Reflections on entrepreneurial culture: two varying hypotheses

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the question of how entrepreneurial culture evolves in entrepreneurial firms by presenting two competing hypotheses that have emerged out of the literature. The first hypothesizes that founders are primarily responsible for driving this evolution. The second is that entrepreneurial culture evolves in reaction to environmental influence. After reviewing past work in organizational culture, entrepreneurial culture and entrepreneurial firms are defined to examine these two perspectives. By discussing the implications of these hypotheses, research questions for scholars and practical actions for entrepreneurs are proposed to better address the inherent tension between maintaining entrepreneurial culture and inevitable organizational change.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial culture, Founder-driven Entrepreneurial Culture Hypothesis, Entrepreneurial Culture Evolution, Environment-driven Entrepreneurial Culture

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurial firms are intriguing opportunities for organizational culture research because of their highly dynamic nature. In an entrepreneurial firm, particularly those in nascent markets, growth, innovation, and the creation of opportunities and relationships provide a prime environment for cultural evolution. Growth in human resources, facilities, and responsibilities tests the resiliency of the existing culture. Innovation presents new ways of doing things and new challenges that can strain culture. Changing opportunities and relationships among customers, suppliers, partners, and competitors can induce cultural shifts. While these sorts of changes can occur in more established, larger firms as well, the entrepreneurial context is often quite special, where existing mechanisms and routines to absorb cultural changes may not exist. Also, in entrepreneurial firms the presence of the founder may still hold great influence.

For many years, culture has been explored in the entrepreneurial context by researchers in organizational behavior, strategy, and entrepreneurship. An important question that has come out of these studies is how an entrepreneurial culture evolves in entrepreneurial firms. Two diverging hypotheses have emerged to answer this question. One hypothesis highlights the key role that the founder plays in developing and perpetuating an entrepreneurial culture in the firm, through changes over time. The other hypothesis, in contrast, denotes how entrepreneurial culture is essentially reactionary to and constrained by environmental stimuli, downplaying the role of the founder in guiding this cultural evolution.

This conceptual paper will explore these competing hypotheses and demonstrate the valuable lessons both entrepreneurs and researchers can learn from these perspectives. The paper will begin with a review of organizational culture in management studies and entrepreneurship. This will be followed by a description and analysis of the founder-driven and environment-driven entrepreneurial cultural evolution hypotheses. The discussion section will describe important practical and research implications that arise from these divergent perspectives. There are two main contributions of this paper. The first contribution is to shed light on two key interpretations of the entrepreneurial culture evolution phenomenon. This is particularly relevant given the importance to entrepreneurs of managing the inherent tension in maintaining a homogenous culture in the face of inevitable organizational change. With these insights, entrepreneurs may be better able to assess not only the origin and propagation of culture in their organizations but develop practical strategies for managing culture change. The second contribution is to highlight for scholars the very different research questions that emerge from each hypothesis and how we might be able to better focus efforts on answering them as part of an entrepreneurial culture program of study.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Organizational Culture:

All societies and the organizations nested within them have culture. In a broad sense, culture tells us what is acceptable and not acceptable, desirable and undesirable, and is a homogenizing influence on both society and individuals (Thompson, 1967, p. 102).

Organizational culture as a topic in management studies has been around for over 40 years, since it was developed as a construct from anthropology (Ajiferuke & Boddwyn, 1970). One such anthropology derived definition of culture is “the set of habitual and traditional ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting that are characteristic of the ways a particular society meets its problems at a particular point of time” (Schwartz & Davis, 1981, p. 32). In management research, organizational culture rose to particular prominence in the early 1980s (e.g., Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1985; Jelinek, Smircich, & Hirsch, 1983), particularly with proposed relationships to improved firm performance. This occurred alongside tremendous interest in the practitioner literature, such as Peters and Waterman’s (1982) In Search of Excellence and Deal and Kennedy’s (1982) Corporate Cultures. Some of this work was oriented around cultural trait based views, which focused on “strong” cultures that emphasized consistency, agreement, and conformity (Denison, 1984). More specifically, this strong-culture hypothesis indicated that organizations with “a high level of shared meaning, a common vision, a ‘clanlike’ attitude toward members, and a high level of normative integration [would] perform well” (Denison, 1984, p.20).

In the years since, many researchers have developed and applied the organizational culture construct using a variety of epistemological and theoretical orientations. These have included critical theoretic and constructivist perspectives that clashed with past positivistic views. In particular, the strong-culture hypothesis attracted criticism for being too simplistic and imprecise in its study of culture and the linking of culture and performance (Saffold III, 1988). These somewhat fractured perspectives have led to numerous reviews and evaluations of the different interpretations over the years (e.g., Denison, 1996; Eisenberg & Riley, 2001; Smircich, 1983), but according to some, still describe a field in a “preparadigmatic” state (Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000). However, while the debate continues in some circles over predominantly epistemological and methodological grounds, other authors have adopted interpretations of organizational culture in order to advance the field.

