

Variations in entrepreneurship

William B. Gartner

Accepted: 26 August 2008 / Published online: 27 September 2008
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC. 2008

Abstract This article is written in the style of a “bildungsroman,” a fictional autobiographical “coming of age story” about the author’s experiences of his beginning to recognize the: great diversity of entrepreneurs, many types of startup firms, multiple ways entrepreneurs go about starting firms, and innumerable situations in which entrepreneurial activity takes place. In this remembrance of things past, the author realizes: the phenomenological underpinnings of his understanding of entrepreneurship, his belief in the primacy of facts as the arbiter of theory, that his theory predisposed him to look only for certain kinds of facts and ignore others which then makes theory paradoxically the arbiter of the facts found, and, finally, that knowledge is hard won and wisdom elusive.

Keywords Narrative · Poetic · Process · Organization · Weick

JEL Classifications M13 · B31 · L26

“Nothing is more uncertain, more contradictory, more unsatisfactory than the evidence of facts”—William Godwin

W. B. Gartner (✉)
Spiro Institute of Entrepreneurial Leadership, College
of Business and Behavioral Science, Clemson University,
346 Sirrine Hall, Clemson, SC 29634-1305, USA
e-mail: gartner@clemson.edu

1 Introduction

Karl (Vesper) had money from his N.S.F. (National Science Foundation) grant that would give me the year to “not have to teach.” I could put all of my time into the dissertation.

I had actually worked on that same N.S.F. grant the summer before I began the Ph.D. program at the University of Washington in 1978. I had quit my job at Hertz Rent-a-Car that spring, right after spending 2 weeks as a management “strike breaker” in Detroit. Being the junior accounting manager in the Hertz Rent-a-Car “SeaTac” (Seattle Tacoma International Airport) back office, it was my luck to be sent off, along with other managers from around the country, to take jobs that the union employees at Hertz Detroit had left as they struck for higher wages. Within a week of the strike, when the Detroit workers realized that all of the managers that Hertz had flown to Detroit to take their positions were doing their jobs better and that customers were actually happier with the service they were getting, the striking workers decided to settle. However, Hertz corporate had another agenda. “No reason for us to settle now. Hertz doesn’t really amortize the cost of bringing in these managers unless the strike goes on for at least 2 weeks. And, if we keep the strikers out for 2 weeks, even though they want to come back, they can really feel the suffering of not getting paid.” So I stayed and felt soiled by the meanness of it all: punishing the hourly workers who already realized they had been

beaten in the strike. It seemed that all we were doing was insuring that no other union shop across the USA would dare think of striking in the future: their own jobs would be taken over by managers who had run rent-a-car operations across the country. I handed in my resignation letter as soon as my 2 weeks were up and I was back in Seattle. I guess I should have never gone in the first place. It is what my boss said after he read the resignation letter. “Why didn’t you tell me you didn’t want to be a strike breaker?” How did I know what I was getting into? I thought that if I just did what I was told—“You are going to Detroit for the next 2 weeks”—things would be okay. I should have asked questions. Now I was a “scab.” I could never erase that.

With no job before the Ph.D. program began in September, I called up Karl to see what he might have going on. I had already spent some time talking with him earlier in the year about research, as I had decided to become a Ph.D. student at the University of Washington rather than go to Columbia University or Claremont. I can remember Charlie (Summer) was so angry when I told him I had decided to stay at the University of Washington and work with Karl rather than take the position at Columbia: “Entrepreneurship! You’ve ruined your career.” Maybe the entrepreneurship focus didn’t make any sense in 1978 to anyone but me. I just remember how stupid all of the decisions seemed to be that were coming out of Hertz’s New York corporate headquarters in 1977: trying to get all of the counter agents to wear pens around their necks so that the company wouldn’t have to spend so much on lost ones; firing dozens of airport managers in the Southeast during a bout of winter storms when none of these rental outlets could make their numbers because no one was able to fly into these airports: no airline passengers, no people to rent cars—you would think that corporate would know that. They seemed to be caught up in making sure they made their numbers for RCA, their corporate parent, who needed Hertz’s cash flow and depreciation to make their earnings. So, when the numbers weren’t made, it meant that someone needed to take the blame, and it always seemed to be the people at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Maybe I had already made the decision to leave Hertz before the strike: large companies seemed to be entirely dysfunctional. It had been that way in the job that paid for my M.B.A. I had a 1000 h per year

internship as an auditor with the Army Corps of Engineers during the spring and summer of 1976. I was able to work 56-h work weeks during the summer on a project at Chief Joseph dam in Bridgeport, Washington, where I audited a project that had change orders and cost over-runs of \$54 million on a \$76 million project that had yet to break ground. (And it didn’t take too many summer weeks before I had burned through my allotted time of 1000 h and was let go.) Every day was spent documenting the systematic stupidity of a procurement system that could be looted with just a modicum of intelligence. Government, at least the Army Corps of Engineers, with a large and bloated bureaucracy, seemed to be an inept way to organize and accomplish work.

