

THE RESEARCHERS' PROPOSALS: WHAT IS THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION? ¹

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Abstract:

After the appearing of the EO construct (Entrepreneurship Orientation EO) various conceptualizations and accompanying measurements were developed. The problem for both theoreticians and practitioners, is concentration of the research results with such dispersed operating achievements of EO. This paper addresses to these problems and needs. The aim of the article is to identify the architecture of EO and the usefulness of particular dimensions of entrepreneurship orientation of the entrepreneurship research. The specialist literature referring to the interpretation of the concept of entrepreneurship orientation as well as the overview of the components of EO allowed recognition of EO as the multidimensional construct. The construct which requires the aggregation of one-dimensions together as a whole. The existing diversity and multiplicity of dimensions of EO implicate following subsequent empirical researches. It leads to the problem of choosing one of the existing conceptualizations or developing your own conceptualization. There is no universal EO measurements instrument, which could be used for every organization or industry branch. It means that every time the researches are facing the problem of determining individual EO measurements and their subsequent aggregation. The essence of the individual measurements of EO was identified as well as the arguments which were used by the researches to include/exclude the partial (detailed) measurements to/from an aggregated form of EO. It was also determined that partial EO measurements can provide individual evaluation criteria. Testing EO as the aggregate concludes as gathering individual evaluation criteria into a whole. Whereas different dimensions of EO may occur in different combinations.

Keywords: entrepreneurship orientation, innovativeness, autonomy, risk taking, proactiveness

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the considerations on entrepreneurship orientation (EO) and its results have become a really popular topic of the discussions among researchers and practitioners. The findings of the researchers clearly indicate that both EO as an aggregate, as well as, as each of its dimensions separately is positively correlated with the results of the company especially in the long term context. However, despite further scientific researches in the domain of EO, a universal definition of the EO construct has not been developed yet. The disclosed multiplicity of EO definitions in scientific researches is the result of different uses of the EO construct by the researchers. Therefore, the aim of the article is to identify the architecture of EO and the usefulness of particular dimensions of entrepreneurship orientation of the entrepreneurship research.

This issue is important because of its implications for the operationalisation of that construct by other researchers. They can adapt one of the existing conceptualizations – the one they assume is the proper one according to the research process, or they can create their own EO definitions and their measurement tools on their bases.

The conceptualization and operationalisation of the constructs are crucial stages in every research procedure. They enable the researchers not only to present the results of their own researches, or to mutually compare the results and conclusions of their own empirical researches, but they also outline the direction for further researches. For the practitioners the recognition of the architecture of EO is important because it helps to deepen their knowledge on how to duplicate their competitive advantage and improve business results. This is the reason why in the management studies the considerations on the determinants of the effectiveness of the company are so interesting. EO can be indicated as one of them. On the one hand, achieving the aim of this article encourages not only the understanding the phenomenon of EO on its organizational level. On the other hand, meta-analysis enabled to determine the frequency of the usage in empirical researches of uni- and multidimensional conceptualization of EO construct.

2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP ORIENTATION – THE CONCEPTS AND DIMENSIONS

EO has become a central concept in the domain of entrepreneurship that has received a substantial amount of theoretical and empirical attention (Covin, Green, & Slevin, 2006). The construct of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) has been examined in a large stream of research. EO has become a central concept in the domain of entrepreneurship that has received a considerable amount of theoretical and empirical attention (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin & Frese, 2009).

The construct of EO originates from Miller's (1983) work, in which entrepreneurial firms are defined as "those that are geared towards innovation in the product-market field by carrying out risky initiatives, and which are the first to develop innovations in a proactive way in an attempt to defeat their competitors" (Miller, 1983, p. 771). EO can be viewed as a characteristic of organizations, which can be measured by looking at top management's entrepreneurial style, as evidenced by the firms' strategic decisions and operating management philosophy (Vij & Bedi, 2012).

