

6-2017

# (Meta-)framing Strategic Entrepreneurship

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## Recommended Citation

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# **(Meta-)framing strategic entrepreneurship**

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## **Abstract**

In this essay, we seek to focus scholarly discourse on the conceptual identity, boundaries, and precision of strategic entrepreneurship as an organizational construct. To give a “face” to a construct, lines must be drawn, marking off what it encompasses and what it does not. We, thus, first frame and assess prior conceptualizations from a construct clarity perspective. Our intent here is not to exhaustively catalogue all the varied conceptualizations available, but rather to map the content domain of strategic entrepreneurship as a theoretical construct, illuminate points of convergence and divergence, and reveal potential blind spots and ambiguities in extant definitions. Then, we advance a meta-framework for stimulating discourse around the key construct parameters. We say “meta-framework” because we do not seek to offer a “silver bullet” but rather advance a core set of questions to view strategic entrepreneurship with greater clarity and precision. We conclude with a set of suggestions for guiding and stimulating future research.

## **Keywords**

Competitive actions, design and boundaries, governance, interface of strategic organization, organizational structure, strategic entrepreneurship, topics and perspectives

It has now been fifteen years since the term “strategic entrepreneurship” entered the popular lexicon of strategy and entrepreneurship scholars. Since its inception, research on strategic entrepreneurship has grown at a rapid pace (e.g., Ireland and Webb, 2009; Kuratko and Audretsch, 2009, 2013; Meyer et al. 2002). Today, we have a journal dedicated to strategic entrepreneurship, chaired positions at leading business schools, and even entire academic departments are embracing strategic entrepreneurship through various programs and courses. Broadly, strategic entrepreneurship has been defined as a firm’s ability to integrate entrepreneurial (i.e. opportunity-seeking) and strategic (i.e., advantage-seeking) perspectives when developing and taking actions (Hitt et al. 2001). In explaining firm performance, the combination of strategy and entrepreneurship can account for how firms create and renew competitive advantages and transform the dynamics of competition.

And yet, strategic entrepreneurship remains ill-defined and under-developed as a theoretical construct. Even as we readily acknowledge that strategy and entrepreneurship overlap in several ways, there is far less clarity around what constitutes the core features and distinctive identity of strategic entrepreneurship. Simply put, *what do we gain by considering the two domains in concert rather than independently?* Because the constituent dimensions of strategic entrepreneurship are so encompassing, it is very difficult to establish boundary conditions and set clear guidelines for identifying the presence or absence of strategic entrepreneurship—limiting the usefulness of the concept. Additionally, over the years, the concept has drifted and acquired surplus meaning – moving “beyond the parameters of its original intended definition” (Suddaby, 2010: 348).

In this essay, we seek to focus scholarly discourse on the conceptual identity, boundaries, and precision of strategic entrepreneurship as an organizational construct. To give a “face” to a construct, lines must be drawn, marking off what it encompasses and

what it does not. We, thus, first frame and assess prior conceptualizations from a construct clarity perspective. Our intent here is not to exhaustively catalogue all the varied conceptualizations available, but rather to burrow the content domain of strategic entrepreneurship as a theoretical construct, illuminate points of convergence and divergence, and reveal potential blind spots and ambiguities in extant definitions. Then, we advance a meta-framework for stimulating discourse around the key construct parameters. We say “meta-framework” because we do not seek to offer a “silver bullet” but rather advance a core set of questions to view strategic entrepreneurship with greater clarity and precision. We conclude with a set of suggestions for guiding and stimulating future research.

### **Construct Clarity of Strategic Entrepreneurship**

We performed a systematic review of strategic entrepreneurship definitions by searching for articles using the keyword “strategic entrepreneurship” within the title, keyword and abstract fields in the Web of Science and Scopus databases with no date restrictions. Of the 192 unique articles that included strategic entrepreneurship in the title, abstract or keywords, we found that 44 articles defined strategic entrepreneurship as an organizational construct. Many of the other 148 articles viewed strategic entrepreneurship not as a *construct*, but rather as a broader *perspective* (e.g., Meyer et al. 2002), or merely as a label for a disparate set of *phenomena* such as corporate entrepreneurship (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996), or strategic renewal (Floyd and Lane, 2000). Conceptualizing strategic entrepreneurship as a specific construct rather than a perspective or set of phenomena offers the benefits of building specific theory and evidence. Without a clear construct serving as a “center of gravity,” strategic entrepreneurship research is likely to remain fragmented. Indeed, a key reason why strategic entrepreneurship has acquired surplus meaning and

become reified is its inconsistent usages. As such, our focus in this essay is on clarifying strategic entrepreneurship as an organizational construct.

