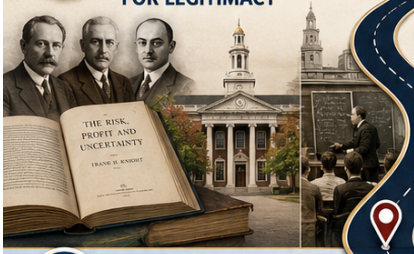
Entrepreneurship in America

Where We've Been, Where We Need to Go

A reflective booklet by Eugene Fregetto, PhD

1 WHERE WE'VE BEEN: THE AMERICAN SEARCH FOR LEGITIMACY



- **Intellectual foundations:** Taussig, Knight, Schumpeter
- **Early institutional milestones:** Harvard course (1947), Coleman Foundation (1951), JSBM (1963)
- **1970s turning point:** SBDC movement, David Birch, rise of small firms
- **1980s institutional surge:** courses, centers, conferences, journals
- **Key insight:** *"Popularity outran understanding"*

A TIMELINE OF LEGITIMACY

- **1940s** Early academic exploration
- **1950s** First institutional recognition
- **1970s** Legitimacy through practice and policy
- **1980s** Institutionalization and expansion

2 WHERE INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP BEGIN

- Ecosystems grow from lived history
- Innovation also emerges from corporate research and product development
- Human aspiration and imagination are central sources
- Untapped entrepreneurial capacity exists among people in poverty
- Entrepreneurship requires a tension between order and disorder

> *Aspiration and imagination provide the greatest and most sustainable source of innovation and entrepreneurship.*

3 WHERE WE NEED TO GO

- Learn from coordinated recovery and aligned institutions
- Design entrepreneurship education in three dimensions:
  1. Knowledge transfer
  2. Learning approach
  3. Enterprise focus
- Reunite entrepreneurship with small-business management
- Move from risk to uncertainty
- A 21st-century agenda: better educators, differentiated pathways, lifelong learning, broader access, and stronger links to communities

THREE DIMENSIONS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship is a journey of becoming—
historical, human, uncertain, and full of possibility.

A REFLECTIVE BOOKLET ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship in America

Where We've Been,
Where We Need to Go

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Prepared from presentations delivered in 2021 and 2022 to audiences associated with the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the Sri Lanka Forum of Entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship in America

Where We've Been, Where We Need to Go

A booklet adapted from three presentations by Eugene Fregetto, PhD

SOURCE PRESENTATIONS

"Entrepreneurship in America" (January 9, 2021); "Researching the Origins of Innovation and Entrepreneurship" (December 9, 2021); and "Thinking about Entrepreneurship" (March 25, 2022).

The presentations were prepared for faculty, students, researchers, public officials, and entrepreneurship program stakeholders in Sri Lanka. This booklet reorganizes their central ideas into a single, continuous narrative. Historical figures and institutional counts are retained as they appeared in the original presentations and should be read in the context of the dates on which the presentations were delivered.

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Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to the entrepreneurship students of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura; to the faculty members who encourage and support the study and advancement of entrepreneurship on and beyond the campus; and to aspiring entrepreneurs throughout Sri Lanka who pursue excellence while building stronger communities.

A Special Thank You

I offer special recognition to my friend and colleague Rukmal Weerasinghe. His leadership has created repeated opportunities for me to exchange ideas with students, faculty members, researchers, and policy makers in Sri Lanka. More important, his commitment to entrepreneurship education, to the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and to meaningful educational experiences has strengthened a community of scholarship and practice that reaches far beyond a single event or program.

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Introduction

Three Presentations, One Continuing Argument

The three presentations brought together in this booklet were delivered for different occasions, but they share one central concern: entrepreneurship has become enormously popular, yet our understanding of it—and our capacity to educate for it—has not always kept pace.

The first presentation traced the development of entrepreneurship in America from its early intellectual foundations to its emergence as a legitimate field of research, education, policy, and practice. The second examined where innovation and entrepreneurship actually come from, emphasizing ecosystems, organizations, aspiration, imagination, and the often-overlooked potential of people living in poverty. The third returned to history in order to ask what scholars, educators, and public officials must do now.

Taken together, the presentations make four claims:

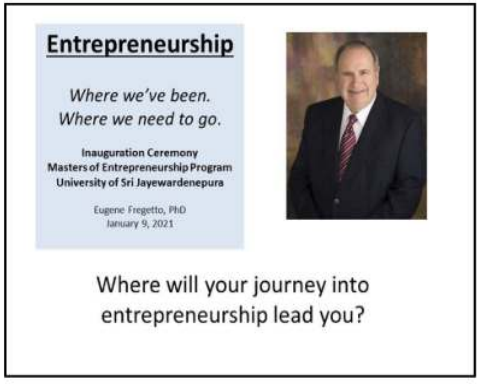
- Entrepreneurship did not become established through a single discovery or institution. It emerged through the cumulative work of scholars, educators, foundations, associations, public agencies, firms, and entrepreneurs themselves.
- Innovation and entrepreneurship cannot be produced with the regularity of a factory process. They arise through uncertain, iterative, historically situated journeys.
- Entrepreneurship education must move beyond a one-size-fits-all, lecture-dominated, business-plan-centered model.
- The future of the field depends on closing the gap between popularity and legitimacy through better research, more capable faculty, stronger program design, and greater attention to both entrepreneurs and the small firms they build.

