6-9-2012

IMPORTING THEORY (SUMMARY)

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Recommended Citation

Available at: http://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol32/iss20/1

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SUMMARY

IMPORTING THEORY

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Principal Topic

There has been a noteworthy shift towards theory driven research over the last twenty years in the top journals of the field of Entrepreneurship – the result of importing over a hundred different theories from a variety of fields. One potential perspective on this ‘knowledge spillover’ from other fields is that anything goes. An opposing perspective is that the field should be vigilant about what theory spills over into its scholarly journals. This paper examines not only the testing of imported theories but also the testing of theories in general in Entrepreneurship.

Method

The review of theory-driven research was limited to the following six journals and time frames: JBV (1985-2008); ET&P (1988-2008); JSBM (1985-2008); AMJ (1987-2008); SMJ (1987-2008); and, ASQ (1987-2008). Theory-driven articles were characterized as 1) empirical and 2) hypothesis-testing, explicitly informed by theory. An empirical article involved the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Such articles typically included research method and results sections. To be classified as theory driven: 1) a hypothesis had to be communicated prior to a research methods section, and 2) a hypothesis had to be related to an explicitly communicated theory.

Results and Implications

A total of 140 theories were found: 133 exogenous and 7 endogenous. The 133 exogenous theories likely represent only a portion of the total number of exogenous theories being used in the field. It is likely that other exogenous theories have been introduced into the field via publication in other Entrepreneurship, Management, Sociology, Psychology and Economics journals.

This paper is ultimately a contribution to the sociology and philosophy of science within the field of Entrepreneurship, and quite possibly beyond. Making visible the practice of science (the sociology of science) enables us to better understand the currently preferred methods of scientists in order that they might be critically examined and restructured. In particular, this paper is the first to hold up to scrutiny the tendency of the entrepreneurship field to enable knowledge spillovers (i.e. import large numbers of theories) with only the most limited screening. A model for the critical vetting of theories is advanced and applied to the ten most frequently researched theories (all imported).

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