To assess the clarity of strategic entrepreneurship and verify whether the construct is well-formed, we applied the four criteria outlined by Suddaby (2010). First, the definition should effectively capture the “essential properties and characteristics of the concept or phenomena under consideration” (p. 347). Good definitions are parsimonious and eschew tautology and circularity by avoiding the inclusion of antecedents and outcomes in the definition. Second, good definitions specify scope conditions; the temporal, spatial, and contextual circumstances in which a construct will or will not apply. As part of scope conditions, the level of analysis at which a construct operates and applies is specified. Third, clear constructs explicate semantic relationships, particularly with other constructs that form part of the same process, or with other related concepts within the nomological network. Finally, clear constructs are coherent, meaning that the “construct, its definition, and its relationship to other constructs must all make sense” or “hang together” (Suddaby, 2010: 351). In the case of multi-dimensional constructs (Law et al. 1998), this involves specifying the conceptual relations among the dimensions and between the dimensions and the construct. We assess the available strategic entrepreneurship definitions using these four criteria and provide a summary of the most unique and/or impactful articles in Table 1.

*--Insert Table 1 about here--*

***Definitional clarity:*** From the definitions in Table 1, strategic entrepreneurship has been consistently defined as the combination/integration of advantage-seeking and opportunity-seeking behaviors. In broad strokes, advantage-seeking behavior is concerned with extending and deepening a firm’s existing competitive advantage whereas opportunity-seeking behavior is concerned with recognizing and developing opportunities for new sources of competitive advantage (Ireland et al., 2003). But what exactly are advantage- and

opportunity-seeking behaviors? How can firms be meaningfully arrayed along these dimensions? And how, where, and when does the integration and combination of these dimensions take place? In this respect, a fundamental ambiguity exists as to whether strategic entrepreneurship requires that firms achieve high levels on both dimensions or whether it can exist when both are maximized within a given timeframe.

*Scope conditions:* One of the more vexing issues in defining strategic entrepreneurship is the absence of scope conditions that specify the unit of analysis and boundaries of strategic entrepreneurship. In terms of unit of analysis, strategic entrepreneurship has been described as a set of behaviors (e.g., Kuratko and Audretsch, 2009), actions (e.g., Kotha, 2010), processes (Bratnicki and Zabkowska, 2009), cognitions (e.g., Kraus et al. 2011), or decisions (e.g., Boone et al. 2013). So, what is strategic entrepreneurship, and where does it reside? While some definitions focus on actions as the unit of analysis, it is not clear whether strategic entrepreneurship is a single action, a repertoire of actions, or a decision-making process on a coordinated set of actions.

With respect to boundary conditions, the temporal and spatial properties of strategic entrepreneurship have also remained inadequately defined. Does a firm need to engage in high levels of strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions simultaneously to qualify as exhibiting “strategic entrepreneurship”? Or does strategic entrepreneurship relate to the ability of the firm to sequence and vacillate seamlessly between strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions? While most definitions refer to the simultaneous pursuit of advantage- and opportunity-seeking behaviors, it is not clear whether simultaneity is a boundary condition. From a spatial perspective, it is also not clear whether strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions must be co-located within the boundaries of the firm, or whether strategic entrepreneurship applies to instances where these dimensions are spread across different governance modes. Perhaps of even greater significance, extant definitions

have not specified at what level of analysis the integration of strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions takes place. Without greater clarity around these key scope conditions, the concept can be stretched to describe nearly any situation in which strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions interface, irrespective of how, when, or in what form.

***Semantic relationships:*** Another threat to the construct clarity of strategic entrepreneurship is the unclear semantic relations with other constructs within its nomological network, such as corporate entrepreneurship, strategic renewal, and entrepreneurial orientation. While there has been some reference to these concepts, there is very little consistency or consensus in their semantic relatedness. Consequently, the unique identity, distinctive contribution, and predictive empirical validity of strategic entrepreneurship vis-à-vis these other related constructs remains unclear. Should strategic entrepreneurship be treated as a distinct concept, separate from these other constructs? Or is strategic entrepreneurship an umbrella concept within which all these other constructs can be potentially subsumed, and why?

***Coherence:*** Finally, scholars have yet to establish how the advantage and opportunity dimensions of strategic entrepreneurship relate to one another and to the overall concept and whether the overall concept is greater than the sum of its parts. As a multidimensional construct, what is the relationship between strategic entrepreneurship and its dimensions? Does it exist at the same level of its dimensions, and if so can its dimensions be algebraically combined to form an overall representation of the construct (Law et al., 2008)? Of even greater significance, what exactly arises from the combination of strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions? Does the whole exceed the sum of the parts? Suddaby (2010: 351) suggests that umbrella constructs, like strategic entrepreneurship, should retain “an overall coherence or consistency that is more than the sum of its individual parts.” In effect, what information do we gain by considering strategic and

entrepreneurial dimensions jointly that cannot be explained by each alone? And what opportunities do we miss by combining them?