Entrepreneurship is a life journey of becoming and discovery—a journey that educators must fill with hope, pride, and rigor.

Part I

Where We've Been

The American Search for Legitimacy



Entrepreneurship as we know it today started in America during the early 1900s. This is the story of entrepreneurship development in America.

Where will your journey into entrepreneurial lead you?
My journey into entrepreneurship started in 1970, 50 years ago, and I'd like to tell you about my journey.

In 1970, I started the first of my three overlapping careers as a professional photographer; this career lasted seventeen years. In 1974, I started my second career as a purchasing agent for a major government agency taking on high-risk, politically sensitive contracts with an entrepreneurial mindset; this career lasted twenty-five years. In 1982, I started my third career as a professor of entrepreneurship and marketing; this career lasted for thirty-four years. In 2016, I started my "retirement career" and that is why I am speaking to you today.

Entrepreneurship is a young discipline; we've made progress, but still have a long way to go. The story of entrepreneurship in America is the story of the search for legitimacy and popularity, and I have an interesting story to tell you.

My wish for you is that your journey will be as exciting as my journey.

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The opening page of the January 2021 presentation framed entrepreneurship as both a national history and a personal journey.

1. The Intellectual Foundations

Entrepreneurship as it is commonly understood today took shape in America during the first half of the twentieth century. Before the Second World War, a small number of thinkers helped move the entrepreneur from the margins of economic theory toward the center of economic action.

F. W. Taussig emphasized that the entrepreneur's role extended beyond invention to the creation of wealth. Frank Knight's Risk, Uncertainty and Profit offered a distinctly American account of entrepreneurial judgment under uncertainty. Joseph Schumpeter connected the entrepreneur to innovation and creative destruction, giving scholars a language for understanding how new combinations displace established practices and industries.

Together, these works gave entrepreneurship a human face. The entrepreneur was no longer merely a passive component in an abstract model. The entrepreneur made intentional decisions, accepted responsibility, acted under uncertainty, pursued profit, created wealth, and disrupted existing arrangements. That shift mattered because it opened the possibility that entrepreneurial behavior could be studied, encouraged, and perhaps educated.

FOUNDATIONAL WORKS HIGHLIGHTED IN THE PRESENTATION

F. W. Taussig, Principles of Economics (1915); Frank H. Knight, Risk, Uncertainty and Profit (1921); Joseph A. Schumpeter, The Theory of Economic Development, English translation (1934).

2. From Humble Beginnings to Public Recognition

After the Second World War, entrepreneurship began to acquire institutional form. Harvard offered the first entrepreneurship course in 1947. The Coleman Foundation was established in 1951 and later became an important supporter of entrepreneurship education. The United States Small Business Administration began in 1953. The International Council for Small Business was formed in 1956, creating a forum in which scholars and practitioners could exchange ideas across national boundaries.

Progress remained slow. The Journal of Small Business Management began in 1963. The Small Business Institute program and the first undergraduate entrepreneurship concentration followed in 1972. These were important milestones, but they did not yet constitute a broad movement.

The reason was partly cultural and economic. Postwar America placed its faith in mass production, consumerism, and large organizations. The conversion of wartime productive capacity into consumer production helped feed a rapidly expanding economy. For many college graduates, the ideal career was secure employment inside a major organization. The entrepreneur was often portrayed as economically insecure, socially awkward, or outside the respectable mainstream.

For several decades after World War II, entrepreneurship possessed more scholarly legitimacy than public popularity—but not enough of either to command the center of business education.

3. The 1970s Turning Point

The 1970s altered the context. Stagflation, unemployment, inflation, and slow growth weakened confidence in the large-organization economy. The first pilot Small Business Development Center appeared in 1977, creating a model for practical assistance to entrepreneurs and small-business owners.

David Birch's 1979 research on job generation brought the most dramatic change in public attention. His work argued that small firms were responsible for a large share of net new job creation. Whatever later refinements were made to the estimates, the political and intellectual effect was unmistakable: small business and entrepreneurship became linked to employment, renewal, and economic recovery.

At almost the same moment, the personal computer industry offered a vivid demonstration. Entrepreneurial firms did not merely enter an existing market; they helped create a new industry, new products, new markets, and new jobs. Entrepreneurship was no longer discussed only as a theoretical possibility. It was visible in firms, technologies, and employment growth.

WHY THE TURNING POINT MATTERED

Economic crisis created a demand for alternatives. Research supplied evidence. New technology supplied visible examples. Public policy supplied support. Together, these forces moved entrepreneurship toward legitimacy.

