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# Preface

Giovanna Dossena\*

More and more entrepreneurship is playing a critical role with respect to the development of the economic system. Therefore, new studies are emerging in literature, as well as new cases are rising in the reality of the economic system.

A plurality of heterogeneous themes are becoming paramount in the scenario of literature and enterprises: all of them need and involve an integrated and multidisciplinary approach.

Nevertheless, the effort to identify them in a “*uti singuli*” way appears effective and helps in figuring out the evolutionary processes, which are now in progress.

Some studies are of primary interest:

1. The understanding of the factor that allows a possible development for Small and Medium Enterprises: are they “dwarf” businesses unable to grow? Or are they “miniature” businesses conceived to be small? Or are they “baby” businesses able to grow under certain circumstances?

These questions present some relevant aspects:

- the former is linked to the nature of the different key functions of the company, such as finance, organization and resource management; each of them can become a special opportunity and a tool for the entrepreneurial project;
- the next is related to the different phases and evolutionary processes of the company;
- the latter is linked to the diverse alternatives of the strategy: alliances, acquisitions, internationalization and so on.

These themes are of great interest and imply sociological and anthropological studies as well as economic ones.

2. The role of the entrepreneur with respect to the governance of the company: the key issue refers to the relation between the entrepreneur’s role and attendance in the company and the efficacy of the governance. The drivers of such relationship are

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important for the evaluation of the efficacy of the possible alternative structure of governance.

3. The link between the entrepreneurial presence and performance, which is no longer assessed only in terms of economic and financial results (profitability, cash flow and so on), but more and more in terms of sustainability; this latter term can be explained through the company's ability to maintain and hopefully to develop its presence over time, its competitive position and its organization. An important consequence of these mentioned trends is that not only the performance, but even the value of the company is measured in terms of:

- its development ability;
- its membership in a network, which can be viewed as a strength that facilitates the resources acquisition;
- its reproducibility of the absorbed resources;
- the more or less physiological alternation of entrepreneur and managers' generations;
- its business model sustainability;
- its capacity to generate and adopt innovation, not only in technological terms but also in organizational ones;
- the elasticity of the strategy and of the strategic process;
- the type and the level of knowledge within the entrepreneurial function;
- the possibility for that knowledge to be transferred to a different figure;
- the chances and limits of "the entrepreneurial training". If the teaching is focused on the entrepreneurial function, will it be able to "generate" new entrepreneurs? Is it then able to "generate new companies"? In fact, in a wide public of managers, students and employees the entrepreneurial presence and example can induce a behaviour that in some way "imitates" the entrepreneurial one; subsequently, it is supposed that the entrepreneurial conduct will "generate" new businesses.

The education and role models themes are crucial, because they show the entrepreneur as a resource demand to give rise to new wealth without any additional cost. Therefore, added value to the economic system as a whole can be brought by devoting courses for specific topics of entrepreneurship, and encouraging communication of entrepreneurial experiences, such as stories and events aimed at the diffusion of positive models.

# **Food For Thought**



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# I Entrepreneurship as a Performance Art

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Shaker A. Zahra\* and Cristina Bettinelli\*

Prevailing academic conceptions of entrepreneurship consistently overlook the crucial truth that entrepreneurship has much in common with the performing arts. Current academic research has focused on the incidence and rate of entrepreneurial activities, rather than on their quality and essential nature (Zahra & Wright, 2011). This has led to critical misperceptions regarding the real nature of the entrepreneur, who in practice shares so much with the artist.

In recent years, researchers have focused on how entrepreneurs recognize opportunities and pursue them to create value. At the same time, the mechanisms entrepreneurs use to convert these conceptual opportunities into sources of value are somewhat mysterious. Much of this conversion takes place in the entrepreneur's mind and imagination as she or he probes the nature of the opportunity, its magnitude and the best ways to extract values from it (Kirzner, 1978). These processes resemble what artists go through as they develop their works; cognitions, experiences, skills, imagination and inner values intertwine to form the image that guides an artist's final creation.

A key limitation of existing entrepreneurship scholarship is that it ignores the essential raw materials of the entrepreneurial act: emotions and passions. Existing models of entrepreneurship, which are mostly quantitative and analytical, fail to consider entrepreneurship as a fundamentally human and creative activity. These existing quantitative perspectives also lead to an oversimplification of the role of affect in the interactions of people, processes and outcomes. Moreover, some researchers tend to treat idiosyncratic entrepreneurial qualities as "statistical noise" instead of trying to understand them as intrinsic to entrepreneurial creativity. For example, entrepreneurial peculiarities such as inventiveness, optimism, imagination, and originality are often

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undervalued or omitted by some scholars. Viewing entrepreneurship as a performing art can expand and enrich our thinking about entrepreneurship in multiple ways.