### **Meta-Framing Strategic Entrepreneurship**

We build from the above assessment to “meta-frame” strategic entrepreneurship around the key decision points needed to advance the development of clearer constructs. We take for granted that strategic entrepreneurship can be described using strategic and entrepreneurial sub-dimensions, even though this point is not universally agreed upon (cf. Meyer et al., 2002). Given this assumption, our questions include: *What is the strategic dimension of strategic entrepreneurship? What are its underlying parameters? What is the entrepreneurial dimension of strategic entrepreneurship? What are its underlying parameters?* With these set out, we are then able to ask – *what is the appropriate unit of analysis at which strategic entrepreneurship should be conceptualized?* Defining strategic entrepreneurship also requires specifying *how*, *where*, and *when* the integration of strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions take place. Below we clarify each decisional issue and summarize the meta-framing in Figure 1.

***--Insert Figure 1 about here--***

***What is strategic? What are its key parameters? What is not strategic?*** To Hitt et al. (2001: 2), strategic actions are “those through which companies develop and exploit current competitive advantages.” While the definition does not provide a firm description of all relevant dimensions, it provides insight into how scholars could qualify and anchor the “strategic” dimension. One possible feature that scholars might consider is whether actions and processes are focused on the pursuit of competitive advantage— either short-term, transient or long-term, sustainable. This would limit “strategic” behaviors to those that are designed to build, extend, or replicate a competitive advantage; with actions outside of this purview being deemed non-strategic or tactical. This is consistent with how Hitt and



colleagues (2001; 2011) envisioned the concept of strategic entrepreneurship. They suggested that entrepreneurial action from a “strategic perspective is helpful to identify the most appropriate opportunities to exploit and then facilitate the exploitation to establish competitive advantage.” Thus, actions not associated with building a firm’s competitive advantage would appear to fall outside the purview of strategic entrepreneurship.

A second possibility relates to the level of resource commitments entailed. Strategic actions are commonly defined as those actions that involve large commitments of resources that are difficult to implement and reverse. Thus, the notion of “strategic” might signify the level of commitment a firm makes in developing a strategic position or in pursuing an initiative. However, a limitation of this approach is that firms often place multiple strategic bets or “real options” particularly under conditions of uncertainty. Under such conditions, flexibility is the hallmark of strategy (Ghemawat and DeSol, 1998).

A third approach would be to define “strategic” behavior as those activities that are “central” to the firm’s strategic intent, or particular “winning aspirations.” Because strategic behaviors are generally founded upon and guided by a strategic intent that “envisions a desired leadership position and established the criterion the organization will use to chart its progress” (Hamel and Prahalad, 1989: 64), the presence of an underlying strategic intent might be a third potential basis for defining “strategic”. It is certainly hard to conceive of actions as “strategic” in the absence of a pre-meditated strategic intent.

While there are other possible approaches, we believe the above points provide an initial basis for drawing scope conditions and specifying the parameters on which firms can be arrayed on the strategic dimension. Specifically, actions, cognitions, or behaviors that are not focused upon competitive advantage, involve few if any high-stakes commitments, and that are peripheral to the strategic intent of the firm are unlikely to be qualified as “strategic”, and would naturally fall outside of the domain of strategic entrepreneurship. In

defining the parameters along which firms might be arrayed on the strategic dimension, the horizon of advantage focus might be a particularly useful frame of reference. In other words, strategic actions can vary in whether the focus is creating a short-run advantage through positioning or longer-run actions designed to build a long-run advantage.

*What is entrepreneurial? What are its key parameters? What is not entrepreneurial?* While strategy is concerned with the mechanisms of value capture, the entrepreneurial dimension is concerned with creating new forms of value through the creation of new products, firms, and markets (Sarasvathy and Venkataraman, 2001). To Hitt and colleagues (2001: 2), entrepreneurial actions are “actions through which companies identify and then seek to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities rivals have not noticed or fully exploited.” One possibility, thus, is to leverage the idea that entrepreneurial opportunities differ from other opportunities because they relate to the discovery or creation of new means-end relationships (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). As Eckhardt and Shane (2003: 336) explain, the creation of new means-ends relationships is a “crucial part of the difference between entrepreneurial opportunities and situations in which profit can be generated by optimizing within previously established means-ends frameworks.” In effect, the pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunities is concerned with the creation of new forms of economic value rather than refining or altering existing sources of value (Eckhardt and Shane, 2003) – either through a problem-solving process (Hsieh et al. 2007), or an iterative creative process shaped by contextual and social influences (Dimov, 2007). Examined this way, the essence of this dimension is the creation of novel means-ends connections to generate new economic value, such as new products, markets, supply and distribution channels, and/or business and management models. Actions that do not involve the discovery of new means-end relationships are unlikely to be deemed as “entrepreneurial”, and would fall outside of the definition of strategic entrepreneurship.

