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The House believes that the entrepreneurship field will remain nothing but a troubled industry: *Against* the motion

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Every productive field must periodically face the question of whether its core intellectual project coheres. The motion before the House presses that question with force, and the concerns it raises – about incentive structures, definitional fragmentation, and commercialization – warrant direct engagement rather than dismissal. We engage them here. But we arrive at a fundamentally different conclusion. The motion rests on an unstated premise – namely, that paradigmatic convergence is the hallmark of scientific legitimacy, and that fields failing to achieve it are fields failing to mature. Yet decades of post-Kuhnian scholarship in the philosophy of science have shown that convergence is only one path to progress. Fields can advance through competing research programs, through problem-solving effectiveness, and through the kind of productive theoretical and methodological pluralism that entrepreneurship exemplifies. In this regard, we assert the field's pluralistic character is not a pathology awaiting cure; it is fidelity to phenomena that are constantly in motion. Entrepreneurship studies emergence under irreducible uncertainty — the formation of ventures, markets, and organizational forms before outcomes are knowable where the 'terrain' never stabilizes enough to permit rigid classification. A science faithful to such phenomena should expect conceptual pluralism, not apologize for it. Accordingly, we stand in opposition to the motion: *entrepreneurship is not a troubled industry, but a pluralistic science continuing to do its most important, creative work*.

1. When a field refuses to sit still

The language of the motion deserves careful unpacking. To begin, merely referencing entrepreneurship as a *field* implicitly acknowledges its legitimacy as an area of academic inquiry. This is no trivial concession. Only two decades ago, the very existence of entrepreneurship as a field of research was a matter of genuine contestation. Sorenson and Stuart (2008), in their widely cited *Academy of Management Annals* article "Entrepreneurship: A Field of Dreams?", asked whether the community of entrepreneurship scholars had coalesced around a coherent intellectual project or whether it was more a loose aggregation of perspectives. Eighteen years on, the answer is clear: entrepreneurship has become an established field of research, with thriving programs, forums, research centers, journals, conferences, and policy influence. Many of the foundational theories homegrown by entrepreneurship scholars (e.g., Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Davidsson and Honig, 2003; McMullen and Shepherd, 2006; Miller, 1983; Sarasvathy, 2001) have been extensively cited and widely emulated across dozens of adjacent fields (Townsend et al., 2022).

The verb "remain" signals a second embedded assumption: that entrepreneurship is *already* "nothing but a troubled industry." Yet the evidence for this claim is conspicuously absent. Certainly, challenges exist. Entrepreneurship scholarship is pluralistic, distributed across multiple definitions, and sometimes intertwined with a service industry that promotes spectacle and hype. But the motion suggests conditions of abject stagnation, and the evidence points in the opposite direction. The rapid rise of the Academy of Management's Entrepreneurship Division, the growth of its journals, and the global spread of entrepreneurship education all attest to a field gaining momentum, not losing it. If these are symptoms of trouble, they are symptoms many disciplines would envy. The question,

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then, is not whether entrepreneurship is pluralistic – it clearly is – but whether its pluralistic character constitutes a weakness or a strength.

2. Proudly pluralistic

The sweeping assertion that entrepreneurship is, and will remain, "nothing but a troubled industry" likely stems from the field's unequivocally pluralistic nature and substance. While proponents of the motion see this as a disfiguring, disabling malady, *we see the lack of a forced, synthetic coalescence around a core set of variables, precepts, and viewpoints as being constructive, inevitable, necessary, and, dare we say, permanent.*

While others may find frustration in the relative absence of a clear, consensually agreed upon definition of entrepreneurship, and chaos in the continuous proliferation of new terms, concepts, constructs, dependent variables, and emergent phenomena, we find each of these to be invigorating testaments to entrepreneurship's richness. To put it even more plainly: it is impossible to overstate how untroubled we are by assertions that entrepreneurship's intellectual pluralism limits its importance and impact. On the contrary, entrepreneurship's superpower is its ability and willingness to embrace chaos. Entrepreneurship is a font of useful, intelligible, and veridical insights precisely because it does not succumb to an artificial set of narrow perspectives. Few human endeavors exhibit greater heterogeneity in decisions, actions, and outcomes than entrepreneurship. Formalization is not merely challenging; at times, it is counter-productive. Thus, if entrepreneurship is characterized by its pre-paradigmatic pluralism, it is not because it has failed to mature, but because it addresses phenomena that do not stabilize long enough to permit closure without distortion. To force a fixed theoretical core under these conditions is less a scientific aspiration than a metaphysical preference. Instead, we would proudly proclaim that *phenomena that are difficult to formalize in a single theoretical core are often the ones most worth understanding.*

