

ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITY-(AD)VENTURING IN EARLY START-UP PHASE: EVIDENCE FROM THE FRONTLINE

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INTRODUCTION

Today I am going to share the research that I am doing with University of Canterbury. The purpose of the study is to develop a conceptual framework to explain the phenomenon of startup entrepreneurship contextualized in terms of opportunity. In essence, it looks at the entrepreneurial process of ‘opportunity-adventuring’ by startup ventures, which are the key drivers of economic development, innovation and job creation. However, starting up a new venture carries significant risks and uncertainty.

The potential for failure is high, due perhaps to a lack of methodical approach to startup venturing as reflected in the oft-heard cliché, “we go with our gut.” Against this backdrop, it will be beneficial to have a *conceptual framework* that helps startup entrepreneurs to understand the pertinent variables and navigate the process of planning, and deciding the ‘*hows*’ of orienting, their ventures.



RESEARCH CONTEXT

The dominant discourse in literature regards entrepreneurship as a nexus of individual and opportunity (Venkataraman, 1997; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Eckhardt & Shane, 2010). Despite a multitude of studies, the role of entrepreneurs, and their traits and characteristics, have proven unsatisfactory in explaining how the startup entrepreneurial phenomenon happens. As an alternative way of looking for answers, scholars have shifted research focus towards the ‘opportunity’ construct of the individual-opportunity nexus (Sarasvathy, 2001; Ucbasaran, Westhead, & Wright, 2001; Zahra, 2007), which my study will undertake (see Figure 1).

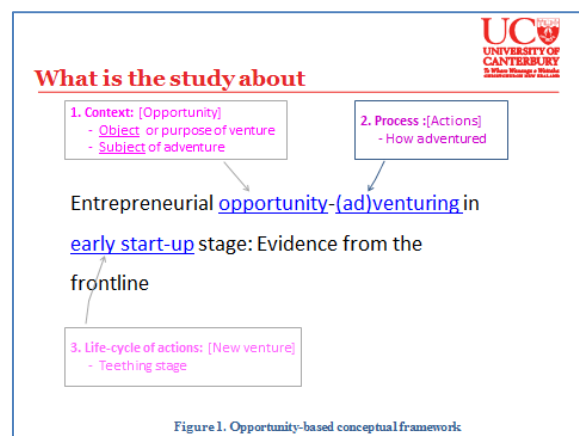


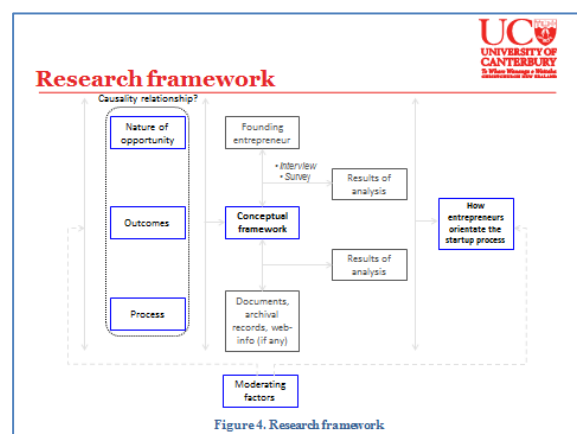
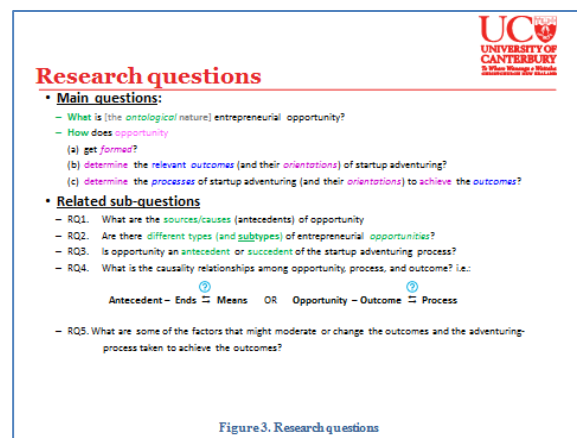
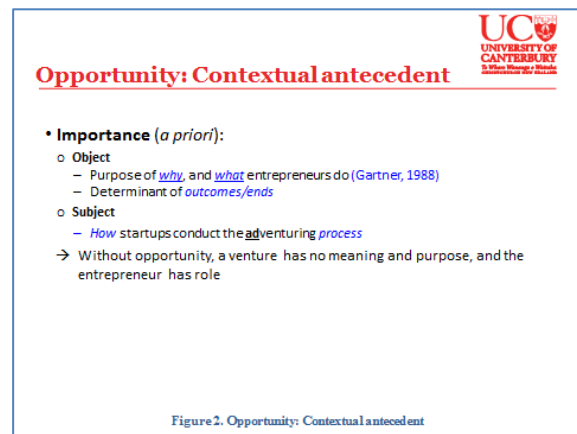
Figure 1. Opportunity-based conceptual framework

The importance of opportunity cannot be understated. It is the *'object'* of the startup entrepreneurial venture. Once *'adventured,'* opportunity is also the *'subject'* of *'how'* entrepreneurs conduct the startup *'process.'* Accordingly, *'what'* startup entrepreneurs do (Gartner, 1988) will be contextualized in terms of *'opportunity'* for my study (see Figure 2).

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

If a conceptual yet functional framework on *startup* entrepreneurial phenomenon is to account satisfactorily for central role of the opportunity construct in the *startup* entrepreneurial process, it will first need to explain the *ontological nature* of opportunity (see Figure 3). Understanding the nature of opportunity's existence will help explain its sources/causes; and therefore, how various types of opportunities are formed, along with the *'degree of entrepreneurship,'* level of innovation, and the profile of risks and uncertainties that are involved in forming them. In particular, understanding *'what'* opportunity is will help to elucidate its role as either antecedent or succedent in the entrepreneurial process. This helps to illuminate the *'ends (outcome/s) ⇌ means (process)'* circularity debate regarding causality that commonly confronts researchers of process-oriented phenomena such as entrepreneurship.

Multiple-case study research based on semi-structured interviews will be conducted to verify the explanations. If empirical findings are demonstrated to be analytically generalizable to the propositions of the conceptual framework, the study can then assert usefulness as providing an *a priori* model that helps, *inter alia*, (a) aspiring individuals in planning and executing their startup entrepreneurial journeys, and (b) policy-makers to formulate and promote programmes that support opportunity-adventuring initiatives.



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