



Choosing the Most Viable Research Methodology for Studying Entrepreneurial Success Factors

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Abstract. The meaning of entrepreneurial success can vary, depending upon whom you ask. Further, a majority of entrepreneurial success factors are directly related to the entrepreneur's human experiences. Thus, research specific to the entrepreneur's "human experiences" as they correlate to entrepreneurial success factors is relatively new. The paper begins with an exploratory and comparative analysis of various research methodologies as a means of analyzing and selecting one of the three operative paradigms to study entrepreneurial success factors including analytical, actors, and systems approaches. In essence, this paper compares and contrasts the quantitative survey methodology and the qualitative phenomenological methodology to determine the most thoroughly aligned methodology for studying entrepreneurial success factors. Most entrepreneurial success factors discussed in the analysis relate to human experience and behavior. Thus, it appears that a sound approach entails an actor's operative paradigm that is grounded in systems theory. The paper presents an argument that the qualitative phenomenological methodology is best aligned with the requirements of a researcher who uses the actors operative paradigm. This selection is based on the premise that the qualitative phenomenological methodology affords the researcher greater potential to generate the richest and most viable data set in addition to a higher likelihood of significant discovery of unknown variables and constructs. Moreover, the qualitative phenomenological method provides the researcher with greater flexibility in analyzing the rich data set providing a better opportunity for substantial research conclusions based on real-world entrepreneurial experiences (Clark, 1998; Conger, 1998; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Munck, 1998). In conclusion, the use of an actor's operative paradigm that is grounded in systems theory and combined with the qualitative, phenomenological research methodology appears to provide the most viable research plan for studying entrepreneurial success factors, particularly when the research question is based on the construct of discovery.

1. Introduction

The study of entrepreneurial success is an on-going topic for many researchers. The meaning of entrepreneurial success may vary by individual and often depends upon varying factors such as the entrepreneur's ability to achieve their personal goals, how much money they made, whether their venture is a success, or perhaps if the entrepreneur is able to create jobs and have a solid impact on the economy. Goltz (2010) asserts that the 10 reasons for entrepreneurial success are the result of (1) seeking opportunities, (2) accepting risk, (3) acting responsibly, (4) working an established plan, (5) adapting their plan along the way, (6) learning from others, (7) making sure their math works, (8) ensuring their employees are

mission focused, (9) being resilient, and (10) finding balance. Burke (2009) argues that successful entrepreneurs are targeters of innovation, adapters of business markets and models, market and money focused, fundamentally agile, and applicators of appropriate strategies. Thus, regardless of the definition one applies to entrepreneurial success, entrepreneurial success factors require measurement that is affected by the specific research methodology that is chosen. Determining the most effective methodology for measuring entrepreneurial success factors begins with an exploratory and comparative analysis of various research methodologies.

2. Exploratory and Comparative Analysis

The quantitative survey methodology and the qualitative phenomenological methodology have both resulted in significant seminal research and knowledge creation. Seminal researchers using the quantitative survey methodology have typically exemplified a positivist approach while those using the qualitative phenomenological methodology have exemplified a post-positivist, interpretive approach (Clark, 1998; Gephart, 1999; Lacity & Janson, 1994). Some researchers who adhere to the quantitative, positivist survey methodology continue to debate the validity of the qualitative, post-positivist phenomenological methodology and premise that the quantitative survey method is the most accurate and reliable (Clark, 1998). Other quantitative survey researchers premise that the qualitative method is composed of many methodologies and thus, there is no clear and definitive qualitative method (Clark, 1998; Lund, 2005; Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

Conversely, qualitative researchers refute this argument and premise that their method is in fact definitive and incorporates greater flexibility into the research process while providing a greater opportunity for discovery compared to the quantitative survey methodology. Moreover, qualitative researchers further argue that the quantitative survey methodology is very rigid and definitive which stifles discovery and is more appropriate for verification purposes. Qualitative researchers support the viability of their methodology by highlighting its flexibility through many approaches such as ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and phenomenology. Lester (1999) supports the advantage of the method's ability to discover unknown data when he states that "Phenomenological approaches are good at surfacing deep issues and making voices heard" (p. 4).