Recognition of entrepreneurship's "pre-paradigmatic pluralism" has a long pedigree (e.g., Amit et al., 1993; Davidsson, 2003), but there is no evidence that this has been problematic. In fact, we would make the assertion that entrepreneurship's pluralism is critical for its insights, impact and influence, inside and outside the field. Some degree of historical context is useful. Prior to the 1970s, the central preoccupation of organizational studies was with the "M-Corp." Small firms certainly existed, but they were generally "main street" businesses that catered to the logics of community sustenance, not new ventures promising technological breakthroughs and economic growth. Prior to 1947, there were no transistors. Prior to 1974, there were no personal computers. Prior to 1993, there was no worldwide web. Prior to 2005, there was no mass digitalization. Prior to late-2022, there was no high-quality, publicly accessible generative AI. And prior to 2026 – the present era – few believed entrepreneurial novelty might be generated by agentic machines. Where, amidst this succession of techno-social transformations, was there a rest stop on the information highway designated for paradigmatic solidification?

Far from being a liability, the pluralistic nature of entrepreneurship research situates it as a tremendous source of insight for other fields. In our view, the true threat to entrepreneurship scholarship is the drive to achieve premature epistemic closure. One might ask: can something that is pluralistic be scientific? The answer to this is easy to conjure: of course! The premise that cumulative scientific progress requires a single paradigm is drawn from a very narrow reading of the natural sciences and, specifically, Kuhn (1962). Social and organizational phenomena rarely conform to unified theoretical templates. Yet, even within the natural sciences, interpretive pluralism persists at the deepest levels – e.g., the ongoing disputes among Copenhagen, many-worlds, and Bohmian interpretations of quantum mechanics demonstrate that competing paradigms exist with fundamental disagreement about what the paradigm *means*. If physics can tolerate this degree of interpretive diversity, then the expectation for entrepreneurship to converge on a single paradigm again seems less like a scientific standard than a metaphysical preference. In fact, many domains thrive precisely because they accommodate multiple ontologies and epistemologies, such as fundamental differences between normative versus positive organization theories. Many such fields, including now entrepreneurship, have resisted attempts to harden the theoretical core into a narrow set of concepts, definitions, mechanisms, and causal logics (e.g., finance's still unresolved debates regarding the efficient market hypothesis come to mind). In this sense, entrepreneurship's conceptual pluralism is not intellectual disorder; it is fidelity to the complexity of its subject matter.

Thus, efforts to support the motion err in several critical regards. First, these efforts assume that paradigmatic closure is the normal or necessary endpoint of scientific development. Kuhn's (1962) account of paradigms was descriptive, not prescriptive. He did not argue that all legitimate sciences must converge on a single paradigm, nor that those that do not are failed sciences. Indeed, Kuhn himself acknowledged that the social sciences often operate with multiple competing frameworks, precisely because their subject matter is reflexive, historically contingent, and value-laden. Second, the motion assumes that entrepreneurship *should* look like a normal science. This is the deeper error. Entrepreneurship studies phenomena characterized by novelty, uncertainty, and endogenous change. Entrepreneurial action does not merely occur *within* environments; it reflexively reshapes them. Opportunities are not stable objects waiting to be discovered, but are enacted, interpreted, and transformed through entrepreneurial work (Ramoglou and Tsang, 2016; Ramoglou and McMullen, 2024). Under such conditions, paradigmatic closure is not simply difficult, it may be conceptually incoherent. In our view, fields do not become scientific by winning arguments about definitions; they become scientific by generating insight. Paradigms follow problems, not the other way around.

3. A distinctive field with an outpouring of distinctive contributions

The motion also implicitly assumes that if we were to remove the term *entrepreneurship* from our vocabulary, nothing of value would be lost. Psychology can study individuals, economics can study markets, strategy can study competitive advantage. Entrepreneurship, when judged from this perspective, is merely an umbrella term, serving as a branding exercise that covers phenomena

better handled elsewhere. To believe that this is true requires blinding oneself to the distinctive intellectual contribution that entrepreneurship makes. Psychology rarely centers on venture creation as a primary phenomenon; economics typically abstracts away from entrepreneurial novelty by assuming well-defined opportunity sets; strategy presumes the existence of firms and industries.