Karl was doing something else: entrepreneurship. I had taken his course in spring 1977 during my M.B.A. program. Six students started the course, and two of us finished. The cases I studied and the interviews I did of entrepreneurs revealed a world in which individuals made their own choices and were able to accomplish things through their own actions. Results were tangible and immediate.

So I spent the summer of 1978 working for Karl assembling a compendium of university entrepreneurship programs (Vesper 1980a). I would call up entrepreneurship program directors and hassle them about returning the compendium questionnaire, and then I would ask them whether their two page descriptions of their programs would soon be submitted. The phone calls seemed to work. Questionnaires and descriptions kept coming in to the office until the project was completed.

Two years later in 1980, back in the same office where I had spent the summer of 1978 making phone calls to university entrepreneurship program directors, I began calling them again.

2 Entrepreneurship education

Karl thought it would be worth using whatever remaining N.S.F. money to explore whether any of these university entrepreneurship programs created any entrepreneurs. My job was to call all of the university entrepreneurship program directors that I had contacted 2 years earlier and ask them for names and phone numbers of their successes and then call

these individuals and get their stories. We might be able to figure out from these cases whether their experiences in these entrepreneurship programs were of value or not, and if so, why. Karl felt that there was probably a Ph.D. dissertation in this effort. I was somewhat more skeptical. My concern about the entrepreneurship program graduates was that these cases were the success stories of these programs only and that we wouldn't have any stories at all of those people who were in these programs but who didn't start businesses. And, of course, we wouldn't have any stories at all of those people who started businesses without taking entrepreneurship courses. It would be difficult to figure out whether the success of these entrepreneurs was because of the courses they took, or whether these outcomes were due to something else. Without failures or without stories of others who didn't take courses but were also successful, it didn't seem possible to make meaningful comparisons. However, I thought I had better do as I was told and see where it took me. I was really glad not to have to teach for a year. But, maybe I should have asked Karl more questions.

Using the compendium (Vesper 1980a), I was able to contact 60 professors by phone, and they gave me the names of individuals that these professors believed had taken their entrepreneurship courses and had also started businesses. Rarely did I hit the trifecta (tierce): a name, address, and a telephone number. I often was told just a name and a city where the entrepreneur might be located. I was given 211 names, and with a bit of persistence using long distance directory assistance, I was able to locate 153 of these individuals.

As soon as I located one of these entrepreneurs, I arranged a phone interview that focused on the story of their business startup. My intention was to focus on the "critical incidents" (Flanagan 1954) that were seen as the significant factors that led to these individuals successfully creating their firms: "What single factor had the greatest influence in enabling your business to come into existence? Are there other factors that you consider important? I want you to think of three situations in which you did something that enables your business to come into existence. What were the circumstances leading up to this situation? Tell me exactly what you did? Why were those actions so helpful? When did this happen?" (Gartner 1982, p. 30).

What I understood from my time with Karl was the importance of action in entrepreneurial situations (Vesper 1980b). Entrepreneurs did things that resulted in firms coming into existence. New firm creation required individual action, as organizations did not self-create. The interest in behavior had been part of the zeitgeist in management programs since Mintzberg's book, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, had come out in 1973a. So my intention was to explore, more specifically, how organizations were created.

The variety of stories was amazing. The first story involved an entrepreneur who held both a degree in computer science and an MBA, who was leasing video game machines to bowling alleys and convenience stores. The second story described how the entrepreneur used the business plan he developed in his entrepreneurship course to start a business selling inexpensive canvases as wall decorations that retailed at department stores. Stories and more stories kept coming about bicycle shops, manufacturing firms (i.e., kayaks, computers, sportswear, strollers, specialty films), consulting services, retail stores, importers, high technology firms, service firms (accounting, law, operations), aquaculture, corporate spin-offs, family businesses, purchased firms, real estate developers and brokers, a theater company, transportation and delivery services, and wholesalers. While we had initially assumed that the individuals that I interviewed had all taken entrepreneurship courses, the reality was that many of them had not. Some of the entrepreneurs did talk about their entrepreneurship courses and how these courses had led to starting businesses, while others indicated that they had never taken an entrepreneurship course or had received a college education. Yet other entrepreneurs told me that they had spoken to an entrepreneurship class and knew the entrepreneurship faculty that had mentioned their names to me, but that they themselves had never had an entrepreneurship course. Consequently, the commonality among these individuals of taking an entrepreneurship classes was not a given. This fact actually made me feel better about the collection of stories I was generating. I would have a number of stories of people who had started companies with no entrepreneurship course background that I could compare to those entrepreneurs who did. However, I would still not have examples of people who had failed at starting companies.