The outcome of this debate has resulted in much discussion as to which methodology is best suited for studying entrepreneurial success factors. This paper compares and contrasts the quantitative survey methodology and the qualitative phenomenological methodology to determine which methodology is best aligned for the study of entrepreneurial success factors.

3. Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methodologies

The quantitative survey methodology and the qualitative phenomenological methodology use different types of data gathering and analytical techniques that provide advantages and/or disadvantages based upon the researcher's requirements and needs in their particular study. The quantitative or fixed approach focuses on developing and gathering a valid data set and then uses various descriptive statistical analysis techniques to test for significance (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Gephart, 1999; Kirchgassler, 1991; Robson, 2002; Shields & Twycross, 2003). This technique is very sound for cause and effect analysis but can fall short when a more thorough analysis is needed in a study. Conversely, the qualitative or flexible approach focuses more on phenomenological, ethnographic, and case studies that can include quasi-statistical techniques, template analysis, editing approaches, and immersion approaches in which the researcher becomes the analytical tool as opposed to the statistical analysis tools that are used in the quantitative approach (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Gephart, 1999; Kirchgassler, 1991; Robson, 2002; Shields & Twycross, 2003). Next, the paper addresses the quantitative survey methodology.

3.1. Quantitative Survey Methodology

When using the quantitative survey methodology, the researcher faces several key considerations. As previously mentioned the quantitative survey approach focuses on developing and gathering a valid data set and then using various descriptive statistical analysis techniques to test for significance (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Karami, Rowley, & Analoui, 2006; Kirchgassler, 1991; Lund, 2005). To accomplish this task the researcher develops a research question, hypothesis, and survey instrument. One extremely critical issue is the need for the researcher to spend a great deal of time focusing on the survey instrument's design. This front-end work helps ensure that bias is mitigated that the data set is valid (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Robson, 2002). Additionally, the sample group must be appropriate in size and the analytical techniques must meet the data requirements in order to ensure the validity of both the dataset and the outcomes (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Robson, 2002). There is significant room for error in this process and when error does occur the findings are weak at best.

As previously mentioned, the quantitative survey method entails several stringent requirements that absolutely must be met to ensure the survey's validity. According to Cooper and Schindler (2006), these stringent requirements include "internal validity, content validity, criterion-related validity, and construct validity" (pp. 318-321). Cooper and Schindler also emphasize that in addition to the validity factor, other tests must be met to ensure that the qualitative study provides a sound measurement that include "reliability, stability, equivalence,

internal consistency, practicality, economy, convenience, and interpretability” (pp. 321-324).

Yet, if the quantitative methodology is properly used, the results are highly effective in determining the significance of relationships between variables. In addition, the quantitative survey research design provides the researcher with an objective framework by which to identify specific patterns through statistical analysis (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Shields & Twycross, 2003). The use of quantitative statistical analysis allows the researcher to establish a hypothesis and either validate or disprove the hypothesis. The use of statistical analysis provides research and conclusions that are unambiguous, concrete, reliable, objective, and independent of the researcher provided the researcher has stringently adhered to the fixed, ridged, and concrete requirements (Arbnor & Bjerke, 1997; Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Robson, 2002). The very nature and rigor of quantitative, fixed research adds validity and creditability to the quantitative research model (Robson, 2002). Next, the paper discusses the qualitative phenomenological methodology.

3.2. Qualitative Phenomenological Methodology

The qualitative phenomenological methodology is very comprehensive and time consuming for a researcher. Thus, he or she must perform a complete self-analysis to ensure that he or she is firmly committed to the endeavor. Not only is qualitative, phenomenological research very demanding on the researcher, it entails a tremendous amount of data gathering and cataloging because the researcher is actually documenting human experience (Hannah, 2006; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Robson, 2002). Within the large amount of data gathered during phenomenological research, the qualitative researcher seeks to use techniques that center on content analysis, matrix analysis, grounded theory, and sometimes includes insight, intuition, and creativity (Clark, 1998; Conger, 1998; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Robson, 2002).