Entrepreneurship, by contrast, asks questions that these fields tend to bracket: How do new market and non-market actors come into being? How are opportunities imagined, negotiated, and enacted before outcomes are knowable? How do individuals and collectives act when preferences, technologies, and markets are still under construction? What unites these questions is entrepreneurship's focus on *emergence*: the formation of ventures, markets, technologies, and organizational forms under conditions of irreducible uncertainty. The term entrepreneurship cannot be removed from our language, culture, values, aspirations, media, and markets, simply because there is no other term for "entrepreneurial behavior," which is "novel action to generate reproducible benefits" (Hunt et al., 2022). The emergence and promulgation of these novel, value-creating actions has no other abiding reference; the concepts have no other home. It doesn't matter whether the focal context involves start-ups or well-established, globally operating incumbents. It doesn't matter whether the focal organization is a profit-seeking venture, socially minded non-profit, or a hybrid entity. It doesn't matter whether the novel action is financed through a syndicate of high-powered Silicon Valley venture capital firms or self-financed through a savings account from years of mowing neighbors' lawns. In all of these cases, the novel action is in search of reproducible benefits.

Without question, entrepreneurship stands on the tall shoulders of existing fields, but attempts to disaggregate and allocate entrepreneurial phenomena, and their underlying explanations, to other fields are utterly reductive. Even if entrepreneurship borrows tools and theories from adjacent fields, it is because its phenomena sit at their intersections. This is not a failure of identity; it is a consequence of research questions, problem choice, and a rapidly evolving techno-social milieu. Remove entrepreneurship, and the phenomena do not disappear but they lose a scholarly home committed to treating *emergence under irreducible uncertainty* as a central concern rather than a peripheral anomaly. As noted above, pluralistic fields are not deficient, nor are they "unscientific" because they embrace conceptual pluralism in order to maintain fidelity to their focal phenomena. Attendant to our assertion that entrepreneurship will [and should] remain permanently pluralistic given its heterogeneity, novelty, and interpretive complexity, we propose instead that entrepreneurship's distinctiveness and legitimacy derive from its methodological rigor and inventiveness, its theoretical innovations, its institutional recognition, its societal relevance, and its responsiveness to new manifestations of entrepreneurial behavior.

4. Embracing conceptual pluralism as a strength

It is, in many respects, axiomatic that pluralistic fields will appear to have "weak theories" simply because "strong theories" only emerge in instances of epistemic closure. However, the logic of the motion goes even further, arguing that entrepreneurship theory is fragmented, unintegrated, overly philosophical, and insufficiently testable. Through these claims, the implication is not merely that some theories are weak – which is true of any field that possesses a modicum of adventurousness – but that entrepreneurship scholars have failed to generate theory of enduring value. This is a strange assertion, one that rests on a reductive understanding of the purpose of theory.

Consider the functions that scientific theories serve. The most commonly invoked is prediction – yet as Poincaré demonstrated, systems exhibiting sensitive dependence on initial conditions defeat predictive ambition regardless of theoretical sophistication. When prediction fails, we turn to explanation – yet even here, Gödel's incompleteness theorems remind us that no formal system sufficiently rich to capture its domain can guarantee completeness from within its own axioms, a constraint that only intensifies when the "system" in question is a reflexive social phenomenon. When explanation reaches its limits, we turn to interpretation – yet as philosophers of science from Kuhn onward have shown, the ascendance of a particular interpretive framework often reflects disciplinary power structures as much as interpretive quality. None of this implies that prediction, explanation, and interpretation are worthless. It implies that no single evaluative criterion can serve as a universal tribunal for theoretical adequacy.

Given these inherent constraints, organization theories are often productively evaluated on their utility (Van de Ven, 2007). As the old adage reminds us, "All theories are wrong, but some are useful" – and entrepreneurship has generated an extraordinary number of useful theories. Effectuation, entrepreneurial bricolage, real options reasoning, opportunity creation theory, entrepreneurial ecosystems, judgment-based entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial agency, and recent work on digital and AI-enabled venturing represent just a fraction of a growing body of novel theoretical perspectives that have diffused into economics, strategy, innovation studies, regional development, sociology, and organization theory. Such theoretical richness and pluralism are not indicators of failure. They are, instead, evidence of conceptual fertility.

Left unencumbered by a drive towards a singular conceptual orthodoxy, entrepreneurship theory has made substantial contributions precisely by challenging inherited assumptions from adjacent fields. Effectuation reframed entrepreneurial decision-making by rejecting predictive rationality under Knightian uncertainty (Sarasvathy, 2001). Judgment-based perspectives reintroduced uncertainty as irreducible rather than informational (Foss and Klein, 2012). Process theories shifted attention from static traits to temporally unfolding action (McMullen and Dimov, 2013). Ecosystem perspectives reconceptualized context as generative rather than constraining (Spigel, 2017). Even though these theories are not unified, their impact inside and outside entrepreneurship is non-trivial. Rather, they have fundamentally altered how scholars across varied domains conceptualize the expression of human agency under conditions of uncertainty. Moreover, they have provided a fresh bulwark of insights in support of a fundamental intellectual project in the field – namely, *the science of emergence*. Such advances demonstrate the extent to which theoretical pluralism is not a sign of 'trouble' but of ongoing exploration (Hunt and Kurdoglu, 2025).