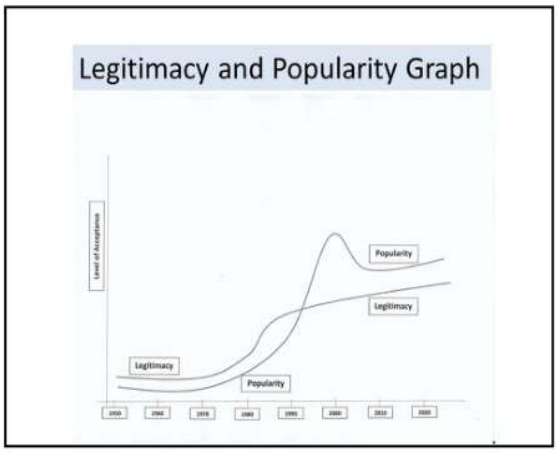
4. The Institutional Surge of the 1980s

Once entrepreneurship gained legitimacy, institutions multiplied. Ashoka advanced social entrepreneurship. Babson expanded entrepreneurship research conferences and faculty-development programs. Students organized collegiate entrepreneurship associations. Peter Drucker presented innovation and entrepreneurship as purposeful, systematic practices. National business-plan competitions emerged. In 1987, the Academy of Management established an Entrepreneurship Division.

By the 1990s, entrepreneurship had become a recognized field of scholarship, education, public policy, and professional practice. The number of courses, centers, endowed positions, journals, and doctoral programs grew rapidly. Entrepreneurship education moved from a scarcity of courses and faculty to a substantial institutional presence.

This growth represented an extraordinary achievement. It confirmed that entrepreneurship could be treated as a serious subject and that universities could contribute to economic and social development. Yet success also created a new danger: institutions could expand faster than knowledge, curriculum, and pedagogy could mature.

5. Popularity Outruns Understanding



Based on our progress during the 1980s, we were certainly on our way to even greater success in entrepreneurship education! However, we did not have time to become complacent!

As shown in the graph, legitimacy was higher than popularity for the four decades after WWII and this legitimacy helped to increase the popularity of entrepreneurship from the mid-1970s until the early 1990s, but starting in the mid-1990s, there was an explosion in the popularity of entrepreneurship, causing popularity to exponentially increase beyond scholars' ability to support entrepreneurship's rapid increase in popularity.

What caused the exponential increase? What caused the enormous gap between legitimacy and popularity? The Dot-com Boom.

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The original "legitimacy and popularity" diagram: the dot-com era accelerated public enthusiasm beyond the field's supporting knowledge base.

The dot-com boom transformed entrepreneurship into a cultural phenomenon. Young technology founders attracted extraordinary investment. Venture capital surged. Entrepreneurship became associated with rapid wealth, disruption, and personal freedom. When the bubble burst, enthusiasm for entrepreneurship did not disappear.

The field was left with a widening gap. Popularity had outrun the foundational work needed to determine what should be taught, how it should be taught, and how learning should be assessed. The business plan continued to dominate many programs even as entrepreneurship research increasingly emphasized experimentation, iteration, effectuation, uncertainty, and learning through action.

The gap is sustained by several persistent problems:

- No single agreed definition of entrepreneurship education.
- Institutional requirements that pull a performance discipline back toward lecture, coverage, and standardized assessment.
- A disconnection between classroom content and the unstructured realities entrepreneurs encounter.
- A shortage of trained faculty and overreliance on practitioners who may have valuable experience but limited preparation as educators.
- Redundancy across courses and curricula.
- A one-size-fits-all approach that treats survival ventures, lifestyle businesses, growth firms, social enterprises, and technology ventures as though they require identical preparation.
- Too few longitudinal studies following entrepreneurs and their businesses over meaningful periods of time.

Part II

Where Innovation and Entrepreneurship Begin

Ordinary Sources, Human Aspiration, and the Limits of Control

6. Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Grow from Lived History

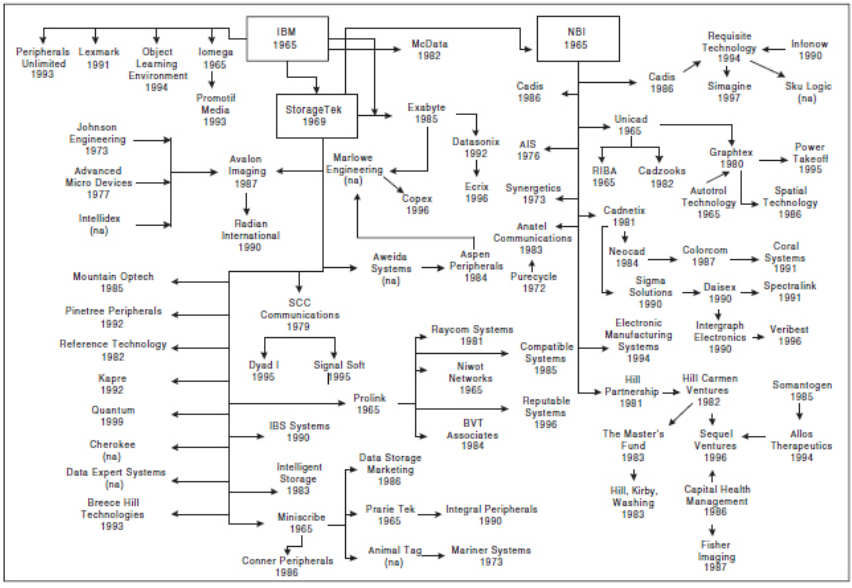
The search for the origins of innovation and entrepreneurship begins with a caution: neither phenomenon can be turned on and off with the precision of a water faucet. Communities can create conditions, but they cannot guarantee a steady, predictable flow of successful ventures.