When properly used, qualitative phenomenological research provides measurement and meaning through an analysis of patterns, themes, trends, plausibility, clustering, metaphors, counting, contrast, comparisons, partitioning, factoring, relationships, evidence, logic, and theoretical coherence to name a few (Huberman & Miles, 2002; Robson, 2002). The qualitative phenomenological research design provides the researcher with more varied options concerning research question development, study implementation, and gathering and analyzing data (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Morse, 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). The qualitative phenomenological design also adds tremendous potential for added depth in the research topic and allows the researcher to explore the data more thoroughly as compared to the traditional, cause and effect, quantitative methodology (Conger, 1998; Huberman & Miles,

1994; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Morse, 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Rolfe, 2006). From a critical realist and post-positivist perspective, the phenomenological method allows the researcher to focus on the subject's individual experience, which offers the potential to better explain the subject's reality through his or her individualized experience (Conger, 1998; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Morse, 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Rolfe, 2006).

As previously mentioned, qualitative phenomenological research is very demanding on the researcher and this fact must be considered in the research plan (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Robson, 2002). The added time that is spent performing in-depth analysis affords the researcher more flexibility in how he or she gathers, arranges, and displays the data. Hence, when the "flexible approach" is used by the researcher he or she often redesigns the matrices and coding processes used to adapt to observed changes in the flow of data as it is gathered and presented during the data gathering process (Robson, 2002). The qualitative, phenomenological approach provides the design flexibility needed for categorizing data in a manner wherein the researcher is "in control" of the process (Robson, 2002). The depth, control, and flexibility factors of the qualitative research methodology add tremendous advantages over the quantitative method when gathering, compiling, and analyzing data sets that evolve from the observation of human experience. In summary there exist a strong relationship between the qualitative structure and the measurement of entrepreneurial success factors which are specific to the individual's experience.

4. The Research Question

A researcher's initial research question is much like a baby's first steps in learning to walk. The infant, like the researcher, will stumble and fall many times. Hence, the researcher often reinvents and alters their research question many times before deciding to proceed to the next stage in the research process. The researcher must focus on developing a sound research question to guide him or her through the critical research process that includes developing an operative paradigm, choosing a research methodology, designing the research instrument, and choosing the analytical techniques to be employed (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Robson, 2002).

First, the research question must be clear, relevant, concise, and answerable in addition to fulfilling the study's purpose. These requirements help ensure that the research question will effectively direct and lead the researcher to an operative paradigm (Smeyers, 2001). Second, the operative paradigm leads the researcher to the appropriate research methodology, instrument design, and analytical techniques (Clark, 1998; Shields & Twycross, 2003; Smeyers, 2001). As is illustrated in this sequence of events, the research question is a prerequisite to the

operative paradigm. Once the research question and the operative paradigm are established, the researcher selects the research methodology. Next, the paper addresses the research question selection within the construct of the quantitative survey methodology.

4.1. Quantitative Survey Research Question

Research questions developed by the quantitative researcher typically establish one or more hypothesis for testing. The quantitative researcher develops the hypothesis and uses a survey instrument to attain data that determines a relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. The researcher then analyzes the raw data attained during the quantitative survey to determine if there is a significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

The results attained in the statistical analysis either proves or disproves the hypothesis. Hence, the quantitative research question verifies a relationship between variables in order to prove or disprove the original hypothesis. In this particular situation, the researcher can use the quantitative survey method to measure the significance of an entrepreneur's level of success and perhaps compare this with specific attributes or variables that may, or may not, have contributed to the entrepreneur's success. Thus, there are some measures that can be attained by using the quantitative survey methodology to measure entrepreneurial success factors. The research in this paper does not question this fact. The point is that quantitative research measures the relationship of one variable to several variables but does not explain the variables themselves. In this analysis, the variables that require measurement are entrepreneurial success factors that are specific to an entrepreneur's experience over time and his or her current behavior. Thus, the variables may significantly change on a regular basis as situational issues affect the entrepreneur's experience and behavior. Next, the paper addresses the research question selection within the construct of the qualitative phenomenological methodology.

4.2. Qualitative Phenomenological Research Question

In the qualitative phenomenological methodology, the researcher first assumes that there is a direct relationship between the variables called entrepreneurial success and the broad realm of human experience and behavior. Because there are no definitive clear-cut variables, there is also no clear cut, definitive hypothesis. Instead, the qualitative researcher forms a postulate they believe to exist in the situation that is studied. In this case, the postulate forms the research question, which in turn, provides the researcher with the required methodology. Hence, the

researcher assumes that there exist the potential for observed or perceived relationships, or factors, within the realm of human experience that influences an entrepreneur's perception of success. Thus, the researcher chooses the qualitative phenomenological method because of insufficient definitive variables that are used in statistical analysis. Hence, the researcher focuses on identifying and observing a set of shifting, ever-changing variables within the construct of an entrepreneur's experience and behavior.