The stories were a jumble of different facts. No one seemed to tell the same story in that there was no similar sequence of entrepreneurial activities that everyone followed. Few had similar backgrounds or motivations for starting a business or, indeed, had started similar types of businesses. I was stunned at the variation because I was unprepared for it.

The entrepreneurship literature, at least what I had read up to that point, seemed to suggest that entrepreneurs were more likely to be the same or that they varied on just a few characteristics. Entrepreneurs had a high need for achievement (McClelland 1961; McClelland and Winter 1969), were independent minded (Hornaday and Aboud 1971), dissatisfied with jobs in large organizations (Brockhaus 1976), and had entrepreneurial parents (Collins and Moore 1964). Sometimes the entrepreneurs I had talked to fit this profile; however, in most instances they did not. I did have some sensitivity to noticing that entrepreneurs were likely to undertake certain kinds of startup activities in order to start a business and that there might not be a predetermined sequence that would lead to startup (Vesper 1980b). I also recognized the variety of environments that influenced how organizations behaved (Aldrich 1979; Aldrich and Pfeffer 1976; Hannan and Freeman 1977). What appeared to gel in my mind, with respect as to how all of these various factors (individual, behavioral, environmental, and firm) might affect the venture creation process, was an article that Charlie Summer had asked me to read a week before my comprehensive exams in business policy (Miller and Friesen 1978). I had only glanced at the article before the exams that summer in 1978 (because the article had just come out, and it seemed to me that anything that recent couldn't be that important), yet this article ended up being the focus of one of the exam's major questions. I barely passed because I had failed to answer the question on the Miller and Friesen (1978) article correctly and without any insight (since I didn't really remember it), so I was determined to re-read the article and discern why Charlie had felt this article was so important that it needed to be on the exam.

3 Archetypes

The article by Miller and Friesen (1978) was probably the high point of the contingency theory

movement (Kast and Resenzweig 1972; Luthans and Stewart 1977). Archetypes are the exemplar of "it all depends." Rather than look for a few factors or characteristics of the phenomenon under study that might explain why those factors affect others, the archetype perspective suggests that a wide variety of factors or characteristics tend to cluster together, as "gestalts," and that a "gestalt" would therefore be somewhat of a pure form of a constellation of specific attributes that would characterize a different type of the phenomenon. Miller and Friesen (1978) had collected case studies of organizations in the strategy-making process and had coded these studies on a wide variety of variables that characterized their environment, organization, strategy making, and success. Rather than look for an optimal model that would explain which specific factors seemed to determine success across all of the case studies, they ran a "Q-type" factor analysis on the cases to explore which cases seemed to be more similar to the others (Miller 1978). Their analyses generated six successful archetypes (e.g., the adaptive firm under moderate challenge, the dominant firm) and four unsuccessful archetypes (e.g., the impulsive firm, the leadless giant). An archetype would therefore describe a certain kind of firm in a certain kind of environment and undertaking certain kinds of activities. Environmental, firm, and behavior factors were all linked together.

This "archetype" perspective was a revelation to me. It seemed to be able to recognize differences in organizational phenomenon under study more clearly than methods that tended to be based on regressions that highlighted just a few variables that might differentiate between them. And it seemed to better answer some of the methodological and theoretical issues raised in what seemed to be the new promising field of "organizational systematics" (McKelvey 1975, 1978) which was using biological perspectives to understand differences among organizational populations. The struggle, as I understood it, was in making sense of what an organization is, in that it would be somewhere in-between the polar opposites of "all organizations are the same" and "every organization is different." While this was all difficult to parse out, the Miller and Friesen (1978) approach seemed to be the best answer to how this effort at differentiating among organizations might be accomplished.

4 Concurrent processes of understanding

A number of broad activities constituted my days during the summer and fall of 1980. I would spend a few hours calling up individuals to learn about their stories of getting into business and to collect specific critical incidents that seemed to distill the important aspects of the startup process. Other hours I spent digging out books and articles in the library trying to find prior work on the kinds of characteristics that other scholars had used to understand organization creation. Due to my experiences with writing my MBA thesis in 1977, I had become obsessed with making the best, most comprehensive effort possible when carrying out a literature search on a topic. For my MBA thesis, I had spent a spring and summer working on developing a model of ways that organizations go about formulating strategies. Upon completing and submitting the thesis, I discovered that Henry Mintzberg had written essentially that same article in 1973, entitled *Strategy Making in Three Modes* (Mintzberg 1973b)! As there is no need to invent what has already been invented, I tried as best I could this time to insure that I didn't make this mistake again.