An Entrepreneurial System View of New Venture Creation*

by Heidi M. Neck, G. Dale Meyer, Boyd Cohen, and Andrew C. Corbett

Our community is one of the driving sources of innovation and entrepreneurship. The best example of how innovation and entrepreneurship that emulates from our community is explained in a 2004 paper by Neck, Meyer, Cohen, and Corbett wherein they diagramed the genealogy tree of high-tech firms in Boulder, Colorado USA. The tree visually shows the impact of seven incubator organizations on the intricate network of a regionally-based entrepreneurial system.

Figure 1a
Genealogical Tree (Corporate Incubators)



The Boulder entrepreneurial genealogy used in the December 2021 presentation illustrated how established organizations can spawn networks of new firms.

The Boulder, Colorado, case showed how a regional entrepreneurial system grew from the accumulated presence of large firms, research institutions, scientific organizations, skilled employees, spin-offs, shared sacrifice, and repeated organizational change. New ventures often emerged from layoffs, closures, reorganizations, and the movement of talented people. The ecosystem was not the result of a single master plan. It developed through history.

The lesson is not that policy is irrelevant. Government and universities can fund basic research, educate a talented workforce, support infrastructure, sustain a vibrant community, and maintain economic and regulatory conditions that permit experimentation. Their best contribution is often to strengthen the soil rather than dictate the crop.

7. Corporate Research and the Product Journey

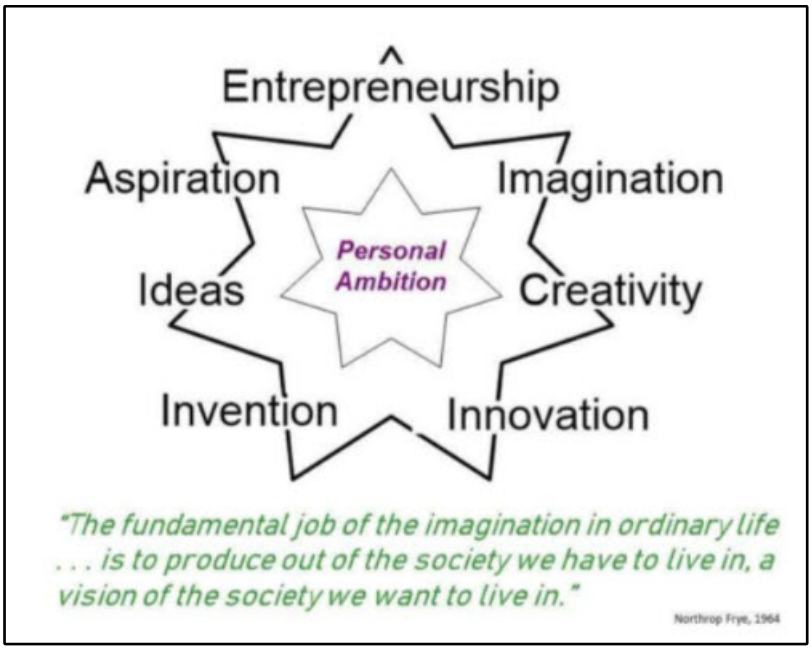
A second source of innovation lies within established firms. Research and development, idea generation, evaluation, market testing, production, and the product life cycle form a familiar route from concept to economic value. But that route is expensive, uncertain, and marked by high idea mortality.

Most ideas do not become products. Most products do not achieve their original expectations. Firms invest before revenues exist, and profitability may be delayed for years. Even successful products require modification, new research, and renewed marketing to extend their lives.

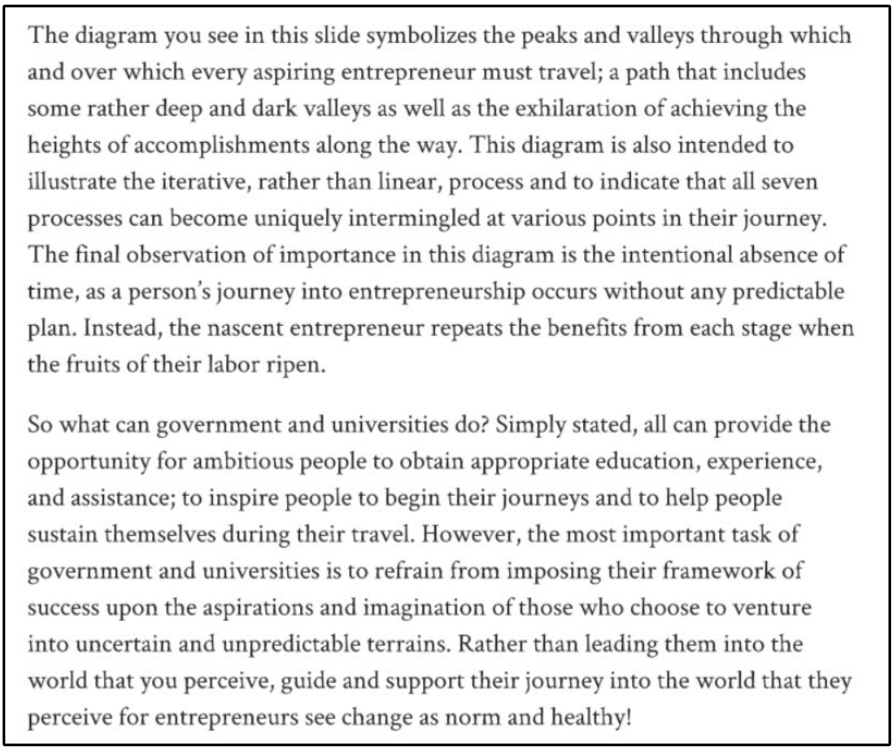
This process reinforces an important point: innovation is not an isolated flash of creativity. It is a sustained organizational commitment to learning, selection, investment, and revision. Policy makers and educators should therefore avoid promising that innovation can be produced quickly merely by adding a course, grant, incubator, or laboratory. These can help, but they operate within a longer journey.