4.3. Post Research Question Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the research question is the beginning point for the research plan regardless of the methodology used. At this point, and regardless of the chosen methodology, the research question is the glue that holds both research methods together (Robson, 2002). The research question in the quantitative survey method focuses on the verification of a relationship between factors associated with entrepreneurial success. Whereas, the research question in a qualitative phenomenological study focuses on establishing a postulate related to entrepreneurial success factors that the researcher believes will fall within the realm of an entrepreneur's behavior and human experience. The best analogy to contrast the differing paradigms of the two research methodologies is the quantitative research question focuses on verification while the qualitative research question focuses on discovery.

Quite obviously, a researcher can choose either method to study entrepreneurial success factors. However, prior to making a final decision concerning the methodology of choice, the researcher must first evaluate the requirements of the study. The study's initial requirements are determined by establishing broad groups of data sets that represent potential entrepreneurial success factors on which to focus the study. Once these broad data sets are chosen, the researcher must select the operative paradigm that will assist him or her to attain research that is specific to the data set. One primary objective of the researcher is to attain a rich and viable data set for further study. Hence, the subject matter being studied, the objectives of the research study, and the data set of variables to be studied guide the researcher to choosing an operative paradigm and a research methodology (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). In summary, before choosing an operative paradigm and research methodology the researcher must validate the study's objective, have a firm grasp of the research question's requirements, and have a firm grasp of the data set to be obtained in the study. Next, the paper will focus on identifying the entrepreneurial success factors that are addressed in this study.

5. Researching Entrepreneurial Success Factors

5.1. The Entrepreneurial Environment

Entrepreneurial organizations operate in a complex open systems environment and experiences a constant state of entropy (Bailey, 1994; Bertalanffy & Rapoport, 1956; Scott, 2003). Traditional systems theorist premise that entropy causes the organization's sub-systems to deteriorate, disorganize, and progress toward a maximum disorder and chaos. The problem occurs because excess energy from the environment cannot be turned into work or output which results in decay within the whole organizational structure (Bailey, 1994; Scott, 2003; Scott, Dornbusch, Busching, & Laing, 1967). Because entrepreneurial leaders must operate in a complex and dynamic business environment filled with chaos and uncertainty, the entrepreneurial leader must possess many traits, attributes, skills, and behaviors that help diminish or minimize the negative impact of entropy on their company's structure.

Another issue affecting entrepreneurial success factors is the entrepreneur's personal experiences, behaviors, and decisions that the entrepreneur has made throughout his or her life. These life experiences, behaviors, and decisions have had a tremendous effect on the entrepreneur's individual level of traits, attributes, skills, and current behaviors. The developmental level of traits, attributes, and skills at any particular point in time have a varying influence the entrepreneur's current decision-making skills and abilities. As previously mentioned, the entrepreneur's current levels of decision-making skills and abilities are dependent on his or her previous human experience and behavior at various points in time and usually improve over time. This time variability factor makes these data sets very difficult to measure by using the quantitative survey methodology and thus, require a different methodological approach.

5.2. The Scope of Entrepreneurial Success Factors

When addressing entrepreneurial success factors within the context of a research study, the analysis needs to encompass four specific areas of understanding, which includes contextual, diagnostic, evaluative, and strategic (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). First, the contextual aspect of entrepreneurial success seeks to identify factors that are: essential to personal success, critical to positive business outcomes, and acquired through experience and training. Second, the diagnostic area focuses on identifying factors that: influence the success of the company, are most important to the entrepreneur, are most predominate for success, are most difficult to attain, are attained prior to starting the venture, and understanding how the factors are attained. Third, the evaluative area of

understanding includes identifying: the importance of specific factors, the most important factors, the factors leading to positive business outcomes, the factors leading to negative business outcomes, and the factors needed prior to business start-up. Fourth, the strategic area seeks to identify factors: to develop through training, are essential to business start-up, and that enhance the likelihood of attaining business success.