With these scope conditions in mind, what are the key parameters upon which firms might be arrayed on the entrepreneurial dimension? A fundamental and enduring distinction is whether the pursuit of opportunities drive the market towards or away from equilibrium (Kirzner, 1999; Schumpeter, 1934). For Schumpeter (1934), the essence of opportunity seeking behavior is the ability to break away from routine, to destroy existing structures, and to move the system away from the even, give-take flow of equilibrium. A disequilibrating opportunity involves creatively destructing the status quo by introducing radical products that challenge industry standards, business models, and conventions, thus reshaping market dynamics. Conversely, for Kirzner, the opportunity underlying an entrepreneurial action does not disturb any existing or prospective states of equilibrium, but instead is driving the process of equilibrium. The critical feature of opportunity-seeking behaviors from Kirzner's perspective is the ability to identify market discrepancies and move towards their systematic exploitation (Kirzner, 1999). In both cases, new means-ends relationships are discovered (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000), but their implications for market structure and associated competitive dynamics will differ. Thus, the nature of the entrepreneurial opportunity and associated market process can serve as the conceptual anchors for specifying the entrepreneurial dimension.

***What is the relevant unit of analysis?*** So far, we have spoken about “strategic” and “entrepreneurial” dimensions of strategic entrepreneurship without specifying the specific forms in which these dimensions are manifest. Based on our review of the literature, we suggest three potential forms of analysis: *actions*, *cognitions*, and *capabilities*.

First, the strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions may be manifest in competitive actions. Defined as “externally directed, specific, and observable competitive moves initiated by a firm to enhance its relative competitive position” (Smith et al. 2001: 321), actions represent the smallest and most irreducible unit of analysis in explaining strategic

behavior (Grimm et al. 2006). A focus on actions provides a tangible basis for operationalizing strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions.

Strategic entrepreneurship could also be associated with the cognitions and cognitive processes that underlie firm activity. Before a strategic or entrepreneurial action is enacted, it is first created in the form of a frame or representation – usually the mental model, or “dominant logic” of a senior manager. Or as Sarasvathy and Venkataraman (2001: 7) explain: “before there are products and firms, there is human imagination; and before there are markets, there are human aspirations.” Because many actions never materialize, taking cognitions as the unit of analysis provides additional leverage, by focusing on the mental models by which leaders make decisions concerning actions (Mitchell et al. 2004).

Strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions might also be considered as a specific set of capabilities. Entrepreneurial capabilities have been defined as the “ability to identify and acquire the necessary resources to act upon opportunities identified in the market, or to create new market opportunities” (Karra et al. 2008: 443). Similarly, strategic capabilities might reflect the ability of firms to “pool their various business, functional, and personal expertise to make the choices that shape the major strategic moves of the firm” (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000: 1107). Thus, in each case, the strategic entrepreneurial dimensions may represent sets of capabilities—on the entrepreneurial side for the search, discovery, creation, and exploitation of new means-ends opportunities, and on the strategic side for decision-making, positioning, and execution.

***Where does the integration of strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions take place?***

Most definitions begin with the assumption that strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions are harmonically integrated in some form somehow in somewhere. But the question of precisely *where* integration takes place is neither straightforward nor clear cut. Does the integration take place at the level of the specific action, cognition, or capability? Or does

integration take place at the firm level, where disparate strategic and entrepreneurial actions, cognitions, and capabilities are orchestrated and combined across units by administrative fiat or through some distinct mechanisms of the organizational context? If so, through which mechanisms, and who is ultimately responsible for the integration? While the primary responsibility for mobilizing, orchestrating, and fusing strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions almost certainly lies with the top management team (Simsek et al., 2015), other groups such as middle managers often serve as the lynchpin between strategic and entrepreneurial activities (Floyd and Lane, 2000). Greater attention as to where and at what level strategic entrepreneurship resides should inform whether strategic entrepreneurship should be studied as a firm-level phenomena or as micro phenomena within the firm. This naturally raises questions around the micro-foundations of strategic entrepreneurship, as well as the mechanisms by which strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions are formulated, emerge, and coalesce.

***When does the integration of strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions take place?***

While some definitions stipulate that strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions are pursued simultaneously, it remains an open question of whether they are combined concurrently, reciprocally, sequentially, or spatially. To a certain extent the question of timing and location will depend on the locus of integration – whether at the firm level, or at a lower level of analysis. If the locus of integration is the action, process, cognition, or capability, then the condition of simultaneity is almost certainly a given. For example, for an action to be deemed as “strategic entrepreneurial” it must possess both strategic and entrepreneurial properties. If the locus of integration occurs at the firm level, then it is possible that firms may exhibit strategic entrepreneurship by engaging in a sequencing, separation, or temporally cycling of actions, processes, cognitions, or capabilities. Indeed, ambidexterity researchers have suggested that sequencing provides an alternative combinatory

mechanism that may “alleviate some of the resource and administrative constraints of a simultaneous approach” (Simsek et al., 2009: 882).