For some scholars, this conceptual diversity spawns an uncomfortable state in which competing definitions abound, theoretical debates never close, and consensus eludes the field. Supporters of the motion interpret these realities as maladies that marginalize entrepreneurship. We disagree – and note that the discomfort rests on a particular reading of scientific progress that does not survive

scrutiny. Kuhn (1962) did famously argue that scientific fields progress through stages, including pre-paradigmatic fragmentation, paradigmatic consensus, normal science, and revolutionary shifts. But as we noted above, his accounting of these transitions was descriptive, and Kuhn himself acknowledged that paradigm shifts rarely occur because a new framework is demonstrably superior; they occur because the old guard retires and a new generation finds different questions compelling. If paradigmatic transitions have less to do with theoretical quality than with generational turnover and shifting attention, then the absence of convergence tells us very little about whether a field is producing strong theories. And indeed, philosophers of science after Kuhn have offered more pluralist frameworks for evaluating exactly this question.

Lakatos (1970) proposed that progress occurs through competing *research programs*, some progressive, others degenerative. Feyerabend (1975), in *Against Method*, championed epistemological anarchism. Progress, he argued, comes from methodological pluralism and even chaos. Laudan (1977) proposed judging science by its *problem-solving effectiveness* rather than its paradigmatic unity. Rorty (1982, 1991) reframed knowledge as pragmatic conversation. Legitimacy comes not from consensus but from participation in meaningful discourses. Finally, Becher and Trowler (2001) described academic disciplines as "tribes and territories," each with its own cultures and boundaries. Entrepreneurship is a hybrid tribe, straddling multiple territories, borrowing and lending concepts, thereby making its eclecticism a cultural identity, not a defect. Our view is that many of the most productive fields flourish precisely because their core phenomena demand multiple ways of seeing. As such, conceptual diversity is a resource, not a pathology. And from the perspective of these five post-Kuhnian frameworks, entrepreneurship is thriving.

5. Managing the entrepreneurship industry: challenges and opportunities

Somewhat camouflaged in the motion is the seemingly innocuous concept of entrepreneurship as an *industry*. Concerns about the growing commercialization of the field are a legitimate consideration. Following Hunt and Kiefer (2017) – who coined the term "entrepreneurship industry" (EI) to describe the multi-billion-dollar global market goods and services specifically marketed to current and prospective entrepreneurs – we fully subscribe to the notion that the emergence of an EI is emblematic of the field's challenges and opportunities in dealing with industry-level status. We would observe, however, that entrepreneurship scholars have dramatically accelerated their research on this burgeoning sector, often in a refreshingly self-critical fashion. A recent special issue on the EI published by *Small Business Economics* urged scholars to take note of "the reality that entrepreneurial action is also promoted and shaped by a curated supply of products and services, such as venture-building programs, university education, popular management books, or lifestyle magazines" (Brattström et al., 2025:2). Higher education, scholarly journals, doctoral programs, and entrepreneurship centers, are all facets of the EI framework developed by Hunt and Kiefer (2017:234), making industry participants of entrepreneurship faculty members, who in turn play an active role in determining EI's positive and negative impacts. As Brattström and colleagues go on to say, "By understanding when, how, and why the competitive and organizational dynamics of these supply-side forces instigate entrepreneurial action, we build a broader understanding of who engages in entrepreneurial action, when, and why."

In this sense, the EI brings challenges that need to be understood and carefully managed, but on balance its contributions outweigh its liabilities. By preparing individuals and entities for the demands of a rapidly changing techno-social milieu – one in which there is shockingly little organizational loyalty and few guideposts concerning how to thrive in a chaotic labor market – the EI serves functions that would otherwise go unmet. The key is to be effective participants and committed stakeholders. Many legitimate sciences coexist with robust service ecosystems. Medicine has hospitals, law and accounting have specialized professional firms, and engineering has contractors. The existence of applied markets does not invalidate a field's intellectual core. Entrepreneurship's proximity to practice may be a liability if it mindlessly encourages hype and overgeneralization, but the proximity is also a strength. It exposes weak ideas to real-world scrutiny, highlights ethical tensions early, and creates feedback loops between theory and its application.