8. Aspiration and Imagination as Human Sources

The deepest and most renewable sources of innovation and entrepreneurship are human aspiration and imagination. Aspiring entrepreneurs begin in the world as it exists, but they act because they can imagine a world that does not yet exist. Aspiration creates the desire for movement; imagination supplies possible futures; action begins the uncertain journey between them.



It is, in my opinion, aspiration and imagination that provide the greatest and most sustainable source of the innovation and entrepreneurship in every community.



The diagram you see in this slide symbolizes the peaks and valleys through which and over which every aspiring entrepreneur must travel; a path that includes some rather deep and dark valleys as well as the exhilaration of achieving the heights of accomplishments along the way. This diagram is also intended to illustrate the iterative, rather than linear, process and to indicate that all seven processes can become uniquely intermingled at various points in their journey. The final observation of importance in this diagram is the intentional absence of time, as a person's journey into entrepreneurship occurs without any predictable plan. Instead, the nascent entrepreneur repeats the benefits from each stage when the fruits of their labor ripen.

So what can government and universities do? Simply stated, all can provide the opportunity for ambitious people to obtain appropriate education, experience, and assistance; to inspire people to begin their journeys and to help people sustain themselves during their travel. However, the most important task of government and universities is to refrain from imposing their framework of success upon the aspirations and imagination of those who choose to venture into uncertain and unpredictable terrains. Rather than leading them into the world that you perceive, guide and support their journey into the world that they perceive for entrepreneurs see change as norm and healthy!

The entrepreneurial journey was portrayed as iterative, nonlinear, and filled with peaks and valleys rather than predictable stages.

This journey is not linear. Inspiration, imagination, ideation, invention, innovation, learning, and enterprise formation overlap and recur. The entrepreneur may return to an earlier question, reinterpret an experience, abandon an idea, or discover a new use for a resource. Time cannot be predicted in advance; progress arrives unevenly.

Government and universities can widen access to education, experience, mentoring, finance, networks, and practical assistance. They can inspire people to begin and help them endure. But they should resist imposing a single institutional definition of success on another person's aspiration. The educator's role is not to substitute the educator's world for the entrepreneur's imagined world.

Guide and support people on the journey into the world they perceive—not merely into the world we already know.

9. The Untapped Entrepreneurial Capacity of People in Poverty

One of the largest underutilized sources of entrepreneurship is the aspiration and imagination of people living in poverty. When poverty is treated as a defect located within the person, programs tend to concentrate resources at the top and view the poor primarily as recipients. When poverty is understood as a condition of context, communities can be seen as reservoirs of knowledge, endurance, relationships, ideas, and entrepreneurial possibility.

This perspective does not romanticize poverty. It recognizes that literacy gaps, weak infrastructure, limited finance, fragile markets, and constrained choices affect how people set goals, recognize opportunities, and interpret uncertainty. Conventional entrepreneurship programs may need to be redesigned rather than merely transferred.

The moral and economic challenge is to create conditions in which people can aspire, imagine, experiment, organize, and reach markets. Self-help groups, collective finance, community networks, and locally grounded education illustrate how support can mobilize capacity that standard institutions overlook.

A CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE

The critical question is not whether people living in poverty possess entrepreneurial potential. It is whether institutions can learn to see, respect, and support that potential.

10. The Necessary Tension Between Order and Disorder

Entrepreneurship requires both structure and deviation. Without planning, discipline, accounting, instruction, and coordination, activity disintegrates. Without imagination, experimentation, dissent, and willingness to enter the unknown, organizations become rigid and sterile.

Michael Morris described entrepreneurship education as the confluence of "unreasonable thinking" and "focused discipline." That formulation captures the educator's dilemma. Students must learn to challenge assumptions, transform markets and communities, use the resources of others, and persist through obstacles. They must also learn realism, evidence, ethics, financial discipline, and operational competence.

The goal is not to choose order over disorder or discipline over imagination. The goal is to manage the tension. Innovation often appears as a deviation from the expected. Programs and policies that eliminate deviation may also eliminate the very behavior they seek to encourage.

Entrepreneurship education must teach students to be bold enough to disturb the present and disciplined enough to build a future that can endure.

