacy quest in crowdfunding', Gegenhuber and Naderer highlight a crucial yet understudied aspect of cultural entrepreneurship—how entrepreneurs and their audiences interact to shape the entrepreneurial process. Through an in-depth analysis of two gaming ventures on Kickstarter, they highlight how new forms of entrepreneurship in the context of crowdfunding involve an interactive, dialogic process between ventures and external stakeholders. They find that such dialogic processes involve the negotiation of proper and accepted norms for a venture's conduct during and after a crowdfunding campaign. Three main norms were focal points for negotiation: transparency, fidelity and communality. They show how violating agreed-upon norms can consequentially affect whether a venture (re)gained, maintained or lost legitimacy. This article highlights the fruitfulness of understanding cultural entrepreneurship as an interactive, negotiated process (compared to the dominant entrepreneur-centric focus in much entrepreneurship research), as well as how these processes may differ across different entrepreneurial contexts (e.g., crowdfunding versus traditional venture capital or friends-and-family financing).

In 'Generative imitation, strategic distancing and optimal distinctiveness during the growth, decline and stabilisation of Silicon Alley', Garud, Schildt and Lant draw on cultural entrepreneurship ideas to study how the 'new media' field in New York City came to be known as 'Silicon Alley'. They show how projective entrepreneurial narratives provided a foundation for the new field, as well as a cultural resource for individual entrepreneurs to try to establish themselves. However, as new-venture failures grew, cultural resources that were initially robust became unhelpful, requiring entrepreneurs to revise their stories. Extending the literature on optimal distinctiveness (Zhao, Fisher, Lounsbury, & Miller, 2017), Garud, Schildt and Lant identify novel mechanisms of generative imitation and strategic distancing that offer new narrative-discursive possibilities for the cultural entrepreneurship tool kit. They argue that optimal distinctiveness may work best in more stable fields, while generative imitation and strategic distancing are more prominent mechanisms in more turbulent times of growth and decline.

In a provocative essay entitled 'A double-edged sword: Cultural entrepreneurship and the mobilisation of morally tainted cultural resources', Dalpiaz and Cavotta argue that more attention needs to be paid to the use of resources that are perceived by some

as morally repugnant—for example, the fast-growing restaurant franchise that serves Italian-style dishes in Spain, 'La Mafia se sienta a la mesa' ('The Mafia sits at the table'), which constructed its identity and distinctiveness around Mafia-related symbols and stories. They argue that this type of cultural entrepreneurship is a double-edged sword as it can attract favourable audiences while also fuelling active oppositional audiences. They chart out a research agenda that aims to encourage scholarship on the use and consequences of morally tainted cultural resources, as well as how entrepreneurs who employ such resources deal with offended audiences and related challenges to their legitimacy.

Finally, in an essay entitled 'Venturing into the cultural future: Research opportunities at the nexus of institutions, innovation, and impact', Gehman and Höllerer make the case for an approach to the study of innovation that accounts for both institutions and impact. Drawing on Fortune vignettes of entrepreneurship, they highlight a research agenda that would examine innovation in the context of grand challenges and transformative institutional change. For instance, they suggest that entrepreneurship in Estonia has enabled what they label 'cultural leapfrogging'. They note in the case of Hulu that disruptive innovation can be seeded by what they refer to as 'cultural probing'. More generally, they aim to situate innovation as fundamentally a cultural process that involves not only cultural entrepreneurship at the firm level, but also larger-scale cultural change at the societal level. Indeed, a cultural approach to innovation and entrepreneurship should encompass action and change across all levels—from individuals and fields to societal and planetary. Moreover, they emphasise a need for greater attention—both theoretically and empirically—to the impacts of innovation across these levels.

Towards an agenda on culture, innovation and entrepreneurship

Building on these articles and their respective contributions, this special issue advances our understanding of cultural entrepreneurship, as well as raising further important questions for the future of research in this domain. One of the questions raised by the articles in this special issue is the relationship between culture, materiality and innovation. Innovations are inherently both cultural and material in nature (Höllerer, Daudigeos, & Jancsary, 2018), yet the articles in this issue make clear that few scholars have unpacked how culture is enshrined in technological artefacts, and how culture enables the creation of new material expressions. We have, for example, only scratched the surface in our understanding of how the aesthetics of technology products both reflect sociocultural trends and create new cultural understandings (Krabbe & Grodal, 2018; Jancsary, Meyer, Höllerer, & Boxenbaum, 2018; Rindova & Petkova, 2007). Future research could therefore examine the relationship between sociocultural understandings and the aesthetics of technology products in more detail. Engaging the growing literature on design and creative industries, as emphasised by Khaire, could prove quite fruitful in this regard (see also Glaser, 2017; Jones, Lorenzen, & Sapsed, 2015; Khaire, 2017). Such studies could also track the change in aesthetics over time and relate this to broader cultural changes at micro and macro levels of analysis. As Gehman and Höllerer argue, we need more work that highlights how cultural change

is related to societal impact, including major social innovations that aim to address bottom-of-the-pyramid problems (Slade Shantz, Kistruck, & Zietsma, 2018).