The contextual scope of the aforementioned factors is very broad and the data requirements will vary based on the research methodology used in the study. These factors indicate that most of these dimensional factors fall within the construct of the entrepreneur's experience and behavior in addition to a skill set and decision making capability that shifts and changes over time. Thus, the quantitative survey methodology appears to be a less appropriate method for identifying and measuring the cause and effect relationships of entrepreneurial success factors as they shift at any given time. However, the qualitative phenomenological methodology provides a flexible approach with an analytical lens for observation over time in order to attain a long-term framing of the data set. One certainty is that the choice of operative paradigm and research methodology are contingent on the research question and the objective of the research question. Again, it is essential to note that most of the aforementioned factors address the complexity of the entrepreneur's human experience and behavioral factors favor the qualitative, phenomenological methodology. The qualitative phenomenological method is an ideal methodology for the study of human experience (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). After considered the research question's scope, the analysis will select an operative paradigm that matches the requirements of the study.

6. Choosing the Operative Paradigm

6.1. Paradigm Development

After attaining an understanding of the research question's scope, the researcher must choose an appropriate paradigmatic framework for studying entrepreneurial success factors (Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Rolfe, 2006; Smeyers, 2001). The operative paradigm used by the researcher has a direct affect on the research methodology used in a study (Kuhn, 1962). The seminal research of Thomas Kuhn illustrates the relevance of paradigms in the study of entrepreneurial success factors. Kuhn, the father of paradigm research, stressed the role they play in the development of scientific knowledge. Kuhn (1967) states "normal science means research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further study" (p. 10). A paradigm becomes a distinct

component of normal science as practitioners come to a consensus through validation and accept a theory as being dominant over other existing explanations (Kuhn, 1962). Kuhn (1967) goes on to say that “By focusing attention upon a small range of relatively esoteric problems, the paradigm forces scientist to investigate some part of nature in a detail and depth that would otherwise be unimaginable” (p. 24). What this means is that widely accepted paradigms tend to place an emphasis on the quantitative survey method as a means of validation and enhancement of past scientific developments. Conversely, the qualitative phenomenological method provides the framework for the discovery of new, unknown paradigms or perhaps an acknowledgement of new dimensions of existing paradigms. Although the study of entrepreneurial success factors is not a new phenomenon in the field of scientific knowledge, there is much potential for new discovery regarding human experiences of entrepreneurs within the field of entrepreneurship. Hence, the rationale supporting the premise that the qualitative phenomenological method may be appropriate because it is more oriented toward discovery.

Thus, the phenomenological method is the most productive methodology considering the fact that entrepreneurial success factors are based on human experience and behavioral factors. Additionally, the operative paradigm chosen in the analysis is significantly impacted by the choice of the research methodology used in studying entrepreneurial success factors. The paradigmatic constructs addressed in the analysis are the analytical, systems, and actors approaches. Based upon the analysis of the research question, the two methodologies considered, and the scope of the entrepreneurial success factors, the paper will now focus on selecting the operative paradigm. This selection of the operative paradigm is the final step in the process of choosing the complete research process that is most appropriate for studying entrepreneurial success factors.

6.2. Analytical Approach

The analytical method is firmly grounded in the quantitative, positivistic theory; the analytical, rational operative paradigm includes the quantitative survey methodology (Arbner & Bjerke, 1997; Scott, 2003). This paradigm has produced the greatest amount of research and knowledge in the field of business and much of the entrepreneurial research completed thus far has been completed using this approach (Arbner & Bjerke, 1997). This large research base is primarily because the quantitative approach is the oldest method, is deeply rooted in western thinking, and because bureaucratic management theory is strongly focused on cause and effect relationships (Arbner & Bjerke, 1997; Gephart, 1999). In addition, administrative management styles have historically held the belief that the whole of the organization can be explained by the sum of its individual parts

and hence, the quantitative survey method provides an extremely valuable tool for analyzing data in cause and effect situations during management decision making (Cooper & Schindler, 2006).