Part III

Where We Need to Go

A Research, Education, and Policy Agenda

11. Learn from the Coordinated Recovery of the Twentieth Century

The American development of entrepreneurship was not the work of scholars alone. It was a coordinated, if often unplanned, accumulation of scholarship, public programs, foundations, associations, journals, conferences, educational experiments, and entrepreneurial practice.

Knight, Schumpeter, Kirzner, Drucker, Birch, and many others helped establish intellectual legitimacy. The Small Business Administration, Small Business Institute, Small Business Development Centers, innovation research grants, and technology-transfer programs created public infrastructure. Journals, conferences, faculty-development programs, and academic divisions gave the field a home.

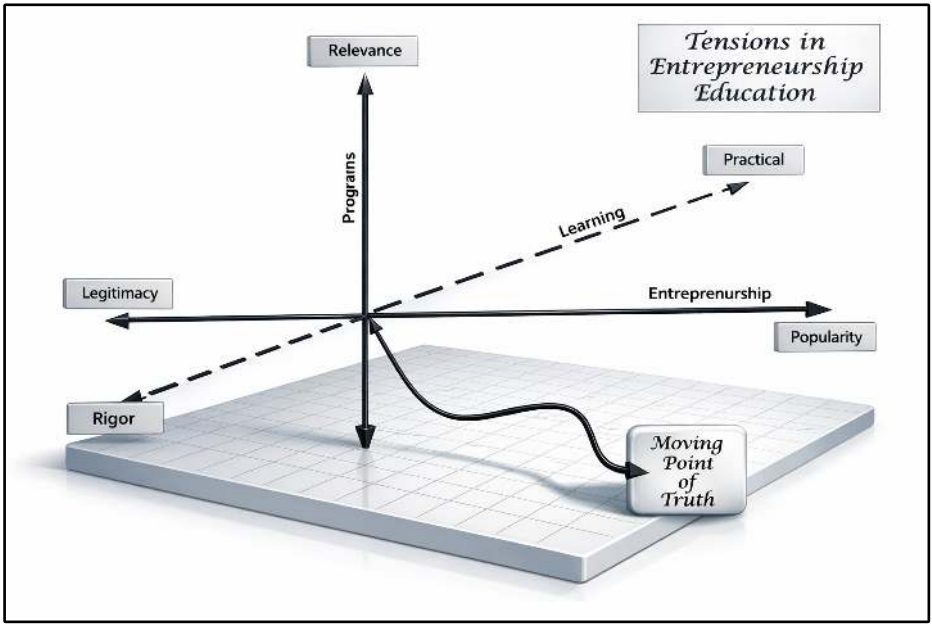
The larger lesson is cooperation. Periods of economic and social crisis create pressure for quick solutions, but the historical record suggests that durable entrepreneurial capacity requires aligned work across sectors. Scholars create explanations and evidence. Educators develop capability. Public officials build enabling institutions. Entrepreneurs reveal what is possible through action.

12. Design Entrepreneurship Education in Three Dimensions

Today, our first priority must be to design meaningful entrepreneurship programs by ridding ourselves of the traditional lecture-based models of education, because we are educating our students to engage in complex, unstructured and chaotic market activities where disequilibrium and uncertainty prevails; activities that require a broader set of skills, knowledge, and competencies than produced by traditional methods.

Surprisingly, the source of today's education challenge is not scarcity, but the abundance of good and viable approaches to entrepreneurship education.

The March 2022 presentation proposed that entrepreneurship programs be designed at the nexus of three tensions: knowledge transfer, learning approach, and enterprise focus.



Entrepreneurship education should not be designed by copying a standard curriculum. Every program exists within a context and is pulled by different stakeholders. A three-dimensional framework makes those tensions visible.

The first dimension concerns knowledge transfer: rigor versus relevance, basic research versus applied research, formal rules versus the spillover of tacit knowledge. The second concerns learning: theory versus practice, rational instruction versus experiential learning, strategic models versus vocational competence. The third concerns enterprise: the entrepreneur versus the small firm, opportunity exploitation versus the strategic management of an operating business, venture creation versus survival and growth.

The optimum program is not located permanently at one end of any axis. It is situated at the nexus appropriate to the learners, institutions, communities, and kinds of enterprise being served. Program design is therefore an act of judgment, not template adoption.

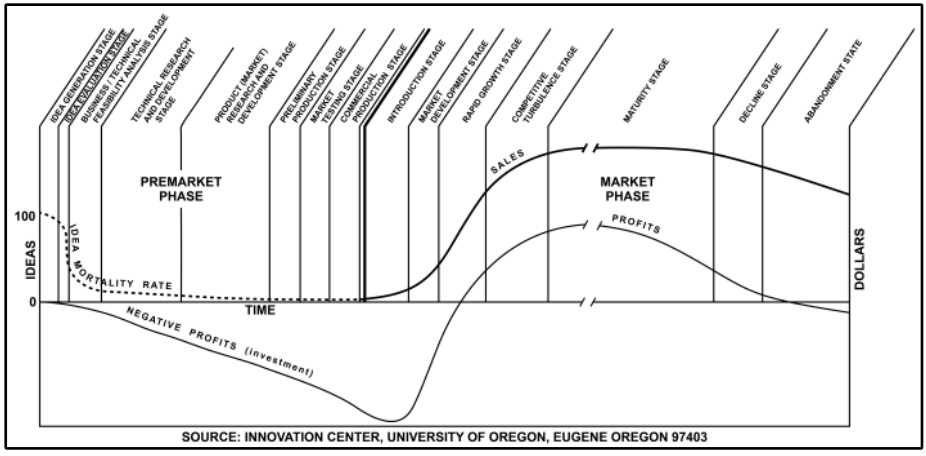
PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

Before selecting courses, begin by identifying the learners, the ventures or organizations they are likely to build, the context in which they will act, and the balance of knowledge, practice, and enterprise management they require.