*How do strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions become integrated? What results from their integration?* As discussed earlier under the condition of definitional coherence (Suddaby, 2010), an important issue is whether strategic entrepreneurship is construed as a latent, aggregate, or profile model. In a latent model, multidimensional constructs are higher-order abstractions manifested in observable dimensions. Because the direction of causality flows from the construct to its dimensions, latent constructs are often modelled as the “common factor underlying their dimensions” (Law et al. 2008: 750). For this reason, a latent model is not especially appropriate since extant definitions suggest that strategic entrepreneurship arises from the combination of strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions, rather than the other way around. Rather, we expect that strategic entrepreneurship likely exists at the same level as its dimensions and therefore the question becomes whether the dimensions can be combined algebraically (aggregate model) or not (profile model). With an aggregate model, strategic entrepreneurship would be conceived as arising from a linear combination of its dimensions. By contrast, a profile model allows for a more flexible specification because each manifestation is “interpreted as various profiles formed by pairing the characteristics of different dimensions” (Law et al., 1998: 743). While the aggregate and profile models are both arguably applicable, a profile model can better capture the “mosaic” of different forms and patterns that could arise from the combination of strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions. By way of illustration, if we were to define the strategic dimension in terms of the horizon of a firm’s competitive advantage (i.e., short versus long-run advantage horizon), and the entrepreneurial dimension in terms of the market process (i.e., equilibrating versus dis-equilibrating), we could envision at least four distinct profiles of strategic entrepreneurship.

*How does strategic entrepreneurship differ from other, related constructs in its nomological network?* Finally, we consider the question of how strategic entrepreneurship differs from other related concepts within its nomological network such as corporate entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial orientation. We believe that the unique distinguishing characteristic is that strategic entrepreneurship, whether described as an action, cognition, or capability, encompasses *both* strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions and that these elements become integrated or fused to varying extents. By contrast, corporate entrepreneurship describes a series of entrepreneurial activities, including innovation, venturing and strategic renewal, under the skin of an established firm (Zahra, 1996). Relatedly, entrepreneurial orientation describes the “processes, practices, and decision-making activities that lead to new entry” (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996: 136). We submit that the overlap between corporate entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial orientation and strategic entrepreneurship exists only to the extent to which these phenomena are focused on creating and/or maintaining competitive advantage *through* exploiting opportunities for new means-ends relationships. Because corporate entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation often exist outside a firm’s competitive advantage, they do not necessarily always entail a strategic dimension. Most critically, neither concept involves the integration or fusion of strategic and entrepreneurial dimensions.

### **Conclusion – Charting a New Direction**

The preceding discussion begs the question: what directions and next steps should researchers take to exploit the full potential of strategic entrepreneurship as an organizational construct? An immediate priority is to consolidate progress around a definition that provides a common frame of reference for describing, explaining, and measuring strategic entrepreneurship. While there are several alternative approaches for characterizing strategic entrepreneurship, a common theme across many definitions seems to

be that a firm's specific actions may constitute the fundamental unit of analysis (Hitt et al. 2001). We would add that because cognitions, processes and capabilities must ultimately manifest as specific actions, individually or in combination, to impact firm performance, strategic entrepreneurship can initially be defined as the *specific and observable actions, as well as action repertoires that embody opportunity-seeking and advantage-seeking behaviors with the intent of creating and capturing value.*

Using this definition, an important step is to begin to investigate potential profiles of strategic entrepreneurship based on the juxtaposition of advantage-seeking and opportunity-seeking dimensions. A fundamental distinction for advantage-seeking actions is between those designed to create long-term value for the firm, and actions needed in the short-term to survive and respond to ongoing competitive imperatives (Marginson and McAulay, 2008). As previously discussed, opportunity –seeking behaviors can be classified as those actions that drive the market towards, or away from equilibrium. Juxtaposing these dimensions (or some variant of them) would generate a profile model that provides varying manifestations of the strategic entrepreneurship construct. Importantly, these profile distinctions would also provide boundary conditions that may advance the explanatory and predictive power of the theories applied to the strategic entrepreneurship construct.