The challenge with literature reviews is that scholars tend to be myopic in recognizing scholars outside of their own disciplines. For example, if I followed a path that led me to explore all of the scholars involved with Harvard's Center for Entrepreneurial History (e.g., Arthur Cole, Clarence Danhoff, and Leonard Jenks), I would miss—completely—other lines of scholarship (e.g., the “Austrian school,” the social psychologists, the evolutionary sociologists) who all had something to say about how and why organizations came into existence. If I had a literature review process at all, it was to randomly search for books in the library stacks and see in which direction a particular book might take me towards other books that could lead me to discovering what entrepreneurship is—books on the shelf next to it, or those in another row, or even those on another floor of the library.

Chapter two of the dissertation *Conceptual Framework and Literature Review* (Gartner 1982, pp. 7–27) was my best effort to assemble as much prior evidence and thought about organization creation into some type of systematic framework. This effort was later published in the *Academy of Management*

Review (Gartner 1985a). It should be noted that the development of the characteristics in this framework was based on both my literature exploration and my interviews of entrepreneurs.

In order that I could make sense of the diversity in these entrepreneurial stories, I decided to develop a classification scheme that would be based on the Miller and Friesen (1978) approach. However, rather than developing a coding scheme that used published case material, I would develop a questionnaire on their startup efforts that these entrepreneurs would respond to. What I didn't realize at the time this decision was made was the genius of Miller and Friesen (1978) who used three coders to analyze each case, so that this coding process generated “inter-rater reliability” for the data generated. For my questionnaire, I had developed a short case that every entrepreneur would read, and I assumed that this case provided an anchor by which all of the entrepreneurs responding to the questionnaire would then have a guide upon which to compare their responses. In the end, I don't think that anyone, outside of my committee (and probably not even the committee members, since, in the end, they were happy just to approve the dissertation and have me move on to an academic life), believed that the case/questionnaire I used had really solved the inter-rater reliability problem. It is a fundamental problem with survey data that is difficult to surmount.

I spent the month of November looking for a job and interviewing a few of the entrepreneurs in California, where some of my sample respondents resided, in more detail about their startup processes. I recall giving presentations about my dissertation research at the University of Southern California (where I was rejected because I was too young and had little practical experience as an entrepreneur), University of Santa Clara (rejected because I was too young and had little practical experience as an entrepreneur), Baylor University (mutually recognized I was not a good fit for them), Case Western Reserve University (rejected because I was too young and had little practical experience as an entrepreneur), Syracuse University (I found it too cold in November), SUNY-Binghamton (I found it too cold in November), Northeastern (rejected because I was too young, and had little practical experience as an entrepreneur), and the University of Virginia (where I found Gib Akin and a label for my experiences as a

researcher). By the end of this month-long trip, my luggage had been lost somewhere in the Northeast, and it had been following me around for about a week or two, missing me by a day at each stop as I flew to another city. I was therefore a mess and ready to go home, and, in many ways, didn't really care how well the interview went at the University of Virginia. It was great fortune, though, that I met Gib. And so I made my presentation about the stories entrepreneurs were telling me about their startups, and I described the development of my framework and the questionnaire, and as we spent most of the day together (taking in a basketball game that evening), he said: "Well, you really are a phenomenologist. Have you heard of (Edmund) Husserl and (Alfred) Schutz?" I couldn't say as I had, since my bachelor's degree was in accounting, and my master's degree was in business policy. His question did get me thinking though, did get me exploring the philosophy of phenomenology, and got me excited about getting a job at the University of Virginia for the fall of 1981. If I were to label what phenomenology is about, for me, it would be: my concerns about my experience experiencing research on the experiences of entrepreneurs making sense of their entrepreneurial experiences told through their stories of their experiences. Or maybe it comes down to this: pay attention. While it is difficult to pay attention: I cannot but help think about these lines from *Death of a Salesman* (Miller 1949/1998):

I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person.

It is what research is really all about; i.e., "go back" search "look:" go back and look. Or, as Sir William Osler said, "We miss more by not seeing than by not knowing." That is my life, "paying attention," or what I would like it to be.

A very detailed questionnaire consisting of descriptions of 20 startup behaviors, 11 questions about the background of the entrepreneur, four broad questions about firm characteristics, and 16 questions about the environment was generated, "field tested"

using colleagues and some of the entrepreneurs I had interviewed, and then revised. The questionnaire was sent out to all of the entrepreneurs I had been able to interview (130 interviews) the early part of winter 1981.