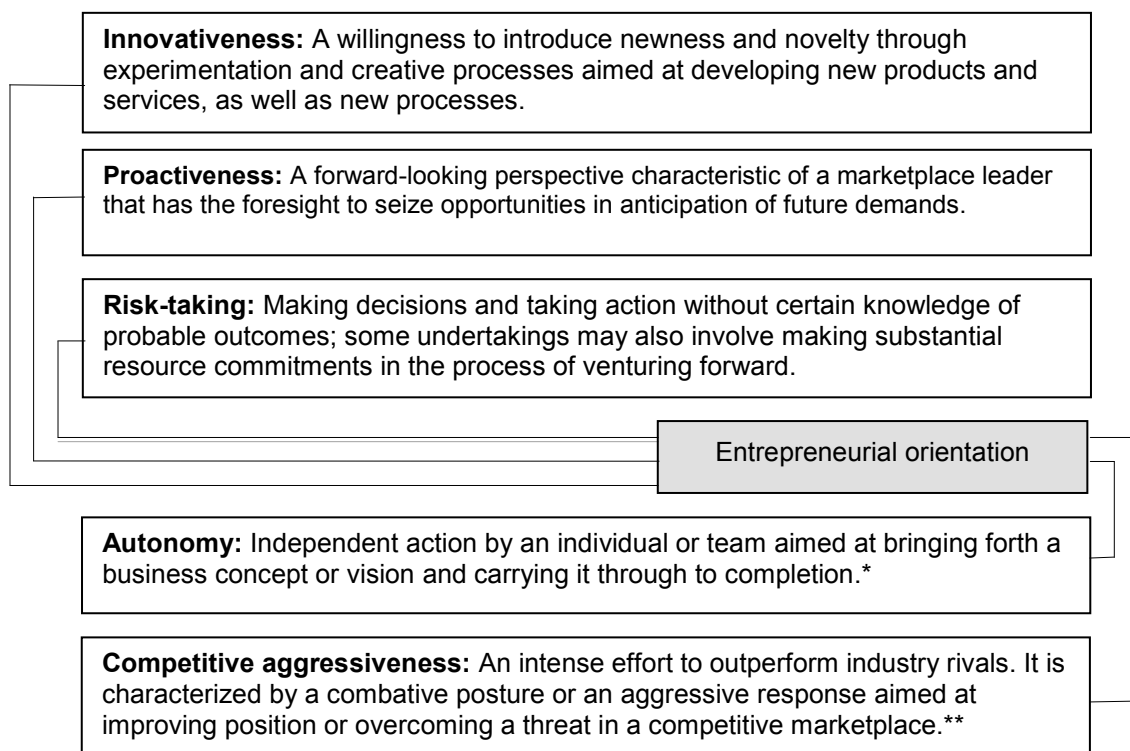
Further, Miller clarified that entrepreneurial orientation encompassed a process or a way in which entrepreneurs behave in creating their "new entries"– such as: a new firm, a new product or technology, or a new market (Muchiri & McMurray, 2015). According to Covin and Slevin (1989), entrepreneurial orientation relates to the methods, practices and decision-making styles that managers use to act entrepreneurially (Real, Roldán & Leal, 2014). Explaining the construct, Covin and Slevin describe EO as the extent to which 'top managers are inclined to take business-related risks, to favour changes and innovations in order to obtain a competitive advantage for their firm, and to compete aggressively with other firms' (Covin & Slevin, 1988). They proposed that EO should be considered as the strategic dimension which can be observed from the firms' strategic posture running along a continuum from a fully conservative orientation to a completely entrepreneurial one. They suggest that firms with a propensity to engage in relatively high levels of risk-taking, innovations and proactive behaviours, have EO of a high level, while those engaging in relatively low levels of these behaviors have conservative orientation (Covin & Slevin, 1991).

The definition of the concept formulated by Covin and Slevin is the definition which is the base for others to formulate their own ones. For example, Tang and others (2008) formulated their own

definition on the bases of the Covin and Slevin one – they expanded the group of persons who are in charge of the company with the business owners, whose actions determine entrepreneurial orientation. Tang et. al. (2008) proposed that entrepreneurial orientation (EO) refers to methods, practices and decision-making styles of managers or business owners of the firms which act entrepreneurially (Tang, Tang, Marino, Zhang, & Li, 2008). However, according to Wiklund & Shepherd, EO refers to the strategy-making processes that provide organizations with a basis for entrepreneurial decisions and actions (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003). Lumpkin and Dess (1996) argued that EO refers to the processes, practices and decision-making activities that lead to ‘new entries’, which examples were provided with the EO conceptualization according to Miller. They considered EO as a process construct, which is concerned with the methods, practices, and decision-making styles used by the managers (Vij & Bedi, 2012).