Beyond profiling the manifestations of strategic entrepreneurship, we call for greater attention to the mechanisms by which strategic and entrepreneurial actions are integrated, including an explanation of when, where, and how they are integrated. Until there is greater specification of the integration parameters, we fear that strategic entrepreneurship will not be taken seriously by scholars and/or practitioners. At the action unit of analysis, case studies and grounded theory could yield micro-level insight into how strategic and entrepreneurial intentions, decision-making processes, cognitions and capabilities fuse and coalesce into actions. It will also be important to examine the historical origins of these



mechanisms. Historical accounts of how strategic and entrepreneurial actions are separated, sequenced, and ultimately combined would be a productive research direction. Future research into how the attributes and activities of leaders at different levels shape and negotiate strategic and entrepreneurial imperatives might yield additional insights into how such actions germinate and survive.

Finally, moving from the abstract theoretical to the observable empirical universe of strategic entrepreneurship will require the development of operational measures and indicators. We cannot know whether strategic entrepreneurship is “worth the candle” until it has demonstrated predictive validity in explaining outcomes. Initially, we believe that an archival rather than survey approach may be needed to demonstrate whether strategic entrepreneurship holds empirical traction. Like in competitive dynamics research, a structured content analysis of firm’s actions could provide a useful methodological foundation (Ndofor et al., 2015; Pacheco and Dean, 2015). In this respect, we believe that a first step is to develop ‘marker’ or ‘indicator’ variables to signify the presence of each action type. These marker variables can be used to guide structured content analysis of a firm’s actions over time – perhaps by developing a coding scheme using keywords to classify actions as documented in newspapers, trade magazines, and social media.

Our aim in this essay has been to focus and revitalize the scholarly conversation on the distinctive identity of strategic entrepreneurship as an organizational construct. Rather than offer a singular specification of what falls within and outside its conceptual purview, we framed extant definitions from a construct clarity perspective. We then offered a meta-framework to discuss the key issues scholars need to consider to better define strategic entrepreneurship. We then speculated that strategic entrepreneurship may be better viewed as an umbrella, profile concept of the various ways in which strategic and entrepreneurial actions, cognitions and capabilities are combined—both within and across firms.

Irrespective of how it is measured or studied, defining strategic entrepreneurship using a profile approach can provide the necessary foundation for scholars to approach the concept with greater clarity and precision. Ultimately, we hope that by meta-framing extant definitions, we have charted a visible path for getting away from high-level discussions towards specific constructs with identifiable dimensions to anchor a research agenda on strategic entrepreneurship.

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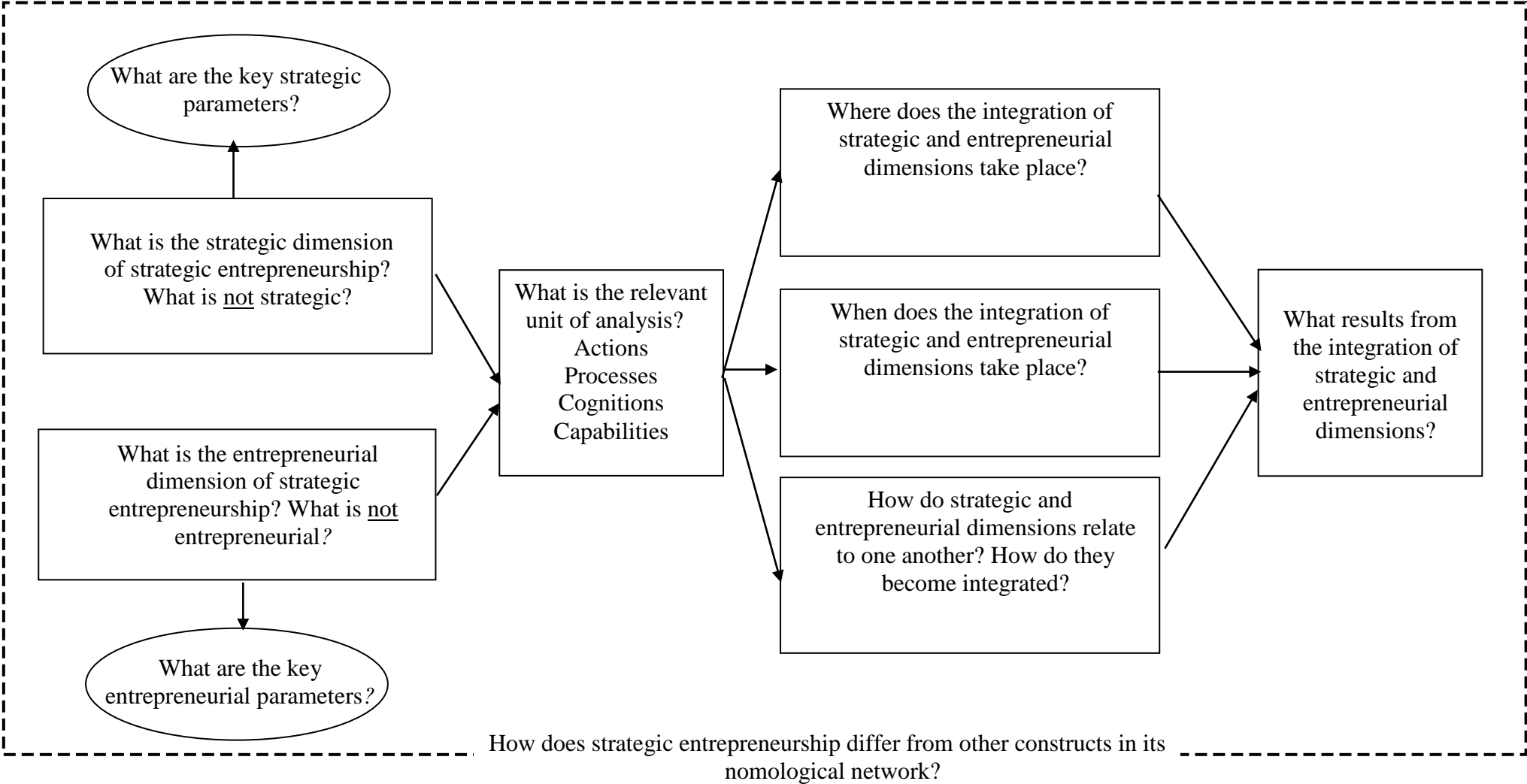
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**Figure 1**  
 A Framework for Defining Strategic Entrepreneurship