One of the most common perspectives has been described as the “culture as effectiveness” (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001) view, which is positivist, assumes the measurement and quantification of culture is possible and has a management-centric orientation. Even though this orientation tends to dominate the organizational culture landscape, there is still a number of different definitions of organizational culture and the dimensions that constitute it (e.g., Detert et al., 2000; Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990; O'Reilly III, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). Therefore, this paper relies on a very specific and functional definition of organizational culture.

Culture is a pattern of shared tacit assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 2009, p. 27).

While Schein’s definition is but one of many usable definitions, it captures the shared, accepted, and evolving nature of culture in organizations. These elements typically reflect the consensus aspects of organizational culture definitions, which have been translated to culture studies in entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial Culture and Entrepreneurial Firms:

Entrepreneurship and organizational culture research have been intertwined for years. Early research often focused on the role of the founder in the creation of organizations and the lasting imprint the founders may leave (Mintzberg, 1973; Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1983). Entrepreneurship and strategy took an interesting turn together as the concept of corporate entrepreneurship began to develop, which looked at entrepreneurial activity within large, complex organizations (Burgelman, 1983, 1984). Burgelman (1984) described corporate entrepreneurship as “extending the firm’s domain of competence and corresponding opportunity set through internally generated new resource combinations” (p.154). Building on the firm-level of analysis, Stevenson and Jarillo (1990) defined an entrepreneurial organization as a firm which pursues opportunity, regardless of resources currently controlled. Work by Covin and Slevin (1991) noted that entrepreneurial organizations or as they described, organizations with an entrepreneurial posture, are risk taking, innovative, and proactive; similar behaviors of entrepreneurs as individuals. Furthermore, the relationship between entrepreneurship as a firm behavior and organizational culture are one of mutual reinforcement. Organizational cultures are the context in which an entrepreneurial posture emerges, which when successful, affects the organizational culture in turn. Lumpkin and Dess’ (1996) influential paper elaborated on the construct of entrepreneurial orientation. Entrepreneurial orientation referred to the processes, practices, and decision-making activities that lead to new entry. Similarly, to Covin and Slevin (1991), they included five dimensions: autonomy, innovativeness, risk taking, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness. These dimensions sparked additional research exploring the relationships between firm-level entrepreneurial behaviors and firm performance, a comprehensive review of which is beyond the scope of this paper (cf. Barringer & Bluedorn, 1999; Zahra, Jennings, & Kuratko, 1999). There is some consensus among this body of work that entrepreneurial behaviors are influenced by firm culture and individual attitudes and behaviors, particularly at the top management level.

This brief review of the relationship between entrepreneurship and organizational culture highlights some of the key developments in the literature over the past several decades. However it is important to be very specific about the terms that will be used in this paper. Our definition of entrepreneurial culture reflects both Schein’s (2009) definition noted earlier and the entrepreneurial behavior dimensions described by Lumpkin and Dess (1996). Thus, entrepreneurial culture is defined as an organizational culture: *Entrepreneurial culture is a pattern of shared tacit assumptions about the positive values of autonomy (e.g., independent action), innovativeness (e.g., creativity and experimentation), risk taking (e.g., taking calculated chances), proactiveness (e.g., anticipating the future), and competitive aggressiveness (e.g., challenging competitors), that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.*

This definition, while lengthy, is necessary to articulate both the cultural processes and the positive value put on the entrepreneurial behavior dimensions. Indeed, this is a critical assumption, that entrepreneurial culture is a positive thing worth pursuing. It is also important that this definition conveys how “an ‘entrepreneurial’ philosophy permeates an entire organization’s outlook and operations” (Covin & Miles, 1999, p. 48). The definition used in this paper is also similar to one developed by Ireland, Hitt and Sirmon (2003) but adapts Schein’s mechanisms of cultural creation and perpetuation. This paper is specifically concerned with different viewpoints on how this entrepreneurial culture evolves over time.

Defining an entrepreneurial firm can be complicated as there is a broad understanding of what an entrepreneurial firm is. For example, it might describe new, recently founded firms run by a founder or large, mature firms acting in an entrepreneurial manner. However, given the context of this paper, a more specific definition is utilized, which also serves as a boundary condition. An entrepreneurial firm is defined as: an early stage organization that is past start-up but before mid-life where the founder (or team of founders) is still present in a managerial capacity.

This definition clearly reflects a life cycle orientation rather than an entrepreneurial behavior orientation because the focus of this paper is on cultural evolution, rather than a behavior-leading-to-performance perspective. This definition of entrepreneurial firms is also used in the same sense that Daily, McDougall, Covin and Dalton (2002) used, in that the firm is “independent” and was created and operates outside the context of a previously established organization (p.390). Mid-life in this context is meant to reflect a firm who has yet to have had a professional manager appointed by an outside board, typically beholden to diverse stockholders (Schein, 2009). The reason why a firm in these early stages of development is the focus of this paper is because more mature organizations typically exhibit increasingly complex cultures and subcultures which are cumbersome (Schein, 2009), there are simpler structures and less diverging internal forces in the smaller, newer firms (Chandler & Hanks, 1994), and firms rarely escape increasing bureaucratization as they grow (Martin, Sitkin, & Boehm, 1985). We argue that these factors limit the capability for culture to evolve. Metaphorically speaking, much like a teenager in adolescence, entrepreneurial firms in this stage of their life are still developing and adapting and have not yet become a more mature adult, set in his or her way (and thus more resistant to change). It is still important to understand cultural change in mature organizations that are in mid-life and beyond, however this endeavor is outside the scope of this paper.

