OPPORTUNITY: AN 11-LETTER WORD (SUMMARY)

David J. Hansen  
*College of Charleston, hansend@cofc.edu*

Rodney Shrader  
*University of Illinois at Chicago*

**Recommended Citation**

Available at: [http://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol27/iss17/3](http://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol27/iss17/3)
SUMMARY

OPPORTUNITY: AN 11-LETTER WORD

David J. Hansen, College of Charleston, USA
Rodney Shrader, University of Illinois at Chicago, USA

Principal Topic

“Opportunity” is a word that has appeared frequently in the entrepreneurship literature. However, scholars have approached entrepreneurial opportunity and the process of perceiving opportunities, from a variety of diverse perspectives. This has led to inconsistent and apparently contradictory theoretic models and empirical findings, and more fundamentally, to inconsistent definitions and operationalizations. It sometimes seems that the only thing scholars agree upon with regard to opportunity is the spelling of the word. Thus much of the work done by scholars on entrepreneurial opportunities and opportunity perception can not be generalized to our understanding of the concepts. Theory building is frustrated by the fact that these scholars were not all examining the same theoretic constructs. To shed some light on the issue, we examined the various theoretic and operational definitions of entrepreneurial opportunity and opportunity perception used by scholars and compare and contrast those definitions in light of the theoretic perspective driving each study.

Method

We systematically examined articles involving entrepreneurial opportunity published in four top entrepreneurship journals including the Journal of Business Venturing, Entrepreneurship: Theory & Practice, Journal of Small Business Management and Small Business Economics. Our goal was to find papers that defined and/or operationalized “opportunity” and/or “opportunity perception” or variants thereof. An initial broad search indicated that the majority of such papers were found in these four journals. Furthermore, we limited our review to articles published since 1990. During that time, two seminal articles (Venkateraman, 1997; Kirzner, 1997) brought greater attention to the importance of opportunity perception to understanding entrepreneurship, potentially changing the focus on the topic.

Results and Implications

Because it lacks a unifying framework, the literature continues to appear unfocused, fragmented, contradictory, and tolerant of imprecise definitions of constructs. Recognizing the diversity of definitions and operationalizations and how they have been influenced by diverse theoretic perspectives should help scholars recognize how inconsistencies developed and better understand how various seemingly contradictory insights fit together. Our study will help scholars studying entrepreneurial opportunity to more clearly define the words opportunity and opportunity perception and will serve as a resource for identifying previously used operationalizations of opportunity and opportunity perception.

CONTACT: David J. Hansen; hansend@cofc.edu; (T): 843-953-6447; College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29401.