Further, Stam and Elfring (2008, p. 98) describe EO as the ‘simultaneous exhibition of innovativeness, proactiveness and risk taking’. Thus, EO may be viewed as the entrepreneurial strategy-making processes that key decision makers use to enact their firm’s organizational purpose, sustain its vision, and create competitive advantage(s). Despite the burgeoning scholarly interest in this area, numerous questions appear in the EO literature. For example, there are ongoing conversations regarding the dimensionality of EO? (Anderson, Kreiser, Kuratko, Hornsby & Eshima, 2015; Dyduch, 2008, p. 155-156). As originally conceptualised by Miller (1983), EO encompasses a firm’s propensity for risk taking, innovation and proactiveness. Later, Lumpkin and Dess (1996) further refined the EO construct, and added the two components of competitive aggressiveness and autonomy. However, it has sometimes been argued that ‘autonomy’ is an internal organizational driver of entrepreneurship, which influences the organizational climate for entrepreneurship (Vij & Bedi, 2012). Some researchers claimed that ‘competitive aggressiveness’ forms a part of the proactiveness dimension and does not represent a separate dimension (Chang & Lin, 2011). EO as multidimensional construct requires all its dimensions to be characterized. The dimensions of EO can be understood as the grouping of its similar attributes, which differ from other groupings. Each of these dimensions can be described with smaller or larger number of the attributes which are, in fact, sub-dimensions of a particular construct (Dyduch, 2013, p. 154-176). Specific dimensions of EO and their definitions are shown in Picture 1.

Picture 1: The architecture of entrepreneurial orientation



* *The autonomy* is treated by some of the researchers as the antecedence rather than the EO dimension.

** Some of the researchers treat competitive aggressiveness as the part of the *proactiveness* dimension and then it does not function as a separate dimension.

Sources: Covin & Slevin, 1989; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Miller, 1983; Dess & Lumpkin, 2005).

The first EO dimension: innovativeness requires that firms depart from existing technologies and practices and venture beyond the current state of the art. Inventions and new ideas need to be nurtured even when their benefits are unclear. However, in today's climate of rapid change, effectively producing, assimilating, and exploiting innovations can be an important avenue for achieving competitive advantages (Dess & Lumpkin 2005).

The second EO dimension: risk-taking refers to the tendency to take bold actions such as venturing into unknown new markets and committing a large portion of resources to ventures with uncertain outcomes. Risk-taking refers to the tendency to take bold actions such as venturing into unknown new markets and committing a large portion of resources to ventures with uncertain outcomes. Risk-taking implies willingness for committing huge resources to opportunities which involve probability of high failure (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003; Zbierowski, 2012, p. 103). Risk handling is the process in which potential risks to a business are identified, analyzed, mitigated and prevented, along with the process of balancing the cost of protecting the company against a risk versus the cost of exposure to that risk. The ideal way to cope with risk is to perceive risk at its inception, and taking risk under control right from its inception stage (Vij & Bedi, 2012).

The third EO dimension is proactiveness. In literature, the terms proactiveness and competitive aggressiveness are often used interchangeably but there is a difference between both terms. Proactiveness states how a firm relates to market opportunities in the process of creating demand, while competitive aggressiveness refers to how firms relate to competitors, that is, how firms respond to trends and demand that already exist in the marketplace (Vij & Bedi, 2012; Lumpkin & Dess, 2001; Zbierowski, 2012, p. 103).

The fourth EO dimension: competitive aggressiveness is the intensity of a firm's effort to outperform rivals and is characterized by a strong offensive posture or aggressive responses to competitive threats (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin & Frese, 2009). Competitive aggressiveness is the intensity of a firm's effort to outperform rivals and is characterized by a strong offensive posture or aggressive responses to competitive threats (Lumpkin & Dess 1996)

The fifth, the last EO dimension: autonomy refers to an independent action undertaken by entrepreneurial leaders or teams directed at bringing about a new venture and seeing it to fruition (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin & Frese, 2009;). Autonomy refers to independent action undertaken by entrepreneurial leaders or teams directed at bringing about a new venture and seeing it to fruition. In an organizational context, it refers to freely taken action, irrespective of organizational constraints, for establishment and smooth running of a venture (Stevenson & Jaiilo, 1990; Kraus, Harms, & Schwarz, 2005). Autonomy in firms may vary with the size of organization, management style, or ownership (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Dyduch, 2008, p. 97-98).

The described EO dimensions used to be and still are popular research topic. The most important of the considerations are dealing with the dimensions of EO and their configuration. Covin Green, and Slevin (2006); Bratnicki and Gabryś (2011); Lumpkin and Dess (2001) argued that the dimensions of EO may occur in different combinations each representing a different and independent aspect of the multidimensional concept of EO.

As a consequence, the dimensions of EO may relate differently to firm performance. Specifically referring to the dimensionality of EO, Covin, Green, Slevin, 2006, p. 80) note that "intellectual advancement pertaining to EO will likely occur as a function of how clearly and completely scholars can delineate the pros and cons of alternative conceptualizations of the EO construct and the conditions under which the alternative conceptualizations may be appropriate."

Prior studies use two principal approaches in conceptualizing EO: the composite dimension approach presented by Covin and Slevin (1989) and the multidimensional approach posited by Lumpkin and Dess (1996). In the composite dimension approach, EO represents a unidimensional construct characterized by innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness.