This definition of entrepreneurial firms implicitly puts boundaries on the notion of “evolution” in this paper. Evolution is meant here to reflect change over time up to mid-life or when the founder leaves the firm. As firms continue to mature and grow in both size and complexity, organizations move towards more bureaucratic systems as the need for coordination, control, and stability calls for greater procedures, rules, and routines (Becker, 2004). However, given that a great many things can happen to an entrepreneurial firm’s culture before they reach that stage, assuming they even survive past start-up, there is ample time for the culture to evolve. This paper seeks to explore that evolution, how that might occur, and potential implications of that evolution.

Of special note in this paper is the relationship between entrepreneurial cultural evolution and the recent work by Shepherd, Patzelt and Haynie (2009) which introduced the notion of “entrepreneurialness” and “entrepreneurial spirals.” Entrepreneurialness refers to “how entrepreneurial either an individual’s mindset or an organization’s culture is – the higher the entrepreneurialness, the more entrepreneurial the mindset and culture, respectively” (p.60).

Shepherd et al.'s (2009) spiral model reflects the notion that enduring, deviation-amplifying feedback loops link the manager's mindset to his or her organization's culture, and vice versa. This innovative spiral model helps to address some of the mechanisms behind the mutually reinforcing nature of entrepreneurial orientation and organizational culture noted in previous research, albeit at the individual mindset level. While this work develops a similar theme of entrepreneurial culture in organizations, our paper notably diverges. Since this paper adopts an agnostic view between two competing hypotheses, one founder-oriented and the other environment-oriented, it speaks in a different way to a founder's potential relationship to entrepreneurial culture evolution. Specifically, from a founder-oriented perspective the ideas are similar, but this paper focuses more on the effects on organizational culture change rather than the founder's own mindset. In the environmental hypothesis, the impact of the founder on culture is effectively diminished, which reduces his or her individual impact. However, while this paper proposes a different research question it is still anticipated that this work can help inform and contribute to the growing body of work on manager's entrepreneurial mindsets and organizational culture as spearheaded by Shepherd et al. (2009).

The Founder-driven Entrepreneurial Culture Hypothesis:

The founder-driven entrepreneurial culture hypothesis (abbreviated hereafter as FDH), at its core is both simple and intuitive. Given that a founder or team of founders plays a central role in all aspects of the development of an entrepreneurial firm, the hypothesis essentially states that entrepreneurial cultural evolution in an entrepreneurial firm is primarily directed and influenced by the founder or team of founders. In this view, entrepreneurial culture is founder driven in a top-down fashion. An entrepreneurial culture established by the founder or team of founders during the early stages of the firm set the foundation for future cultural evolution that is perpetuated in this mode. The founder or team of founders is the main driver of creating an entrepreneurial culture that evolves with the firm.

Culture Creation and Early Stage Development:

As noted previously, a founder-centric perspective has existed for years (e.g., Mintzberg, 1973; Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1983) and the language has often been strong: "all revolves around the entrepreneur…its goals are [his or her] goals, its strategy [his or her] vision of its place in the world" (Mintzberg, 1988, p. 534). While this creates a somewhat "heroic" view of the entrepreneurial founder, we can begin to tease apart this idea through past work to understand the role of the founder in creating culture. Schein (1983) argues that in the early stages of an organization, founders can begin to shape the group's culture through the force of his or her personality and through a vision of how "a concerted effort could create a new product or service in the marketplace" (p.16). There is a strong intuitive connection here. Founders create organizations bringing to it their own personality and background sense of values, perspectives, and beliefs. In particular, the entrepreneurship literature would suggest that these are beliefs that associate positive value to innovativeness, risk taking, proactiveness, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy.

As the organization begins to grow, employees are brought in and socialized into these belief and value systems (Schein, 1988). Research by Morley and Shockley-Zalabak (1991) and Shockley-Zalabak and Morley (1994) examined this phenomenon in detail. Their 1991 work noted how the personal value systems of organizational founders identified to employees not only the way things should be (e.g. people should work hard, a smaller company is better, everyone should pull their own weight), but also the way things should not be (e.g. laziness is unacceptable, large and bureaucratic environments are dissatisfying). In the high-tech company they studied, the founders modelled behavior for employees by working long hours, involving themselves in technical problems, and generally supporting a friendly work environment. The research Shockley-Zalabak and Morley conducted in 1994 also found that over a multi-year period, founding management values were influential over time by helping to shape both management and worker values and rules. An important aspect of this cultural perpetuation was how employee values matched those of founding management, suggesting that employees of similar beliefs and values were hired into the company. It seems both consistent and logical that in the early stages of an organization, founders would look to hire individuals who "naturally" fit with the organization. It was once remarked to us by a founding entrepreneur of a successful media company that in his organization they only hired PLUs or "People Like Us." Similarly, people who were not "team players" rarely lasted long at his organization. However, he was also clear to point out that at his organization, they appreciated shared values and not "clones" which perhaps highlights the cultural importance of autonomy and individual action and initiative.