Explanations in the quantitative, survey approach tends to take the form of casual relationships between variables which can be proved or disproved with statistical analysis methods (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Robson, 2002). This is why statistical analysis fits well within the framework of the quantitative survey method and provides a sound framework for hypothesis testing (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Robson, 2002). If the researcher chooses to validate or disprove existing theoretical relationships related to entrepreneurial success factors, this paradigmatic framework will definitely provide the most productive outcomes.

6.3. Actors Approach

Grounded in post-positivistic, qualitative research, the actors approach includes the qualitative phenomenological method. This approach consist of information that is dependent on the individual perceptions and interpretations of a subjective reality they have created (Arbnoor & Bjerke, 1997). Thus, the actors paradigm perceives reality as a manifestation of human intentionality which cannot be quantified like data that is attained in the quantitative methodology (Arbnoor & Bjerke, 1997). As mentioned earlier, the qualitative phenomenological method fits well into this research paradigm (Gephart, 1999; Robson, 2002). Thus when considering entrepreneurial success factors, the researcher may choose to go beyond the cause and effect construct to discover and uncover new observed or perceived relationships involving the nature of human existence, behavior, and entrepreneurial success.

6.4. Systems Approach

The systems approach lies between the analytical approach and the actors approach. According to Arbnoor and Bjerke (1997, "Systems reality is assumed to consist of components that are often mutually dependent on each other-which means they cannot be summed up...the constitution of these components brings about synergistic effects" (p. 65). Because the systems approach falls in the middle of the paradigm spectrum, researchers are equally likely to use either the quantitative survey method or the qualitative phenomenological method, or a combination of both which is called a mixed methodology (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Robson, 2002). This paradigmatic framework provides the greatest flexibility and allows the researcher to choose a combination of methodologies to study a research question.

7. Operative Paradigm Comparative Analysis

The three paradigmatic approaches previously discussed provide the focus, or “lens”, that a researcher uses in their study. The evaluation of entrepreneurial success factors revealed that many of the factors established in the contextual, diagnostic, evaluative, and strategic analysis frame of reference are specific to human experience and behavioral factors (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Additionally, the actors paradigmatic approach consists of information that is dependent on the individual perceptions and interpretations of a subjective reality which they have created (Arbnor & Bjerke, 1997). Hence, the actors approach encompasses the realm of human experience and behavior. Based upon the analysis of three operative paradigms, the actors paradigmatic approach is best aligned with the qualitative, phenomenological methodology in the study of entrepreneurial success factors. In addition, the systems-driven operative paradigm appears well suited for the qualitative, phenomenological methodology when internal unknown relationships exist between sub systems that need to be discovered. This is also true when the sub system interrelationships involve the realm of human experience and behavior. In addition, when the variables being studied are very difficult to frame at any given point in time and/or unknown as in new discovery, the qualitative, phenomenological method possesses tools to isolate these variables while the quantitative survey method requires that the variables be specifically identified, precisely framed, and easily comparable. The aforementioned facts present a reasonable argument for the use of the qualitative, phenomenological method of inquiry for researching human experiential and behaviorally driven variables such as entrepreneurial success factors.

8. Summary

The purpose of this paper is to determine whether the quantitative survey method or the qualitative, phenomenological method is a valid methodology for the study of entrepreneurial success factors. The research clearly demonstrates that a researcher’s selection of his or her research methodology must be based on the needs and demands of the particular study (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Accordingly, the researcher must match the demands and requirements of the research study with both the operative paradigm and the research methodology.

The analytical paradigm, which embraces the quantitative survey methodology, does in fact offer a clear cut method for validating or disproving existing theoretical relationships related to entrepreneurial success factors. Furthermore, the actors paradigm clearly embraces the qualitative, phenomenological method, and promotes the use of information that is dependent on the individual perceptions and interpretations of a subjective reality (Arbnor & Bjerke, 1997). Additionally, the system’s paradigm promotes flexibility and

allows the researcher to choose between several methodologies to form a mixed methodology in studying a research question. Thus, the actor's paradigm typically entails the research and analysis of variables involving human experience and behavior, whereas the systems paradigm occasionally encompasses these types of variables. In addition, both the actors and systems paradigm often deal with unknown and unidentified variables. In conclusion, a researcher considering either the actors approach or the systems paradigms under the aforementioned situational issues, will tend to favor the qualitative, phenomenological research methodology.