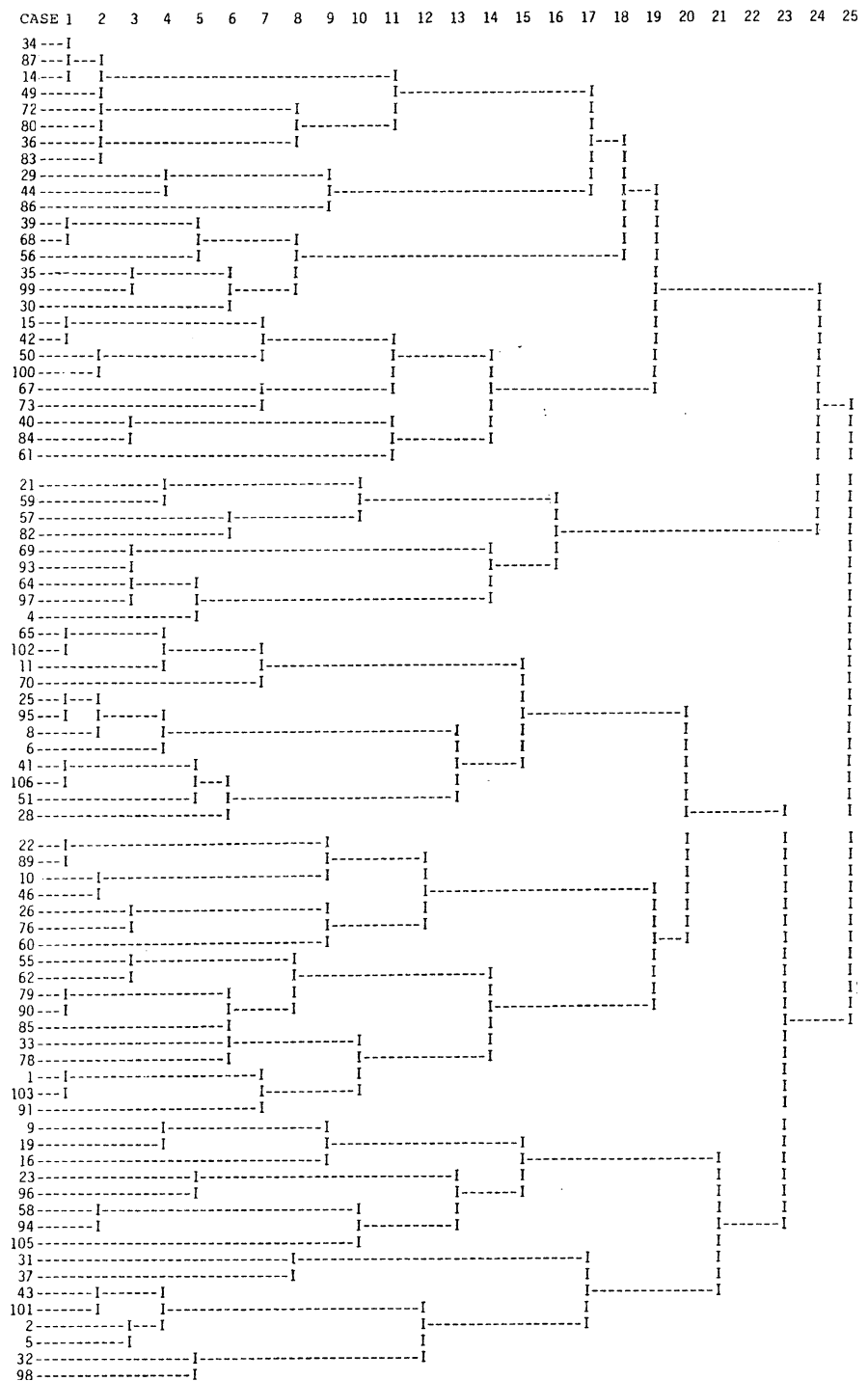
5 Clustering

Karl was about to spend a year at Babson College. I can't remember whether he took the position for the academic year 1980–1981, or whether he began the position in January 1981, but I do recall that once Karl arrived at Babson, he seemed to be having a lot of fun teaching courses, developing teaching cases and materials, and working to create the Babson Entrepreneurship Research Conference and the *Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research* series. I felt that I was pretty much left to my own devices while he was away.

As the questionnaires began to come back in the mail, and as I created punch-cards to process at the computer center for analyzing the data, I needed methods to categorize these cases into similar clusters. I eventually received 106 completed questionnaires that I could use for clustering. What I can't seem to recall, yet what is so critical to this process, was when I ended up contacting Ted Klastorin, who had a computer program, CLAN (Klastorin and Ledinham 1980), that could create clusters using various statistical algorithms. After fooling around with many of the different methods CLAN offered as ways to cluster the data, I ended up using Ward's hierarchical clustering method (Ward 1963) as a way to generate clusters, or "archetypes," of new venture creations. Figure 1 shows how 80 of the 106 cases are clustered in a hierarchical "dendogram."