Founder-driven Entrepreneurial Culture Evolution:

The processes above describe how founders determine and create culture as well as how they encourage it in the early stages of the firm. They create an entrepreneurial culture with the backgrounds they bring and through hiring employees with similar values and beliefs. The FDH also explains a key point of interest in this paper, namely how entrepreneurial culture evolves and is perpetuated. One way this occurs is an extension of the selection of employees, but specifically, at the top management level as the firm grows. Much has been written about the role of the top management team in organizations, such as Upper Echelons theory in particular (Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick & Mason, 1984), as well as the role of leadership in top managers (e.g., Cannella Jr. & Monroe, 1997). In a cultural context, top management plays an important role in setting the strategic direction of organizations, as well as providing attitude and value examples for employees. In entrepreneurial firms where the founder or team of founders begin to select or add to their top management team, they will likely look for employees either within the firm who have demonstrated potential and already know and understand the culture, or individuals external to the firm. When selecting for external managers, it is likely that they will also search for people who can integrate with the firm (Chatman, 1991; Chatman & Cha, 2003). For example, the same media company founder was explaining to us how his company had recently hired three senior executives, including a new head of Human Resources. One of his main challenges in such a situation was acknowledging that he was hiring these three outsiders for their previous experiences and expertise, yet had no wish to see them change the culture he had built, at least, not too much. This was particularly the case for the new HR director, given that he described her role as “the custodian of culture.” Thus, one way that founders can help an entrepreneurial culture evolve is to select managers who reflect the same entrepreneurial values and therefore, provide additional entrepreneurial cultural reinforcement from the top.

A second way that founders can direct entrepreneurial culture evolution in their firms is by setting examples and establishing correct patterns of behavior during what Schein (1988) calls “critical incidents.” A critical incident is essentially an emotionally charged or anxiety producing moment that is witnessed by members in the organization. In such an incident, particularly with respect to the founder, the response behaviors will very likely create a behavioral norm and subsequent assumption about appropriate conduct. For example, if an organization member challenges the founder in a public situation, such as a meeting, and is forced to back down or apologize for his or her “mistake”, then an assumption might be generated amongst the group: “we do not attack the leader in this group; authority is sacred” (Schein, 1988, p.18). Of course, critical incidents do not need to be negative, and a more positive version of the “critical incident” may be similar to a classroom environment and a “teaching moment” with the students. Here, ambiguous or confusing behavior may be clarified by the founder demonstrating “appropriate conduct.” Indeed, a founder may very well promote independent action and risk-taking among employees by acknowledging creative ideas and acting on them while giving credit. In entrepreneurial firms the founder’s presence and activities may also signal leadership and standards. For example, we spent time talking with employees of a rapidly growing medical transportation company. The founder and CEO was both an emergency physician and an MBA. In addition to personally welcoming all new employees, he was often seen wandering the office, interacting with staff and checking up on projects. Several employees remarked that at any time the founder may show up over their shoulder, which, while appearing intimidating to outsiders, seemed very much the norm at that organization. Furthermore, as an airborne emergency medical transport company, the founder would often perform shifts in the control center acting as the on-duty physician for their numerous helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. These kinds of actions made the presence and expectations of the founder both salient and instructive to the employees.

The FDH thus presents an image consistent with mythical or heroic stereotypes of the founder or team of founders laying down the cultural groundwork and then directing its evolution as the organization grows. However, as the literature and anecdotal reports suggest, founders do not just direct any sort of cultural change, but an entrepreneurial culture in line with the values and beliefs that they brought to the organization when they created it. In its initial stages, founders bring in employees who reflect a like-minded attitude towards entrepreneurial behaviors and values. Over time, founders then look for managers and other top level employees who share the same entrepreneurial mindset to reinforce the culture throughout the organization. Founders also help to perpetuate an entrepreneurial culture through their actions in the workplace and during critical incidents or teaching moments.

Criticisms of the FDH:

Apart from the environment-driven hypothesis itself, there have been criticisms levelled against a founder-centric view of culture evolution. Notably, Martin, Sitkin and Boehm (1985) took issue with several aspects of such a Ptolemaic view of founders (i.e., that the universe revolved around the Earth). For example, in their study of an electronics manufacturing company they noted attribution biases where the employees would attribute product and customer relation concerns to the founder when the founder himself would seldom mention these issues. This suggested a potentially artificial inflation of the founder's contribution at work. This is a fair criticism in terms of the actual work output of the founder but with respect to culture, it is actually a strong indicator of the founder's ability to influence employees if they attribute concern and attention to the founder that did not in fact exist.