13. Reunite Entrepreneurship with Small-Business Management

The field's language reveals a persistent bias. "Entrepreneurship" is more exciting than "small-business management," and scholars have often preferred the dramatic moment of opportunity and start-up to the long, difficult work of sustaining an enterprise.

Yet most start-ups that survive become small and medium-sized enterprises. They must hire, develop systems, manage cash, serve customers, comply with regulation, improve operations, and adapt strategy. At some point, the founder's start-up competencies must be supplemented by professional management skills without extinguishing the entrepreneurial mindset.



The diagram illustrates entrepreneurship and SME sustainability as a single continuous process.

This transition deserves much more research and educational attention. Venture creation and SME management should not be treated as competing subjects. They are connected phases of enterprise development. An effective curriculum prepares students not only to start, but also to stabilize, manage, renew, and—when appropriate—exit or transfer a business.

14. Move from Risk to Uncertainty

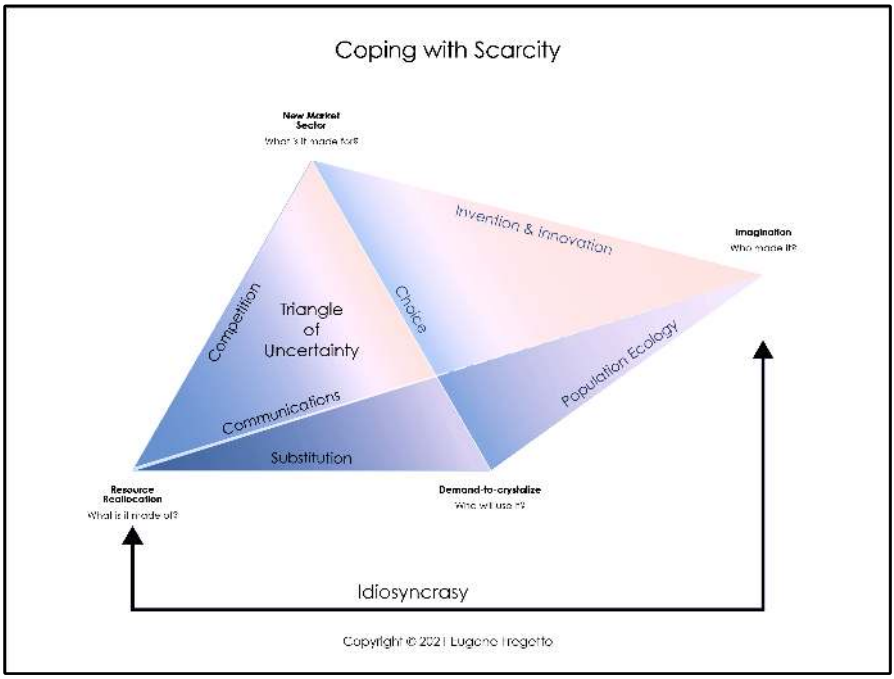
The entrepreneur was once portrayed primarily as a risk-taker: a gambler moving recklessly toward an opportunity. Risk, chance, and luck, however, offer little practical guidance. They describe exposure but do not explain how entrepreneurs learn, choose, imagine, negotiate, and adapt.

Effectuation redirected attention from calculable risk to uncertainty. Under uncertainty, the future is not simply predicted; it is partly shaped through action. Entrepreneurs begin with available means, form commitments, limit affordable loss, respond to surprise, and co-create possibilities with others.

> My final comment for you today is a question: "What happened to risk?"
>
> Historically, the perception of an entrepreneur, as a risk-taker, fits the image of the entrepreneur as a gambler; an adventuresome person who forges ahead recklessly, rolling the dice, in pursuit of an opportunity. However, we no longer view the entrepreneur as a gambler, because risk has failed to provide scholars with a pathway to deepen our understanding of the entrepreneurship. Risk, nor its companion terms, chance and luck, can be operationalized in order to build a strategy for success; as betting the future of a new venture on risk, chance, or luck is like going to Las Vegas to bet everything you have on one roll of the dice. Simply stated, risk ended up being nothing more than just risk.
>
> The final demise of risk as an explanatory variable came with the discovery of effectuation, as effectuation positioned uncertainty, rather than risk, of importance to entrepreneurship. More importantly, uncertainly opened a pathway to allowing scholars to explore many interesting aspects of entrepreneurship, such as, alertness, intentions, and the co-creation of opportunity; leading to many other interesting and meaningful insights.

The "Triangle of Uncertainty" was introduced as a three-dimensional way to ask who made something, what it was made for, what it was made of, and who will use it.