What this dendogram shows is that at level "0" all of the cases are different. At level "1" the most similar cases to each other are combined. At level "2" cases that are more similar to each other are combined. This combining of cases into more groups occurs until all of the cases are assembled into one group, at level "25." As Anderberg (1973, pp. 2–3) explains:

In cluster analysis little or nothing is known about the category structure. All that is available is a collection of observations whose

Fig. 1 Dendrogram for 80 objects

category memberships are unknown. The operational objective in this case is to discover a category structure which fits the observations. The problem is frequently stated as one of

finding the “natural groups.” In a more concrete sense, the objective is to sort the observations into groups such that the degree of “natural association” is high among members of the

same group and low between members of different groups. The essence of cluster analysis might be viewed as assigning appropriate meaning to the terms “natural groups” and “natural association.”

I used 19 variables from the data set as the clustering criteria, and I began to draw diagrams [much like the score profiles in Miller and Friesen (1978, p. 924)] as a way to see why the clustering algorithm had grouped some cases closer to each other and other cases farther away. Again, quoting Anderberg (1973, p. 176):

The mechanical results derived from submitting a set of data to some cluster analysis algorithm are themselves devoid of any inherent validity or claim to truth; such results are always in need of interpretation...

The use of cluster analysis requires the active participation of the analyst to interpret the results and judge their significance. This stage of the process is subjective, intuitive, and heuristic. When entities bearing a previously unsuspected relationship are placed side by side as a result of clustering, their juxtaposition may be sufficient in itself to spark the recognition or insight which leads to discovery; clustering can relocate an entity from its customary context so it may be seen from a new perspective. A large part of this interpretive stage is a matter of the analyst using his powers of judgment and subjective evaluation to find regularities and relations “by inspiration.”

Some time into the summer, I began preparations to move to Charlottesville, Virginia to take the position at the University of Virginia, and I began to generate a “mini-dissertation” preview/summary/outline for Karl to read when he returned from Babson College. I ended up house sitting for Karl as well as for his parents during a number of those weeks. Both houses had dining rooms, and whenever I was staying at either of these houses, I would use these dining rooms to sort all of the cases into the various clusters. I spread the cases across the dining room table and across the floor, lining up each case in the sequence in the dendogram, and then I would read each case file, look at the case profile, and attempt to figure out why these cases were grouped close to each

other; I would also attempt to determine at which point a group of cases constituted a distinct group from other groups. Many days were spent standing on a chair in either of these dining rooms, looking at a pile of cases, and trying to make sense of them, so as to ascertain their differences and similarities to one another.

At some point, there was inspiration in how the cases would be grouped, and why these groups made sense as groups, both as “archetypes” of a certain kind of business start up but also as empirical forms that mathematically made sense as distinct groupings, one from another. A typology of eight groups, which can be divided into eight clusters at the 19th level seemed to make the most sense to me, in that I felt I could tell a general story about each of these groups that would somewhat encapsulate the critical aspects all of the stories in that cluster. Given the cluster algorithm used, I could also show that each of the clusters were, on certain variables used for clustering, statistically significantly different from each other.

I wrote up a 90-page summary document of my activities over the past academic year, provided descriptions of the results and findings, and put the manuscript on Karl’s dining room table for him to read when he returned. About 1 week after he had returned from Babson College, we met at his house:

“Is this what you spent the year doing?”

“What do you mean?”

“Is this what we agreed you would be doing over the year with the N.S.F. money?”

“Well, I remember that we talked on the phone a number of times while you were at Babson, and I indicated that most of the respondents hadn’t taken entrepreneurship courses, so we would have a lot of problems, with the few cases we did, with trying to say much about the influence of entrepreneurship education.”

“So, this is what we agreed on? Archetypes? Hmmmmmm. I really need to see something about entrepreneurship education. It is what the N.S.F. money was for.”

Before the meeting I thought I was approaching the end of the dissertation process. Rather, it became a mid-way point. And a point that was also marked by my marriage to Constance, arranged a few days before flying to the East Coast to begin the assistant professor position.

The next academic year at the University of Virginia was spent writing, rewriting, and re-rewriting, and re- re- re- re- re- writing the dissertation: clarifying the research logic and methods, sending out another questionnaire to all of the respondents that asked each person to classify themselves into the various archetypes and provide more information on the kinds of learning experiences they had that might have influenced their startup endeavors, writing up one-page descriptions, “caselets,” of each of the 106 stories based on my notes and the responses from the questionnaires (Gartner 1982, pp. 175–287), drawing the variable score profiles for each of the caselets, and—ultimately—shaping this effort into an outcome that Karl and the committee would approve. Constance worked with me every morning, 6 days a week, looking at every one of my sentences, and would ask in what became a mantra question: “What do you mean by this?” After the dissertation was passed back and forth 19 times between me, Karl, and the committee, there appeared to be some consensus that the dissertation was complete and ready to be defended. In addition, my contract with the University of Virginia stated that my assistant professor position would not be renewed unless I completed the dissertation before the beginning of the next academic year, September 1, 1982. I defended the dissertation on August 16, 1982. The empirical article that stemmed from this effort eventually appeared in 1989 (Gartner et al. 1989)—after numerous rejections because of the inter-rater reliability problem and because “archetypes” had somewhat gone out of style in management scholarship by then.