Another criticism about the founder-driven view is whether it is leadership that employees focus on or the unique qualities of the founder. If it is leadership rather than the entrepreneur, then this implies that, in theory, any other person with the same leadership skills and abilities could replace the entrepreneur and act as effectively. I would argue that this distinction is misdirected because people, entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs alike, do have unique leadership skills that are part of their individual personalities. Thus, saying that it is leadership rather than the unique qualities of the entrepreneur is not making much of a distinction at all, given that leadership from that individual is also unique.

Finally, Martin et al. (1985) argue that from a lifecycle perspective, the founder's role diminishes as the organization ages and that his or her concerns become inconsistent with employee concerns as the company grows and changes. This is a plausible suggestion as one can imagine that as a company ages, past mid-life for example, the traditional "old" entrepreneurship behaviors may not be as important or obviously valuable to employees. However, it is likely that the espoused or implicit entrepreneurial values of the organization are still important touchstones of the culture, which may also be embedded in the routines of the organization (e.g., Salvato, 2009). Even as they age, retaining an organizational culture rooted in the founder may also be of particular importance for family firms, where family-based succession may be in effect (Zahra, Hayton, & Salvato, 2004).

While not directly a criticism of the FDH, there is also an important assumption that has not been specifically addressed. That is the assumption that the founder or team of founders chooses to be directly involved in the organizations that they run. After all, a founder who chooses to participate in a secondary or non-leadership role will likely have a diminished cultural influence. However, the FDH would argue against the founder having no influence whatsoever, even if he or she chooses not to be as active. By virtue of their status as founder, employees would still likely view him or her with deference and respect. Consider Bill Gates, for example, long since past the role of CEO yet undoubtedly still an important figurehead for Microsoft.

The Environment-driven Entrepreneurial Culture Hypothesis:

The environment-driven entrepreneurial culture hypothesis (abbreviated hereafter as EDH) has its roots in studies of the relationship between organizations and their environment (e.g., Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). That is, organizations change and adapt to address their external environment, such as developing cultures and systems that can help deal with the uncertainties and contingencies inherent to the environment (Thompson, 1967, p. 50). The EDH clearly poses an oppositional perspective to the FDH. While not dismissive of the role of founders in establishing the early culture of organizations, the EDH proposes that over time, it is a variety of environmental stimuli, such as the particular industry, which primarily influences the evolution of entrepreneurial culture in entrepreneurial firms. The founder and/or top management team is still involved in leading the organization and performing their workplace roles, however, their role in guiding cultural evolution is diminished by the influence of the external environment. That is, the EDH suggests a reactionary, environment-fit based perspective, whereas the FDH is rooted in an inherent, personal belief in establishing and directing the organization's culture with entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors. The EDH is the position that entrepreneurial firms evolve entrepreneurial cultures as a result of changes driven by the conditions of the environment external to the firm. While there may be numerous sources of environmental influence on entrepreneurial firms, there are two related sources that are relevant to focus on here. The first is the influence of industry and the second is that of nascent markets.

Industry as a Driver of Entrepreneurial Culture Evolution:

Industry was perhaps most directly proposed as an influencer of culture initially by Gordon (1991) and further developed by Christensen and Gordon (1999). Gordon (1991) argued that "industries exert influences that cause cultures to develop within defined parameters" (p.396) and that as a result of this relationship, "the potential for changing a company's culture is limited to actions that are neutral to or directionally consistent with industry demands" (ibid.). Gordon (1991) noted corporate cultures, while partly molded by founder's backgrounds, also originate from industry-based assumptions about customer requirements, the competitive environment, and societal expectations. He provides the example of an electric utility whose basic assumption is that a customer needs continuous, uninterrupted service, which results in a high value placed on the reliable delivery of the product. Given these industry related assumptions, an organizational culture can develop but must essentially be consistent or at most neutral to these assumptions and not oppositional to them. To extend this argument to the entrepreneurial sphere, we can imagine that certain industries require an entrepreneurial culture for entrepreneurial firms to better survive. For example, highly competitive industries like biotech may necessitate very responsive entrepreneurial cultures that emphasize risk taking, innovation, and individual initiative and creativity. Entrepreneurial firms that perhaps initially have this culture but lose it over time to complacency or dwindling resources may very well fail in this competitive environment. From a customer perspective, Gordon (1991) discusses an industry's emphasis on reliability or novelty. We can imagine entrepreneurial firms specializing in safety equipment, chemicals, or manufacturing components may give rise to cultures oriented around consistency and personal accountability. Alternatively, customers that demand novelty such as in high-tech or fashion would encourage cultures devoted to creativity and diversity of views. Finally, societal expectations can also hold sway over the development of culture as well. Society's expectations often change over time, for example, emphasizing greater product safety, variety, environmental sustainability, or ethical behavior, which can dramatically influence a firm's culture. For example, existing firms may start to develop values and strategies oriented around sustainable practices and corporate social responsibility, and new entrepreneurial firms may enter because of the strength of those values (e.g., electric car companies, "green" power).

Collectively, the strong influence that industry plays on culture suggests that the direction and extent of culture change is likely to be constrained by industry imperatives (Christensen & Gordon, 1999, p.416). In our case, this suggests that if the industry demands or is conducive to entrepreneurial behavior, then entrepreneurial firms must adapt or risk losing out.