### **Entrepreneurship and Performance Art**

The analogy between performance art and entrepreneurship crystallizes when we consider the qualities that define the performing arts: they are performed “live” in front of an audience; they require considerable training to gain technical mastery; and their form often changes as a result of performance and in response to feedback. Like music, painting or dance, entrepreneurship transcends technique; it is intuitive, improvisational and requires a set of unique skills and abilities. In entrepreneurship as in the arts, continual learning and adaptation are crucial to advancement, and practice is essential for the maintenance and development of skills. Performing artists look for and need to make an intimate connection with their audience, just as entrepreneurs do with their clients and stakeholders. Performing artists also need to be sensitive to context and audience, as entrepreneurs need to be sensitive to their markets and customers. Both entrepreneurs and performing artists rely on live human interaction to actualize, refresh and evaluate their visions and perceptions of opportunities. Viewing entrepreneurship through the prism of “performance art” highlights the role of action as a basic ingredient of entrepreneurship since by definition a performing art consists of a series of actions performed by an actor(s) at a particular place and time. Of course, performance arts vary considerably in their types and nature—very much as entrepreneurial acts do. For instance, performance arts can be either highly scripted or completely improvisational; they can involve a group of artists or a single individual. However, they all share four attributes: particularity, variety, contextuality, and intimacy.

Performing arts are characterized by “... the utter uniqueness and concreteness of every event. It is impossible to conduct a generalized performing” (Vaill, 1989:120). Ignoring these “particularities” results in mediocrity or worse. This is as true in entrepreneurship as in the arts: the particular defines the experience for the audience/customer. Skilled entrepreneurs go out of their way to make their interactions with their diverse stakeholders unique, special and almost “one of a kind,” thus creating a sense of attention to the stakeholder’s views, needs and concerns.

Variety refers to the ability to “...bring enormously varied parts together in productions...” (Vaill, 1989). However, it is more than variety of material or sensual objects such as props, color, line, and movement that make a show or performance a success: the artist, like the entrepreneur, must also be able to produce and manipulate a variety of emotions and feelings. It is this emotional connection with the audience that is indispensable.

In the performing arts, spatial, temporal, emotional and connective contexts are integral to the unfolding act. The setting in which the act occurs, therefore, is defined not in terms of space but the

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quality of engagement and experiences. The act, in turn, cannot be fully understood or felt without recognition of its context (Zahra & Wright, 2011). This dialog between act, actor and context defines the nature of performance (and entrepreneurial act) and its consequences. Both act and performance are intimately linked. Both change and evolve as a result of this intimate link.

Entrepreneurs, like performing artists, need to maintain an intimate connection to their audience/stakeholder/customer through constant communication—which may take the form of persuasion, influence or simple relationship. Performers learn the art of intimate communication—even on a mass scale—in the very process of performing, and by performing with multiple audiences over time. Persuasion and influence-making are core also to the study and success of entrepreneurs. The pathos of entrepreneurship is a concept that demands greater attention. For example, storytelling and the manipulation of cultural symbols are useful as means for the entrepreneur to gain legitimacy (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). In short, passion matters to both the artist and the entrepreneur.

### **Implications for Studying Entrepreneurship**

Our analysis of the main characteristics of the performing arts in their application to entrepreneurship has shown that idiosyncratic qualities are the very substance of entrepreneurship, and not simple “statistical noise.” Our metaphor highlights the importance of paying greater attention to the context of the entrepreneurial act. It also underscores how interactions between the entrepreneur, multiple audiences and context define the nature and mode of opportunity exploitation, and allows us to consider how the entrepreneur learns from multiple performances and audiences.

The performance arts metaphor also allows us to introduce into discussion of entrepreneurship the elements of timing, rhythm, entertainment value, craftsmanship and aesthetics—all of which are understudied in their application to management. It also places “learning by doing” at the center of the study of entrepreneurship while reinforcing the critical importance of education in honing entrepreneurial skills. The entrepreneur, like the artist, is not completely self-made or self-taught but is the product of disciplined study, mentorship and role models.

Performance artists take time to train and develop their skills. This helps them to engage others from related arts. To do so successfully, they rely on their “interactive expertise” where they become fluent in the other disciplines’ languages and images. As they gain fluency, they become more capable of probing the subtle traditions and styles of these disciplines and learn from them. The same applies to entrepreneurs eager to capitalize on scientific and technical discoveries. Our

field would benefit greatly from exploring how entrepreneurs develop such interactive expertise and how some, not all, entrepreneurs are especially good at developing this expertise.

## Conclusion

Viewing entrepreneurship as a performance art highlights the intimate link between the entrepreneur and the act of creation. It also highlights the fact that the ultimate goal of the process—whether entrepreneurial or aesthetic—is not the product per se but the experience, the joy of creating and being a part of something new. The journey of discovery becomes an important context in which the entrepreneur applies her/his skills and see new things, building on those often overlooked idiosyncratic qualities of that context. In performance arts as in entrepreneurship, passion, emotions, connection, intimacy, contextuality, and aesthetics are of vital importance.

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