**TABLE 1**  
**Construct Clarity Assessment for Strategic Entrepreneurship Conceptualizations**

Citation	Definition / Conceptualization	Construct Clarity Assessment					
		I. Definitional Clarity	II. Scope Conditions		III. Semantic Relations		IV. Coherence
		(specificity, economy, accurate yet general classifications, non-tautology)	Locus of Construct (temporal, causal, and hierarchical placement)	Boundaries (space, time, level, world views)	Construct Sub-dimensions (prior constructs and categories relied upon)	Relationships with Other Constructs (to prior work, other constructs, causal processes)	(consistency among dimensions and overall assessment)
Hitt, Ireland, Camp, and Sexton (2001)  WoS Citations: 355	Strategic entrepreneurship is the integration of entrepreneurial (i.e. opportunity seeking behavior) and strategic (i.e. advantage seeking) perspectives in developing and taking actions designed to create wealth (p. 481)	A perspective that drives actions, which are the indicators	Behaviors, actions	Definition is firmly at the firm level, strategy and entrepreneurship co-exist rather than compete	External networks, resources and organizational learning, innovation, and internationalization	The dimensions are domains where the integration of strategy and entrepreneurship manifests	Provides domains of integration rather than dimensions of action
Ireland, Hitt, and Sirmon (2003)  WoS Citations: 346	Strategic entrepreneurship involves simultaneous opportunity seeking and advantage seeking behaviors and results in superior performance (p. 963)	Definition includes its outcome, superior performance - not clear as to whether this is synonymous with competitive advantage	Behaviors and cognitions	Simultaneous performance of two behavior types by an organization, through a specific temporal sequencing of activities by a firm	Entrepreneurial mindset, entrepreneurial culture and leadership, strategic resource management, developing innovation	Within construct the strategy and entrepreneurship elements alternate in sequence, across constructs the outcome "passes through" competitive advantage	Seminal description of the construct, and ties the advantage and opportunity seeking dimensions to specific firm behaviors
Ireland and Webb (2007)  WoS Citations: 67	Strategic entrepreneurship (SE) is a term used to capture firms' efforts to simultaneously exploit today's competitive advantages while exploring for the innovations that will be the foundation for tomorrow's competitive advantages. p. 50)	Value creation specifically defined as competitive advantage	Practices	SE is the simultaneous temporal pursuit of exploration and exploitation through specific action sets	Exploration / exploitation	Outperformance of competitors is brought front and center versus value creation	Competitive advantage may be too central in this conceptualization to be a separate construct with predictive validity
Schindehutte and Morris (2009)  WoS Citations: 31	SE is not "strategy that is entrepreneurial" or "entrepreneurship that is strategic" or "entrepreneurship plus strategy"—it is not a binary construct. Viewing SE through the lens of complexity science provides an explanation of why intersections of strategy or entrepreneurship with other disciplines lead to transformations that are beyond simple interfaces [...] (p. 267)	The structure of the opportunity space is the object or construct of interest, and SE is conceptualized as the discipline to understand and explain it	Meta-stable opportunity space	SE is bounded to the "in-between" space between levels and for processes that are both cause and consequence of change	Form, flow, function	As a perspective, there are several different variables that interact with the family of focal SE constructs and processes	Helps to reconfigure the conversation around SE as a new paradigm for evaluating the opportunity space rather than the performance of a combination of specific activities
Mathews (2010)	[SE is] the activity that drives the economy in new directions, through recombination of resources, activities, and routines by firms and the entrepreneur as the economic agent who in	Focus in on activity recombination rather than on specific entrepreneurial and / or	Activities	Abstracts the concept of SE beyond the firm to the level of society; contextualized by	Not explicitly defined, but appears to be resources, activities and routines consisting of an	Considers the role of the entrepreneur in directing and locating resources that are not	SE travels from the firm level to higher levels of analysis, with the focus shifting to activity