The notion of imitation is also related to industry as a driver of entrepreneurial culture evolution. Barney (1986) discussed imitability with respect to organizational culture being a source of sustained competitive advantage. He noted that "without imperfect imitability, any competitive advantage that a valuable and rare culture might give will create strong incentives for imitation" (p.661). More recently, Lieberman and Asaba (2006) wrote that firms often imitate one another in environments of uncertainty or to imitate superior products, processes, and managerial systems. Given Barney's (1986) work and if we consider an entrepreneurial culture a form of process or managerial system, then we can see firms in the same industry might be encouraged to imitate one another. For example, a new software company may imitate the entrepreneurial culture of successful standouts in their industry like Google. An industry practice of imitation thus represents another form of environmental influence on entrepreneurial culture evolution in organizations. Of course, to Barney's point, even if a culture is inimitable, this does not preclude organizations from trying.

Nascent Markets as a Driver of Entrepreneurial Culture Evolution:

A second environmental influencer of entrepreneurial culture is actually the absence or ambiguity of an industry, or a "nascent market" as described by Santos and Eisenhardt (2005, 2009). Here, in contrast with Gordon's point, the business environment is in an early stage of formation with undefined or fleeting industry structure, and unclear customers and competitors. Santos and Eisenhardt (2009) describe a process of new firms creating organizational boundaries and new market niches using case studies of five high-tech firms. One of the examples they provide highlights how the activities of a company in a nascent market may constitute environmental influences of entrepreneurial culture. The firm, Secret (a pseudonym), began as a team of four engineers who developed a sophisticated cryptography technology. However, they lacked an identity, a well-defined product, and a customer set. After great deliberation, the company began to form the organization's identity around the concept of trust, rather than security. From this identity they began to establish the market standard and hired a lawyer to help develop the burgeoning industry's best practices. Their efforts established them as the "cognitive referent" for the market, an enviable position that made them synonymous with this nascent market. Through a relationship with the press and with the distribution of their product, they successfully "disseminated stories" and "signaled leadership" as Santos and Eisenhardt (2009) describe. In our application, this example demonstrates where the industry influence can begin to emerge from. In Secret's example, we can see how their efforts have created the industry standards and a great deal of forward momentum and inertia for their organization. At this point, after having established themselves as the standard for trust technologies and practices, it is hard to imagine them changing much away from the industry culture that they have developed. For example, Secret even shunned profitable activities if they fell outside of the product and venture identity, they had established for themselves. Essentially, in a successful nascent market scenario, the organization may create the industry influence which drives entrepreneurial culture evolution. Of course, in a less successful nascent market scenario, where a firm fails to establish itself in an ambiguous environment, the EDH would suggest that the firm then needs to pay even greater attention to whatever cues and signals it can derive from the environment in order to direct its cultural evolution.

Criticisms of the EDH:

The primary criticism of the EDH is the FDH itself, as an alternative explanation for the evolution of entrepreneurial culture. This is because a “strong” version of the EDH can be seen as too diminishing of the role of founders and managers in entrepreneurial firms. As a result, cultural evolution becomes a sort of quasi-deterministic outcome based on the nature of the environment. This may be evidenced by survival bias in empirical studies of entrepreneurial firms in fast-paced industries like electronics and biotech. Firms that evolved entrepreneurial cultures to remain competitive in these kinds of industries survived and those that did not, were taken over, went bankrupt, or otherwise exited the market.

It is also difficult to falsify the EDH because it can be used to account for alternative explanations, like the founder’s behavior. For example, if a founder chooses to evolve an entrepreneurial culture in his or her firm over time because of an inherent belief that this is the best way for a company to be run and for employees to act, this belief might be because of environmental influence. That is, the founder’s belief can be entirely attributed to influence from the industry. Or perhaps an environmental shock like the economic downturn and subsequent recession was the “real reason” a founder decided to promote a culture that cut costs and emphasized innovation and new solutions, for example. As a result, it can be difficult to ever really extract the cause from the effect which renders the EDH potentially unfalsifiable, at least without greater specificity of its terms. Nevertheless, the hypothesis is important for emphasizing the influence that the environment plays on the evolution of entrepreneurial culture in entrepreneurial firms.

Discussion:

The two perspectives presented here offer different accounts of how entrepreneurial culture evolves in entrepreneurial firms. In the FDH, the founder or team of founders begins to create the culture from the moment the organization is established. The founders bring an entrepreneurial culture which is reflected in the people they initially hire and later in the managers who reinforce this culture throughout the levels of the organization as it grows and matures. Through this process of entrepreneurial culture creation and perpetuation, founders are able to direct the evolution of entrepreneurial culture over time through selection, leadership, and example. In contrast, the EDH suggests that while founders play an important initial role in developing the entrepreneurial culture, cultural evolution is constrained by the environment, notably the existing industry or the emergent industry. Entrepreneurial culture in entrepreneurial firms will thus evolve in line with or neutral to the existing industry culture as exemplified by the competitive environment, customers, and societal expectations. Each hypothesis thus leads to a number of different implications and questions for entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship research.