The danger lies not in engagement, but in unreflective celebration, which is a danger the field has already widely acknowledged in an encouragingly self-reflective fashion (e.g. Brattström, 2022; Kyprianou and Vedula, 2025; Wennberg and Sandström, 2022). To a deleterious degree, the motion ignores the self-reflexivity of entrepreneurship scholarship. Far from being an uncritical cheerleader of the EI, the field continues to interrogate inclusiveness, sustainability, and the dark sides of entrepreneurship. A single definition, a single perspective, or a single epistemological tool doesn't just risk reductionism, it guarantees it. Our view is that scientific progress occurs not through closure, but through productive disagreement.

6. Real-world impacts

Still, it's not wrong to suggest that entrepreneurship scholars should shoulder some responsibility for making the world a better place by translating its insights into tools that improve entrepreneurial decisions, actions, and outcomes. Yet, even in this regard, entrepreneurship has an extraordinary track record of translating scholarly work into a wellspring of real-world possibilities. In fact, to a greater degree than many other groups of university faculty, entrepreneurship scholars quietly invest substantial time – often through unpaid volunteer work – in assisting fledgling firms, mentoring would-be founders, and educating local chambers of commerce. Depictions of an intellectually aloof, conceptually distal collection of entrepreneurship scholars is not one with which we are familiar. This level of "engaged research" is often an exemplar to other fields, inside and outside the confines of business schools. Calling into question the work of these many thousands of entrepreneurship faculty is an unjust mischaracterization of the passion and commitment each brings to the field and its stakeholders.

Then, too, there are other field-level "translational" efforts to support the vital bridges between scholars and practitioners. One example of these efforts is reflected in the ongoing work of Entrepreneur Innovation Exchange (https://eiexchange.com/) and FamilyBusiness.org (https://familybusiness.org), which now attracts more than 23 million visitors each year. Supported by the

generous philanthropic backing of the Richard M. Schulze Foundation, both platforms have established publication partnerships with entrepreneurship and family business's top journals – including *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*, *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, *Family Business Review*, and the *Journal of Family Business Strategy* – to translate academic studies into practitioner-friendly language to better connect the dots between scholars and practitioners. Few other fields can point to such robust forums for evidence of sustained, tangible, meaningful interactions. Evidence-based skepticism about business plans, greater emphasis on experimentation and learning, and more nuanced understandings of failure and risk are not trivial contributions, and forums to stress-test these concepts are instrumental to making entrepreneurship relevant. The demand for macro-level causal impacts – as well as the reductive metrics we see associated with university-based entrepreneurship centers – ignore the manner in which entrepreneurship research also functions as a second-order discipline, one that shapes how actors think rather than prescribing rigid formulae.

7. Conclusion: thriving on pluralism

Our opposition to the motion can be summarized as follows: the motion confuses pluralism with pathology. Entrepreneurship draws from economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and strategy – not because it lacks a center, but because its core phenomena sit at their intersections. Its conceptual pluralistic diversity is not a sign of weakness but an epistemic virtue, one that post-Kuhnian philosophy of science gives us every reason to celebrate rather than lament. Thus, while the motion characterizes definitional diversity as "chaotic," "fragmented," and symptomatic of a field unable to "map its portion of the world," we see instead definitional and conceptual pluralism that reflects the genuine multiplicity of entrepreneurial action.

Conceptual pluralism enables theoretical triangulation by allowing scholars to surface different mechanisms underlying entrepreneurial behavior rather than forcing premature alignment around a single, inherently impoverished definition. A field studying a heterogeneous phenomenon should be expected to develop a heterogeneous toolkit. Conceptual debates, methodological variation, and theoretical pluralism are indicative of intellectual vitality. Rather than viewing entrepreneurship as a "troubled industry," we should recognize it as a rapidly advancing field confronting inherently difficult questions that demand openness, creativity, and methodological flexibility. Entrepreneurship research has progressed precisely by engaging complexity rather than arbitrarily reducing it, by embracing multiple ways of knowing rather than enforcing premature closure, and by remaining faithful to the uncertainty, creativity, and judgment that define its core phenomena. The field's pluralistic diversity is not its defect, but its creative engine.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Rick Hunt: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **David Townsend:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the manuscript preparation process

During the preparation of this work the authors used *Claude Opus 4.6 – Extended Thinking* in order to flag spelling and grammatical errors, and to ensure we were not missing any listed references. After using this ingenious machine, which combines melted sand and powerful electrical currents to magically produce 'intelligence,' the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article, including all of the *em dashes* in the paper, which we have always loved to include in our writing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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