> As a result of my interest in learning more about uncertainty, I did a "deep dive" into the literature about uncertainty. Consequently, my understanding of uncertainty deepened enabling me to visualize what uncertainly might look like, and I'd like to share my image of uncertainty with you today. The image is a three-dimensional perspective of uncertainty, a perspective I call the "Triangle of Uncertainty."



A three-dimensional perspective also reminds us that entrepreneurial value depends on the interaction of imagination, invention and innovation, population and competition, communication, choice, and substitution. As markets answer fundamental questions about purpose, composition, producer, and user, uncertainty is reduced—but never eliminated.

15. A Twenty-First-Century Agenda

The next stage of entrepreneurship scholarship and education requires renewed seriousness. The field must resist the temptation to label every desirable business practice "entrepreneurial." It must also resist mistaking institutional growth for intellectual progress.

The agenda includes:

- Develop more well-prepared entrepreneurship educators at every level, including faculty capable of integrating theory, practice, judgment, and reflective learning.
- Build online, off-campus, on-demand, and lifelong learning systems that serve entrepreneurs in communities rather than requiring communities to come to the campus.
- Reduce curricular redundancy and create clearer developmental sequences across courses.
- Design differentiated pathways for survival, lifestyle, social, high-growth, family, rural, technology, and other forms of entrepreneurship.
- Expand longitudinal research that follows entrepreneurs, teams, ventures, and communities over time.
- Rebalance research and education so that venture creation and the management of SMEs receive integrated attention.
- Use experiential and reflective approaches that place students inside authentic uncertainty rather than merely asking them to recall content.
- Protect conceptual rigor by distinguishing entrepreneurship from routine management while also explaining how the two must work together.
- Broaden access so that entrepreneurship education reaches people whose aspirations and imagination have historically been overlooked.

Entrepreneurship can serve as a liberal art of the twenty-first century because it develops agility, agency, imagination, judgment, and the capacity to act amid rapid change. It prepares people not only to create firms, but to reimagine careers, institutions, communities, and social possibilities.

Conclusion

Entrepreneurship as a Journey of Becoming

The American history of entrepreneurship is a history of movement: from theory to institution, from marginality to legitimacy, from legitimacy to popularity, and now from popularity toward the need for deeper understanding.

The field's accomplishments are real. Entrepreneurship has a recognized scholarly literature, an educational infrastructure, public programs, professional associations, and global influence. But the very scale of its success creates an obligation to ask harder questions. Are students learning to act under uncertainty? Are programs designed for the people and enterprises they actually serve? Are scholars studying the long-term life of firms, not merely the moment of creation? Are educators lighting fires or filling buckets?

Where we need to go is not back to a narrower age of scarcity. We need to move forward toward a more differentiated, evidence-based, human-centered, and community-connected field. We need rigorous scholarship and bold imagination. We need educators who understand both venture creation and enterprise management. We need policies that enable without prescribing. We need institutions capable of recognizing entrepreneurial potential wherever it resides.

The future is not merely something entrepreneurs enter. Through aspiration, imagination, disciplined action, and learning, it is something they help create.

My wish for every student beginning this journey is that it will be as exciting, demanding, and meaningful as my own—and that the worlds they create will make other people better off.

Appendix

A Selective Timeline

1915	F. W. Taussig, Principles of Economics
1921	Frank Knight, Risk, Uncertainty and Profit
1934	English translation of Schumpeter's The Theory of Economic Development
1947	First entrepreneurship course at Harvard
1951	Coleman Foundation established
1953	U.S. Small Business Administration established
1956	International Council for Small Business formed
1963	Journal of Small Business Management began
1972	Small Business Institute program and first undergraduate entrepreneurship concentration
1977	First pilot Small Business Development Center
1979	David Birch, The Job Generation Process
1980	Ashoka founded

1981	First Babson Entrepreneurship Research Conference
1983	Association of Collegiate Entrepreneurs formed
1984	First Price-Babson College Fellows Program
1985	Peter Drucker, Innovation and Entrepreneurship
1986	First national business-plan competition
1987	Academy of Management Entrepreneurship Division established
Mid-1990s–2000	Dot-com boom accelerates the popularity of entrepreneurship
2001	Saras Sarasvathy advances effectuation as a logic of entrepreneurial expertise
2004	Neck, Meyer, Cohen, and Corbett publish an entrepreneurial-system view of Boulder

Selected Source Notes

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Editorial note

This booklet is an editorial synthesis of the slides and accompanying scripts in the source document. It preserves the presentations' central claims, historical sequence, conceptual diagrams, and personal perspective while removing repetition and reorganizing the material for continuous reading. Quotations have been kept brief; readers should consult the cited publications for full context.

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

Entrepreneurship in America: Where We've Been, Where We Need to Go

This booklet brings three presentations into a single narrative about the intellectual, institutional, and human development of entrepreneurship. It traces how entrepreneurship moved from the margins of American economic thought to the center of education and public policy; examines the ordinary sources of innovation in organizations, communities, and human aspiration; and proposes a more rigorous, experiential, inclusive, and context-sensitive agenda for the future.

We should not merely teach people how to enter the future. We should help them acquire the imagination and discipline to create it.

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