Implications of the FDH:

For entrepreneurs, one of the primary implications of the FDH is that with respect to an entrepreneurial culture, founding entrepreneurs should focus their efforts on maintaining their legitimacy and authority in the workplace. Founders are responsible for directing the cultural evolution of their organization because employees look to them for leadership, example setting, and resolving ambiguity. They are a crucial figure in their organization during the years that they are directly managing the firm. If founders wish to maintain and perpetuate an entrepreneurial culture they will need to do their best to retain their legitimacy and authority. For example, Schein (1988) described a critical incident where employees learned not to attack the leader and that authority was sacred. This may work in cases where the founder is "right" or the attack was inappropriate. However, if the founder always maintains this view even when they are "wrong" or his or her reaction is inappropriate, this will undermine their support. Furthermore, if some of the encouraged entrepreneurial behaviors are autonomy (acting independently) and innovation (acting creatively) and then employees ideas and initiatives are rejected by the founder, particularly in public, it will have cultural implications. Building an entrepreneurial culture does not necessarily mean ruling with an "iron fist" or building a dictatorial or monolithic culture. Instead, it means continuing to promote many of the behaviors and attitudes that the organization started with, behaviors that are demonstrably beneficial and useful to the entrepreneurial firm.

Underlying the FDH is the deeply held belief that what the founder is doing is the right thing to do and that an entrepreneurial culture is the best one to promote, regardless of what else is going on in the world. After all, it is this internal entrepreneurial compass, based on experience and personal beliefs, which lead to the building of the firm in the first place. Therefore, the FDH suggests that founders need to keep this entrepreneurial mindset (Shepherd et al., 2009) in focus as they direct the evolution of the entrepreneurial culture in their firm. A founder needs to ask him or herself, do I want an entrepreneurial culture in my organization? If so, what kind of people should I hire and what kind of examples should I be setting for my employees? One logical conclusion of the FDH is highlighted by the work of Wasserman (2003, 2008) when he described the "founder's dilemma." Basically, it is very difficult for entrepreneurs to make lots of money and be in control. Sometimes, founders will grow a company to a size and level of success such that their board will wish to replace them with a professional manager. Wasserman's work suggests that this often results in a windfall for the founder, for example, as the company continues to grow under new management and the founder's shares increase in value. On the other hand, founders often wish to retain control over their companies, under the belief that they brought the company this far and that they are still the best person (or team) to run it. These decisions and what happens to the company afterwards are perhaps some of the most interesting tests of the FDH.

For entrepreneurship researchers, one of the implications of the FDH is a renewed focus on the role of founders as the firm matures and the host of questions that arise from this perspective. For example, besides hiring and demonstrating behavior, what might some other specific mechanisms be for founders to impart entrepreneurial culture on their firms? Schein (1988) wrote about several different socialization techniques which given their unique results may be variously applied to provide different effects. However, entrepreneurial firms will often have a variety of different systems in place which may affect the ability to implement formalized socialization. For example, some entrepreneurial firms may lack human resources departments or knowledge management capabilities in order to formally train people or codify and store knowledge. We had a discussion with the founder of a geo-engineering firm of about 70 employees, predominantly engineers, who remarked that in his firm, "everybody does everything" and that there were no administrative assistants and no HR department. At the time, he was wrestling with when to bring "an HR person" into the firm and what exactly that would accomplish. Indeed, would that change the "everybody does everything" entrepreneurial culture that he prized?

A closer look at where entrepreneurial values come from in founders may also be valuable. It is easy to assume that founders have these values because they are starting or have started a business but learning where these values come from might help to put context on their passion for entrepreneurship. Furthermore, examining founder's own perceptions of their influence on the organization compared to employee's perceptions would be revealing. The FDH certainly has a heroic sense to it, yet, we have likely all met founders who were very humble and downplayed their own role in being a figurehead, perhaps even a reluctant leader. Does this kind of behavior affect the cohesiveness of the entrepreneurial culture?

Finally, given the prominence of the founder from this perspective, an interesting question becomes, what is the worst cultural fear of founders? Is it bureaucratization, unionization, or the loss of control? Perhaps it is the loss of camaraderie and shared purpose? Where might these fears come from and what might the cultural processes be that lead to those outcomes instead? Are they the logical consequences of failing to develop an entrepreneurial culture?

Implications of the EDH:

For entrepreneurs, the EDH leads to several different implications than the FDH. For example, it means a greater focus on the environment and assessing what the industry looks like or how industry values might be created in nascent markets. Of course, founders still need to act and make decisions for their firms, but the hypothesis suggests that entrepreneurial culture will evolve along the lines established by the external environment. Therefore, founders will need to consider how their firms can be more aligned and consistent with industry values and beliefs. Importantly, they will also need to assess what kind of flexibility they have within those boundaries. By extension, this means that given limited time, financial, and human resources, which aspects of the entrepreneurial culture should be emphasized? For example, if the industry demands rapid product development and deployment, should autonomy or innovation take precedence over risk-taking or competitive aggressiveness? What are some of the ways that founders can identify and articulate industry values and beliefs to themselves and their employees? Or in nascent markets, how might the organization define its corporate and product identity? How might the firm then signal leadership and/or influence industry standards and best practices? This external influence means that not just founders, but employees at all levels of the organization will need to be aware of environmental cues in order to shape the culture.