WoS Citations: 10	principle lacks resources (but knows where to find them) (p. 224)	strategic activities		routines and activity systems	entrepreneurial action and a strategic goal	available	recombination rather than specific strategic or entrepreneurial activities
Lumpkin Steier and Wright (2011)  WoS Citations: 14	In developing our conceptual framework, we first highlight the input-process-output nature of strategic entrepreneurship. Of course, our framework is consistent with the 'systems' logic of most input-output models in that it assumes the various causal factors are interconnected. (p. 286)	Strategic entrepreneurship is recast as an input-process-output model, rather than a construct	Various processes	Model implicitly argues for a firm level of analysis, no specification of time	Orchestrating resources, creating economic value, and creating socioemotional wealth	Family business contexts are argued to have a significant influence on the relative importance and functioning of these different processes	Based on I-P-O framework
Hitt, Ireland, Sirmon and Trahms (2011)  WoS Citations: 43	SE is concerned with advantage-seeking and opportunity-seeking behaviors resulting in value for individuals, organizations, and/or society. This means that SE involves actions taken to exploit current advantages while concurrently exploring new opportunities that sustain an entity's ability to create value across time (p. 57)	Definition includes its outcome, value creation	Behaviors, actions	SE is the simultaneous temporal pursuit of exploration and exploitation	Exploration / exploitation and advantage / opportunity seeking	Implications now affect multiple levels of analysis, not just the firm	Takes SE and ties the construct to outcomes at multiple levels, rather than firm level only
Kraus, Kauranen, and Reschke (2011)  Google Scholar Citations: 70	SE has been introduced to capture a firm's effort to simultaneously exploit existing competitive advantages while exploring what needs to be done in the future to remain successful. SE can be deemed as the intersection between entrepreneurship and strategic management. The identification and exploitation of new opportunities is the essence of entrepreneurship; the essence of strategic management is in how opportunities can be transformed into sustainable competitive advantages (p. 59)	Strategy and entrepreneurship are separate activities that need to be combined, definition implies that for any one sequence it is entrepreneurship first, strategy second but not a linear process in general	Complex configuration of mindsets and activities	Dimensions of SE are at various levels, including the individual entrepreneur, firm level resources and structures, and environmental conditions	Resources, capabilities, strategy, the entrepreneur, the environment, and organizational structure	Concentrates more heavily on the antecedents to SE than other conceptualizations, and allows for more within-construct interplay	Considers the multi-level antecedents that foster the development and expression of SE
Bjornskov and Foss (2013)  WoS Citations: 13	Such processes are located in strategic entrepreneurship broadly conceived; that is, in the actions of enterprising individuals and firms that seek to turn opportunities into longer-lived rent streams whether through founding start-up firms or reshuffling the resource combinations of established firms in the pursuit of new strategies (p. 52)	Provides specificity to firm objectives - presumes pre-existing opportunities	Actions	Bounded by rent duration, available opportunities, generalizes from individuals to firms	External venturing and strategic renewal	Definition rooted in economic constructs such as rent and entrepreneurial individuals	Potentially provides the missing aggregation link between strategic entrepreneurship and firm performance (duration and magnitude of rents)
Kuratko and Audretsch (2013)  WoS Citations: 14	A second major category of corporate entrepreneurship is referred to as strategic entrepreneurship which involves simultaneous opportunity-seeking and advantage seeking behaviors (Ireland et al. 2003a). Kuratko and Audretsch (2009) point out the innovations that are the focal points of strategic entrepreneurship initiatives represent the means through which opportunity is capitalized upon (p. 331)	Strategic entrepreneurship approaches exhibit large-scale or otherwise highly consequential innovations adopted in pursuit of competitive advantage	Innovations	Firm level, but can happen at all levels of the organization; and these innovations are both opportunity and advantage seeking	Fundamentally different from past firm strategies or differentiated from industry rivals; with five forms: strategic renewal, sustained regeneration, domain redefinition, organizational rejuvenation, and business model reconstruction	SE is considered to be a part of a broader class of CE	Multiple different conceptualizations are put forth at once, a synthesis is not really achieved but the true aim of the paper is to understand CE rather than SE