In the multidimensional approach, EO is characterized by innovativeness, autonomy, risk-taking, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996), which vary independently depending on the external and internal context (Shan, Song & Ju, 2016). To determine the most frequently used dimensions of EO by researchers the effects of met analysis created by Rauch and others were used, as well as, the practices of others researchers which were not mentioned by Rauch in order to have all the data complete (see Chart 1).

The only conceptualisation of EO construct, which was taken into a consideration, was the one based on the configurations of its typical dimensions: risk taking, proactiveness, innovativeness, autonomy and competitive aggressiveness. Unusual EO dimensions were not the part of this study due to their infrequent occurrence in the researches of the relation: EO and business results. Recognition of usefulness of each configuration of EO dimensions was conducted by determining the frequency of their usage in empirical researches. It was assumed that low interest on these dimensions suggests their low methodical usefulness in the entrepreneurial researches. In the Chart 1 the frequency of the usage of the conceptualizations of the EO dimensions in the empirical studies was presented.

Table 1: The identification of using particular conceptualizations of the EO dimensions in the empirical researches

Lp.	Dimensions	Uni-/multidimensional	Author name (year)
1.	innovativeness /innovation, risk taking and competitive aggressiveness	Unidimensional	M. Hult, Robert F. Hurley, and Gary A. Knight (2004); Stanley F. Slater and John C. Narver (2000); Shahid N. Bhuian et al. (2003); Jeffrey G. Covin, J.E. Prescott, and D.P. Slevin (1990); Jeffrey G. Covin et al. (1994); Louis Marino et al. (2002); Pavlos Dimitratos et al. (2004); Ari Jantunen, Kaisu Puumalainen, Sami Saarenketo, Kalevi Kyläheiko (2005); Bruce H. Kemelgor (2002); Jeffrey G. Covin et al. (2006); Albert Caruana, Michael T. Ewing, and B. Ramaseshan (2002); Hilton Barrett and Art Weinstein (1998); Shaker A. Zahra (1991); Shaker A. Zahra and Dennis M. Garvis (2000); Shaker A. Zahra and Donald O. Neubaum (1998); John L. Naman and Dennis P. Slevin (1993); June M.L. Poon, Raja Azimah Ainuddin, and Sa'odah haji Junit (2006); K. Chadwick et al. (1999); Dirk De Clercq, Harry J. Sapienza, and Hans Crijns (2003); Johan Wiklund and Dean Shepherd (2003); Johan Wiklund and Dean Shepherd (2005); So-Jin Yoo (2001); Jeffrey G. Covin and Dennis P. Slevin (1986); A. Rauch, M. Frese, C. Koenig, and Z. M. Wang (2006); J. B. Arbaugh, Larry W. Cox, and S. Michael Camp (2005); Wouter Stam and Tom Elfring (2006)
2	innovation, risk taking	Unidimensional	Rainer Harms and Thomas Ehrmann (2003)
3	risk taking, proactiveness, and innovation	Multidimensional	Fredric William Swierczek and Thai Thanh Ha (2003); Patrick Kreiser, Louis Marino, and K. Mark Weaver (2002); Orlando C. Richard et al. (2004); J. L. VanGelder (1999); Zbierowski (2012); Bratnicki (2009)
4	competitive aggressiveness	Unidimensional	Jeffrey G. Covin and Teresa Joyce Covin (1990)
5	innovativeness, risk taking, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness	Multidimensional	G.T. Lumpkin and Gregory G. Dess (2001)
6	risk taking,	Unidimensional	Gerard George et al. (2001)

	proactiveness, innovativeness, autonomy, and competitive aggressiveness		
7.	innovativeness/innovation	Unidimensional	G. Tomas M. Hult et al. (2003); Danny Miller and Jean-Marie Toulouse (1986)
8.	innovation	Multidimensional	Shaker A. Zahra (1993)
9.	risk taking, innovativeness, proactiveness, and autonomy	Multidimensional	Erik Monsen (2005)
10.	autonomy, competitive aggressiveness, innovation achievement, risk	Multidimensional	A. Richter (1999)
11.	proactiveness	Unidimensional	Richard C. Becherer and John G. Maurer (1999)
12.	risk taking, proactiveness, aggressiveness, innovation	Unidimensional	Kwaku, Atuahene-Gima (2001)
13.	risk taking, proactiveness, innovativeness, autonomy, and competitive aggressiveness	Multidimensional	Dyduch (2006)

Source: Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin & Frese, 2009; Dyduch, 2008, s. 151-271; Zbierowski, 2012, s. 176-221; Bratnicki & Gabryś, 2011.