For researchers, the EDH means a renewed call for work examining industry culture. This paper is guilty of it as well, but there is often implied meaning behind the use of descriptors like a “high-tech industry” where we have an image of the fast-paced environments of the Googles and Apples of the world. However, exploring the cultures of industries in greater depth and where those cultures come from would be enlightening and provide greater evidence for those implied meanings. The relationship between those industries and entrepreneurial culture would also be interesting to explore. For example, it is common to associate industries like biotech as being entrepreneurial (e.g., Deeds, Decarolis, & Coombs, 2000) but probably less so for automotive manufacturing. Why is this the case? Automotive manufacturers may once have been entrepreneurial, so what happened? What changed? Or if they were never entrepreneurial, why not?

How entrepreneurs identify industry values and beliefs is an important question for researchers as well because these values and beliefs, or their perception, shape organizations individually and collectively. Do they identify these values and beliefs primarily through trade shows, industry associations, or partner and supplier networks? Perhaps it is something else or even all of the above. What role might employees play in finding this information and transmitting it up?

Finally, what are some of the major shifts in societal expectation that have occurred and how have they affected entrepreneurial culture? Are firms that are more responsive to these shifts performing more competitively or are they just maintaining a new minimum in the industry? A topical example would be the move towards “green” and organic products. How might these expectations become part of an entrepreneurial firm’s values and beliefs?

Combining the Perspectives:

It is obvious that while useful separately, combining the perspectives holds immense value as well. For example, the founder’s actions can be viewed as an internal driver of entrepreneurial evolution with the environment as an external driver. Focusing on one perspective narrows the lens to achieve depth, but incorporating both perspectives provides breadth. Breadth provides a bigger picture and greater nuance to the phenomenon of entrepreneurial culture in entrepreneurial firms. Many of the questions asked from each perspective can be asked in combined form as well. For example, what happens when founders ignore environmental cues? Is this necessarily a bad thing? How do employees react to this outcome when they can see the cues? Do founders gain or lose legitimacy this way?

A related question based on discussions with founders is “how much does my organization need me?” Some founders commented that their organizations were very dependent on them and this was a problem as they were planning to retire. In contrast, other founders did not find high dependence a problem at all. On the other hand, some founders liked having their managers run things so they could do the work that they preferred. Others wanted more influence. More importantly, what is a founder to do about these situations? The FDH suggests that without the founders to direct the evolution of the culture, entrepreneurial culture might trail off. In contrast, the EDH suggests that entrepreneurial culture can still evolve, but in an industry constrained way. What might be the answer if we were to combine an FDH and EDH view? It seems clear that there is still much to be learned from both perspectives for entrepreneurs and researchers alike.

CONCLUSION

The past literature on entrepreneurship and organizational culture has often focused on the benefits and value of entrepreneurial culture for firm performance but has infrequently discussed how that culture evolves. There has typically been some reference to the founder and to the environmental context, but to date, a specific review of the implications of those perspectives has been missing. Furthermore, how these references and suggestions as to the role and importance of the founder and the environment in shaping entrepreneurial culture build up into their own hypotheses of how entrepreneurial culture evolves has also been neglected. Thus, this work attempts to address that gap in order to provide greater understanding of how these components integrate with research on entrepreneurial culture.

The evolution of entrepreneurial culture is important for two key reasons. One reason is that as past work has demonstrated, there are important positive implications for firm performance and competitiveness by adopting an entrepreneurial culture. The second reason is that as entrepreneurial firms grow and age into mid-life, change is inevitable. This fact brings an inherent tension to founders: how do we maintain an entrepreneurial culture in the face of inexorable organizational change? The answer is evolution and this paper has presented two different hypotheses as to how that evolution occurs. One hypothesis emphasizes the primary role that founders play in directing that change, while the other emphasizes the more dominant role of the environment. Each perspective leads to quite different implications for both entrepreneurs and researchers and enumerating them is one of the main contributions of this paper. Greater exploration of these perspectives individually, as well as their combination, presents numerous potential research opportunities for the future. This work also integrates with the new research agenda of entrepreneurialness and entrepreneurial-spirals (Shepherd et al., 2009) to help explore how an entrepreneurial culture is created and perpetuated in entrepreneurial firms. It also helps to explicate the role of the environment in entrepreneurial culture.

Culture is an important aspect of any firm but especially for entrepreneurial ones. Their comparatively small size and proximity to the founder and the founder's vision means that culture takes on a much more complex meaning then merely a superficial interpretation of "how we do things around here." The added element of the environment, particularly for entrepreneurial firms in nascent markets, means that entrepreneurial firms need to be responsive to survive and thrive. Looking at the challenge of entrepreneurial culture evolution through the lens of the founder or the environment or both provides strong opportunities for creating practical solutions and increasing our knowledge of organizational culture and entrepreneurial firm behavior.

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