The first phase in the analysis addressed the importance of the research question in qualitative research. The research question is the foundation which initiates the selection process. The second phase of the analysis in the paper performs a comparison and contrast of the quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. In this analysis, each methodology manifested a clear and definitive framework for the investigation and analysis of entrepreneurial success factors. The third phase in the paper's analysis presented a framework for identifying and classifying entrepreneurial success factors within various dimensions that included contextual, diagnostic, evaluative, and strategic components (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). During this third phase a pattern was identified within the construct of entrepreneurial success factors. This pattern illustrated that a large majority of entrepreneurial success factors are specific to an entrepreneur's human experience and behavior. Hence, at this juncture of the analysis the qualitative, phenomenological methodology appeared to become a preferred methodology because it affords the researcher greater flexibility in researching human experience and behavior in addition to the discovery of new knowledge.

During the fourth phase of the analysis, the researcher chose one of three operative paradigms including analytical, actors, and systems approaches to study entrepreneurial success factors. The analytical approach offers a clear-cut construct for maintaining historical methods for validating or disproving existing theoretical relationships. Conversely, the actors approach promotes the use of information that is dependent on the individual perceptions and interpretations of a subjective reality which in this analysis includes the entrepreneur's experiences and behavior. Additionally, the system's approach promotes flexibility and allows the researcher to choose multiple methodologies when studying a research question. This phase of the analysis indicated that an actors approach which is grounded in systems theory is a viable alternative for studying entrepreneurial success factors.

As previously mentioned, the researcher's operative paradigm must align with the particular research methodology that he or she selects. The analysis concluded that the majority of entrepreneurial success factors are specific to human experience and behavior and thus, the operative paradigm selection that appears to be most aligned with this perspective is the actors operative paradigm

grounded in systems theory. This is true because the actors operative paradigm is specific to research that is dependent on individual perceptions and interpretations of a subjective reality that the entrepreneur has created (Arbnor & Bjerke, 1997; Conger, 1998; Hignett & Wilson, 2004; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994; Rolfe, 2006). These individual perceptions and interpretations of a subjective reality are highly interrelated with an entrepreneur's experiences and behaviors. Thus, the qualitative, phenomenological methodology combined with the actors operative paradigm affords the researcher tremendous potential to generate the richest and most robust data set in addition to providing the greatest potential for discovery leading to significant research outcomes. Moreover, the qualitative phenomenological method provides the researcher with greater flexibility in attaining rich and robust data and provides a better opportunity for the researcher to develop substantial research conclusions based on real world entrepreneurial experiences (Clark, 1998; Conger, 1998; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Munck, 1998). In conclusion, the post-positivist, qualitative, phenomenological research method provides the researcher with a viable methodology that is decidedly aligned with the study of entrepreneurial success factors. The findings suggest the qualitative, phenomenological methodology combined with an actor's paradigmatic approach that is sometimes grounded in systems theory is the best research plan for studying entrepreneurial success factors, particularly when the research question is primarily focused on the construct of discovery.

9. Recommendation for Additional Research

This article addresses the importance of gaining an understanding of the entrepreneur's human experience in entrepreneurship research through comparing and contrasting the quantitative survey methodology and the qualitative phenomenological methodology in order to determine which methodology is best aligned with a study of entrepreneurial success factors. The findings suggest the qualitative, phenomenological methodology combined with an actor's paradigmatic approach that is grounded in systems theory provides a thoroughly aligned research plan for studying entrepreneurial success factors. Recommendations for additional research are suggested in the following areas:

1. How the use of the qualitative, phenomenological methodology affects the overall understanding of entrepreneurship success factors?
2. Does the use of the qualitative, phenomenological methodology add value to the current research findings and strengthen the research conclusions?

3. The best processes for using the qualitative, phenomenological methodology for studying entrepreneurial success factors.

It is premised that each of the aforementioned research questions will add greater support to the argument for using the post-positivist, qualitative, phenomenological research method as the most viable methodology for studying entrepreneurial success factors. Certainly a greater understanding of entrepreneurial success factors is beneficial to anyone starting into business. This understanding provides the entrepreneur with a greater chance of success in his or her new venture and thus, creates the ultimate reasoning for this type of research.

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