The results of met analysis presented in the Chart 1 point out that EO is a multidimensional construct operationalized in terms of variables 'innovativeness', 'risk-taking', 'proactiveness', 'autonomy' and 'competitive aggressiveness'.

Wherein, the number and configuration of these dimension changes depending on the aim of the research procedure. It means, that EO is designated and qualified because of its evaluative dimension, for example: proactiveness, innovativeness. Moreover, the character (dependent vs independent towards each other) of relations between the dimensions determine the shape (unidimensional/multidimensional) of the EO construct. According to these findings EO can be examined partially as well as in its aggregate form. The essence of aggregation can be expressed in a following method, which is based on the synthesis of heterogeneous, partial EO dimensions altogether. Partial characters (detailed ones) are complex or simple criteria of EO assessment. In practical uses they need to have a quantified form.

The salient dimensions of EO usually show high intercorrelations with each other, ranging. Consequently, most studies combined these dimension into one single factor (e.g., Naman & Slevin, 1993; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003).

Several scholars have argued that the EO construct is best viewed as a unidimensional concept (e.g., Covin & Slevin, 1989, George, 2001) and, consequently, the different dimensions of EO should relate to performance in similar ways.

Unidimensionality's definition: one of the most basic assumptions in the measurement theory, is the degree to which items represent one and only one underlying latent variable. The other important analyze convergent validity is about the extent of consistency between applications made by distinct methods for the same goal. Discriminant validity indicates that the dimensions should differ from each other distinctly and independently (Altindag, Zehir & Acar, 2011).

Usually in empirical researches the EO construct functions as unidimensional. Then, the dimensions can be treated as the EO indicators. In case of perceiving EO construct as the aggregate, simultaneous measure of separated dimensions allows to assess the EO intensity of a particular company. In this view, each organization falls somewhere along a conceptual continuum ranging from conservative (low EO) to entrepreneurial (high EO) (Schepers, Voordeckers, Steijvers, & Laveren, 2014).

An aggregate approach to EO had been used in 35 researches at that time, independently from the number of dimensions forming that construct. What is more, the number of EO dimensions ranged from 1 (item 4,11) to 5 (item 6).

EO, as unidimensional construct based on the measures of innovativeness, risk taking and competitive aggressiveness, was used in 26 researches, in one of the researches (item 6) the previous set was expanded by two dimensions: proactiveness and autonomy. Whereas, one of the researches connected four dimensions (item 12), while another connected only two dimensions (item 2) in a joined measure of the EO intensity. In other researches only one dimension was used but it was not identical. So, in two researches the dimension innovativeness (item 7) was used, in the others the dimensions proactiveness (item 11) and competitive aggressiveness (item 4) were used.

Among the researchers there are some persons who perceive the EO as being useful as a multidimensional construct rather than as a unidimensional construct. EO as a multidimensional construct was used in 9 researches.

Five of them was based only on the measures: *risk taking, proactiveness and innovation* (item 3), in one of the researches (item 5) the previous set was expanded with another dimension: *competitive aggressiveness*, and in some other research, even other dimension: *autonomy* (item. 9).

In three other researches, in one of them (item 10) four dimensions were used: *autonomy, competitive aggressiveness, innovation achievement, risk*, and in the other, only one dimension was used: *innovation* (item. 8), and in the others the dimensions *risk taking, proactiveness, innovativeness, autonomy, and competitive aggressiveness* (item. 13)

The findings show that researchers use both EO constructs, while unidimensional one is used more frequently. A vast majority of researches use the EO indicators which already exist, only some of them adapt the already existing ones and create their own research tools.

3. SUMMARY

EO has emerged as a major construct within the strategic management and entrepreneurship literature over the recent years. The EO dimension is one of the areas of researches in the domain of the entrepreneurship, where some part of the collected knowledge is constantly developed. Viewing different interpretations of EO construct and its dimensions, showed its diversity, distinctiveness and multiplicity of EO dimensions, which points out that there is no universal EO indicator.

Literature studies revealed that, most of the researchers prefer unidimensional EO construct, which aggregates all dimensions of EO into one synthetic indicator.

In this view, each organization falls somewhere along a conceptual continuum ranging from conservative (low EO) to entrepreneurial (high EO).

Nevertheless, recent literature conceptualises EO as multidimensional, countering that the different dimensions of EO could occur in different combinations.

It also means that some researchers suggest, that the EO construct can consist of alternative and additional dimensions. Therefore, it can be assumed that in the entrepreneurship measurement there is space for the Covin and Slevin instrument, as well as for new measurement alternatives.

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