Second, a stream of research within cultural entrepreneurship has examined how entrepreneurs use discourse strategically (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010; Granqvist et al., 2013; Überbacher, 2014; Zott & Huy, 2007), yet there are several aspects that require further exploration. For instance, we need more studies that examine the relationship between valorised cultural resources and the success of entrepreneurial strategies that are aligned with or differentiate from these cultural resources. As Dalpiaz and Cavotta provocatively highlight, some resources may be a double-edged sword and require us to be attuned to the role of values and moral evaluation. Garud, Schildt and Lant emphasise how temporal shifts in the efficaciousness of cultural resources require more process-based analyses of cultural entrepreneurship (see also Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016). In addition, we need a better understanding of how success versus failure is managed, as well as how positive and negative outcomes are construed (Mantere, Aula, Schildt, & Vaara, 2013). In general, we need more detailed attention to the production and interpretation of cultural resources, as well as how they change over time and relate to varied outcomes of interest.

Moreover, studies have explored how entrepreneurs construct meaning for their products and market categories by focusing on multiple linguistic constructs (Cornelissen, 2012; Granqvist et al., 2013; Kahl & Grodal, 2016; Loewenstein et al., 2012). But these studies addressing labels, vocabularies, analogies and metaphors are overlapping, on the one hand, and disconnected, on the other hand, opening up questions about the role of different linguistic constructs in the production of meaning, as well as their interplay. Furthermore, much of the work on discourse has been one-sided in its approach, focusing on either the strategic communication skills of entrepreneurs, and assuming a corresponding effect (e.g., Clarke, 2011; Garud, Gehman, & Giuliani, 2014), or on the broadly shared cultural norms that evaluators, such as investors or other stakeholders, rely on to assess entrepreneurial and innovative activities.

Heimstädt and Reischauer remind us that social position matters, and may shape different usages and interpretations of cultural resources. This implies that it might be useful to widen our understanding of cultural entrepreneurship by studying it in the context of institutional fields (Bourdieu, 1984; Lounsbury & Glynn, forthcoming). New structuralist techniques for mapping field meaning systems could usefully complement and situate our understanding of individual acts of entrepreneurship (e.g., Lounsbury & Ventresca, 2003; Meyer & Höllerer, 2010; Mohr, 1998; Mohr & Ghaziani, 2014). This suggests a more relational analysis of how various actors are positioned and interact, including a focus on how culture shapes the co-production of entrepreneurial activities and various forms of collective entrepreneurship (see Mische & Pattison, 2000). As Gegenhuber and Naderer show in this issue, future research should seek to enhance our understanding of how meaning construction is a dialogic process, involving culture as a formative resource that is drawn on between interactants to develop common ground (see also Clarke, Cornelissen, & Healey, 2018; Hannigan, Seidel, & Yakis-Douglas, 2018).

Third, in their review article, Weber and Dacin (2011) observed a diminishing use of terms such as ‘members’ and ‘employees’, suggesting a declining interest in internally focused processes. Historically, the roots of cultural analyses go back to the

ethnographies of the anthropologists Marcel Mauss and Bronislav Malinowski. Such studies aimed to 'unravel cultural insiders' (i.e., its members') view on how they give meaning to different aspects and expressions of the social and physical world they live and operate in' (Tukiainen, 2010, p.15; see also the contemporary ethnographic scholarship exemplified by Barley [1983], as well as the old institutional 'coalface' scholarship reviewed by Barley [2008]). We believe that future studies on cultural entrepreneurship could fruitfully return to these roots and employ ethnographic methods to explore change of practices and meanings from within particular communities, tracing their 'internal logics'.

But in line with the old institutional tradition, and reinforced by the articles by Friedland and Klyver and Thornton, a cultural approach requires individual acts of entrepreneurship and innovation to be deeply situated in context. For instance, observing the situations where an entrepreneur positions the firm or products by using particular labels and language might shed light on the contexts in and interactions through which labelling and meaning construction occur. Regarding materiality, ethnographers could further study how particular spaces, places and objects provide resources for and limit action. Echoing our arguments above, we believe that it is useful to consider field analytical approaches as a way to properly contextualise such processes related to cultural entrepreneurship (Zietsma, Groenewegen, Logue, & Hinings, 2017). These types of studies would provide valuable insights into the construction and use of cultural resources, linking micro and macro concerns.

In all, the articles assembled in this special issue collectively establish the value of a renewed cultural analysis of entrepreneurial activities and innovation. Such an analysis puts culture at the centre of entrepreneurship and innovation—empirically, as a way of making sense of entrepreneurial and innovative activities as these are being observed, as well as conceptually, as a lens for describing and explaining entrepreneurial and innovative processes and outcomes across different levels of analysis. The cultural entrepreneurship agenda emerged around 20 years ago (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001, forthcoming) and, as the articles in this special issue attest, is quickly becoming a mainstream lens for studies of entrepreneurship and innovation. We hope that the articles collected here will intrigue the reader, as well as spur further research in this scholarly domain.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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