6 A remembrance of things past, present and future

I believe that I became a writer during that first academic year at the University of Virginia, as I struggled to take the incoherent thoughts I had typed on the page and reform them into something intelligible that I understood, and, I hoped, readers would understand as well.

The process also left me believing that the phenomenon of entrepreneurship was, then, a struggle with seeing how many different ways that different kinds of individuals, in different settings, could start different kinds of businesses. There wasn’t

one, or “an” entrepreneurial type. Indeed, I could see that each entrepreneur was inherently unique and that only through efforts to create groupings of these unique entrepreneurs could one suggest that there were types and kinds of entrepreneurs. But, these groupings were intellectual and statistical artifacts of my research to make sense of the diversity that I saw. Variation is, inherently, a fundamental characteristic of entrepreneurship.

It makes sense then, that I would write an article, *Who is an entrepreneur? Is the wrong question* (Gartner 1988), as a way to celebrate the diversity of entrepreneurship, rather than let scholars settle for a narrow categorization of individuals as either entrepreneurs or small business people. It makes sense then, that I would write an article, *What are we talking about when we talk about entrepreneurship?*” (Gartner 1990b) that would suggest that academics have a very broad range of beliefs about what entrepreneurship is, how it occurs, and what characteristics constitute entrepreneurship as a phenomenon. And, it makes sense, then, that I would get involved with Nancy Carter and Paul Reynolds in an effort to develop a national generalizable sample of entrepreneurs in the process of getting into business (now labeled the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics), so that I could better understand how the process of starting businesses, over time, actually occurs, over time (Gartner et al. 2004). So, we always begin with unique individuals, in unique circumstances, undertaking unique activities to start unique businesses.

Entrepreneurial efforts are never the same, though we can see them as similar among various situations, but only by imagining them to be so. “There is no average in entrepreneur” is a slogan that I’ve frequently mentioned in talks, and I believe I’ve written it in some article (but I can’t seem to remember where). The slogan is often on my mind because it gets to the point that statistical analyses are often about comparing the averages among groups, yet the average isn’t necessarily representative of anything more than what the researcher has constructed as a way to compare and contrast a grouping of unique individuals that the researcher believes is a group. We hope for—and look for generalities—but the uniqueness of the phenomena we study is still there.

Finally, I still respond to the call of stories (Coles 1989). When I listen to entrepreneurs tell me about how they started businesses, it really sparks my

imagination for the innumerable possibilities within every individual to create their own destinies (Norton 1976). I don't think we can do enough to champion the variety of entrepreneurs, entrepreneuring (Steyaert 2007), and entrepreneurship that comprise this very human activity. The root word for entrepreneurship, *entreprendre*, means "to take in hand, to take a hold of." It is what entrepreneurial stories do. They take hold of us, they take our imaginations to places we never thought possible. Whether it is Professor Hill attempting to start a boy's band in River City (Gartner 1985b), Dorothy trying to get back home to Kansas (Gartner 1986), a Japanese bureaucrat who builds a children's park (Gartner 1990a), or Terry Allen starting a toy store (Gartner 2007), each entrepreneur offers a compelling account of how they took a hold of the situation that is their life—and transformed it. However, it is difficult to see how this transformation occurs. Cross-sectional studies that ask individuals at a particular moment in time about their experiences will not surface all that we need to understand about how change occurs. [My story, here, certainly shows the paucity of memory to uncover what might be essential to understanding how change occurs. My story is *opus operatum*—sense making about the process after it is over, as a finished task—rather than *modus operandi*—sense making about the process while one is still in it (Boudrieu 1977)]. Unless we, as scholars, look to see how individuals, through their daily choices, which are often small discrete actions (Weick 1984), move in ways that enable other, larger (or smaller) circumstances around them to form, it will be difficult to understand how the mechanisms of entrepreneurship actually lead to transformation. So, I believe the current challenge is to pay attention to the stories that entrepreneurs tell about themselves, in the present, as to how their views of their past, present, and future are seen and then acted upon in their day-to-day lives. The future becomes present in every moment, yet we rarely seem to grasp how the future, then, steps back into the now (Weick 1979, pp. 197–200).

The following lines by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe offers us hints as to the challenge of seeing beyond the specific circumstances of the past and present, to what might be the future:

“Until one is committed, there is hesitancy,
the chance to draw back, always
ineffectiveness.

Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation),
there is one elementary truth the ignorance
of which
kills countless ideas and splendid plans:
That the moment one definitely commits
oneself,
then providence moves too.

All sorts of things occur to help one that would
never otherwise have occurred.

A whole stream of events issues from the
decision,
raising in one's favor all manner of
unforeseen
incidents and meetings and material
assistance,
which no man could have dreamed would
have come his way.

Whatever you do or dream you can,
Begin,

Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.
Begin it now.”

We can, through our actions, determine our futures beyond the circumstances of the moment. So, let us begin.

References

- Aldrich, H. E. (1979). *Organizations and environments*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Aldrich, H. E., & Pfeffer, J. (1976). Environments of organizations. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2, 79–105.
- Anderberg, M. R. (1973). *Cluster analysis for applications*. New York: Academic Press.
- Boudrieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice* (Translated by Nice, R.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brockhaus, R. H. (1976). Locus of control and risk-taking propensity as entrepreneurial characteristics: A comparative study. Ph.D. Dissertation, Washington University.
- Cole, R. (1989). *The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Collins, O. F., & Moore, D. G. (1964). *The enterprising man*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.
- Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 51, 327–360.
- Gartner, W. B. (1982). *An empirical model of the business startup, and eight entrepreneurial archetypes*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington.
- Gartner, W. B. (1985a). A framework for describing and classifying the phenomenon of new venture creation. *Academy of Management Review*, 10(4), 696–706.
- Gartner, W. B. (1985b). Did river city really need a boy's band? *New Management*, 3(1), 28–34.

- Gartner, W. B. (1986). The Oz in organization. *New Management*, 4(1), 14–21.
- Gartner, W. B. (1988). Who is an entrepreneur? Is the wrong question. *American Journal of Small Business*, 12(4), 11–32.
- Gartner, W. B. (1990a). To live: The obligation of individuality". A review of the film *Ikiru*, directed by Akira Kurosawa. *The Organizational Behavior Teaching Review*, 14(2), 138–143.
- Gartner, W. B. (1990b). What are we talking about when we talk about entrepreneurship? *Journal of Business Venturing*, 5(1), 15–28.
- Gartner, W. B. (2007). Entrepreneurial narrative and a science of the imagination. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 22(5), 613–627.
- Gartner, W. B., Mitchell, T. R., & Vesper, K. H. (1989). A taxonomy of new business ventures. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 4(3), 169–186.
- Gartner, W. B., Shaver, K. G., Carter, N. M., & Reynolds, P. D. (2004). *Handbook of entrepreneurial dynamics: The process of business creation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hannan, M. T., & Freeman, T. (1977) The population ecology of organizations. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82, 929–964
- Hornaday, J., & Aboud, J. (1971). Characteristics of successful entrepreneurs. *Personnel Psychology*, 24, 141–153.
- Kast, F. E., & Resenzweig, J. E. (1972). General systems theory: Application for organization and management. *Academy of Management Journal*, 15, 447–465.
- Klasterin, T. D., & Ledinham, R. (1980). *Program CLAN: Documentation, Working Paper*. University of Washington, Seattle: Graduate School of Business Administration.
- Luthans, F., & Stewart, T. I. (1977). A general contingency theory of management. *Academy of Management Review*, 2, 181–195.
- McClelland, D. (1961). *The achieving society*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand.
- McClelland, D., & Winter, D. C. (1969). *Motivation economic achievement*. New York: Free Press.
- McKelvey, B. (1975). Guidelines for the empirical classification of organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 20, 509–525.
- McKelvey, B. (1978). Organizational systematics: Taxonomic lessons from biology. *Management Science*, 24, 1428–1440.
- Miller, A. (1949/1998). *Death of a salesman*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Miller, D. (1978). The role of multivariate Q-techniques in the study of organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 3, 515–531.
- Miller, D., & Friesen, P. (1978). Archetypes of strategy formulation. *Management Science*, 24, 921–933.
- Mintzberg, H. (1973a). *The nature of managerial work*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Mintzberg, H. (1973b). Strategy making in three modes. *California Management Review*, 16(2), 44–54.
- Norton, D. L. (1976). *Personal destinies: A philosophy of ethical individualism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Steyaert, C. (2007). 'Entrepreneurship' as a conceptual attractor? A review of process theories in 20 years of entrepreneurship studies. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 19, 453–477.
- Vesper, K. H. (1980a). *Compendium of entrepreneurship education*. Wellesley, MA: Babson College.
- Vesper, K. H. (1980b). *New venture strategies*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Ward, J. H. (1963). Hierarchical grouping to optimize an objective function. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 58, 236–244.
- Weick, K. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing*. New York: Random House.
- Weick, K. E. (1984). Small wins: Redefining the scale of social problems. *American Psychologist*, 39(1), 40–49.

Copyright of *Small Business Economics* is the property of Springer Science & Business Media B.V. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.