

## Book & Resource Reviews

***An Evolutionary Approach to Entrepreneurship: Selected Essays***, by Howard E. Aldrich, 2011, 591 pages, hard cover, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc.

Reviewed by J. B. Craig, Northeastern University, Boston and Bond University.

Such is the reach and contribution of Howard E. Aldrich, that a book including 23 of his published papers covering 5 themes over 50 years, has the potential to include something for everyone in academe. To his many doctoral students and coauthors, the book, particularly the Introduction, is an opportunity to revisit and reflect on the projects that brought them together, and readers are able to share how these relationships and projects evolved. To current doctoral students and aspiring scholars, the collection represents an archive of pioneering pieces that have shaped today's rhetoric in the entrepreneurship space, and Aldrich's concluding chapter presents a beacon on the hill for this community of future thought leaders. To Aldrich's contemporaries, the book presents a body of work that, although they have witnessed it evolve, they may not have not been close enough to understand the thematic thread that was being used to sew such a rich tapestry. Regardless of its audience demographic, the publication is a worthy addition, if not a must have, to any academic library. To have a collection that maps the evolution of evolutionary theory, as well as presents the genesis of entrepreneurial ventures as social entities, is both useful and practical for any reader. Given that the breadth and depth of Aldrich's thought provocation is rare, his body of work is likely to have a timeless impact.

In structural terms, the book is topped and tailed by an introduction and a concluding chapter. In the Introduction, Aldrich invites his readers to share some insights into his professional (and sometimes personal) journey. In the Conclusion, though not stated as such, he sets out his legacy. Specifically, in the Introduction Aldrich shares how various papers came to fruition and acknowledges the characters who make up his supporting cast. This group is a veritable professorial *Who's Who* or rogue's gallery depending on your standing in the academic community. The projects he discusses, both big and small, that have occupied him and

them since the 1960s make for interesting reading. He places on the table what in fact he means by evolutionary theory. This is important as it is through this reflection that the reader gets to hear from "the horse's mouth" what differentiates this thesis. In this chapter Aldrich speaks conversationally to a wide audience, whether evolutionary theory zealots or naysayers. He also details the reasoning behind the division of the five sections of the book.

Part I is a single paper that lays out the evolutionary approach. Aldrich presented this paper in 2000 on the occasion of being awarded "Distinguished Scholar" status by the Academy of Management's Organization and Management Theory division. His purpose in placing a stand-alone paper in this section, and this is an assumption, is to vent his frustration with cross-sectional studies, a recurring theme in his body of work, not surprisingly.

Part II, labeled "Theory," includes four papers applying evolutionary theory to entrepreneurship, emphasizing the role of historical and comparative analysis. In two of these papers, Aldrich pays tribute to notable like-minded evolutionary thinkers in Donald Campbell ("The Accidental Entrepreneur: Campbellian Antinomies and Organizational Foundings" with Amy Kenworthy) and Dick Scott ("Beam Me Up, Scott(ie)! Institutional Theorists' Struggles with the Emergent Nature of Entrepreneurship").

In Part III, "Social Networks," the focus of the six papers turns to the importance of social networks as they affect the emergence of entrepreneurial teams. These papers reflect a career journey. With the first paper appearing in 1986 and the final paper in the section a more recent 2007 publication, it is possible in this section alone to take a 20-year snapshot of the entrepreneurial venture as a social entity. Notably, Aldrich expresses pleasant surprise how much his 1986 piece ("Entrepreneurship through Social Networks" with Catherine Zimmer) has garnered over the years. A quick check on Google Scholar quantified that interest at 1,631 citations.

Part IV, "Strategy," concerns strategy. The identifiable distinction is that it is nuanced in that it "takes a strategic approach to the creation of new organizational populations and communities, using examples from the commercialization of the Internet and the collapse of the Internet bubble"

(xvii). The first two papers build on each other while the second three are also related. Together, they reflect the prescience associated with Aldrich and his collaborators' discourse. Perhaps, not surprisingly, their early predictions of opportunities emanating from the World Wide Web have evolved into what we are now seeing rolled out vis-à-vis the cloud computing phenomenon. Although not framed as such, tangible for support for the practicality of good theory, a hallmark of Aldrichian philosophy, is offered to readers here.

Part V offers up a family embeddedness perspective by introducing a focus on "Gender and Family." Its three papers were published in 1997, 2000, and 2003, respectively. As such, they were at the forefront of conversations that have seen increased attention to these issues in the following decade. Gender and family remain "hot topics" and have evolved into significant stand-alone research destinations that have, importantly, garnered significant attention by policy makers throughout the world. Aldrich, the sociologist, delivered significant legitimacy to the context of family and gender here.

Part VI, the penultimate section, includes four papers under the title of "Stratification and Inequality." In these, Aldrich and his collaborators focus their lens at the intersection of evolutionary and life-cycle perspectives. Although collected under the one umbrella, each is a story not usually embraced by other than sociologists. Whereas the previous section's topics concentrated on collective constructs (family and gender) the papers here zero in on the "self" and how individuals relate to and are influenced by the opportunities presented in the domain of entrepreneurship.

In the final section Aldrich uses the published papers artfully to "raise some promising issues for future work" (589). Here, Aldrich is given license to be at his most provocative. There are no less than 16 questions posed in the 7 pages of this section, each of which would fuel a robust discussion no matter at which career stage the reader is currently situated. Taken together or separately, these questions make for interesting reflection. That Aldrich couches each in his body of work is an added contribution of this collection and, if heeded, will likely spore rich literature streams.

In concluding, this collection of Howard Aldrich's 23 papers published in 22 different journals and books with 27 different collaborators is the go-to destination for entrepreneurship research through a distinctive evolutionary lens. By adding this collection to a personal library, researchers, both early stage and seasoned, will have a ready reference to a novel angle for addressing a re-

search question, and, due to the breadth and depth of the work canvassed in this edition, will be able to efficiently consider "What is the Aldrichian perspective on this?" or more likely, "Howard no doubt has something to say about this."

***The Darwin Economy: Liberty, Competition, and the Common Good***, by Robert H. Frank 2011, 240 pp., hardcover, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Reviewed by K. M. Kniffin, Cornell University.

One of the main takeaways from *The Darwin Economy: Liberty, Competition, and the Common Good* is captured by the recognition that among groups and individuals such as baseball teams, school districts, Olympic sprinters, and even university professors, there will always be half that occupy the top 50% and half that occupy the bottom 50% with respect to any particular objective metric within any specific subpopulation. The implication is that when people or organizations care about their relative standing, then the conditions are ripe for potentially harmful runaway processes. In the Red Queen metaphor that is familiar to evolutionary biologists and anyone familiar with the story *Alice in Wonderland*, the pressure to run faster gets progressively stronger whenever comparative advantage is the main goal. In such a competitive environment, one's relative speed can become so important that absolute speed becomes irrelevant.

Frank explains that people's focus on relative position is not grounded in jealousy or envy; instead, he notes matter-of-factly that "positional concerns exist quite apart from such emotions. It's an incontestable part of the human nervous system that evaluation is shaped by context" (213). Cars seem faster or slower than each other, houses seem larger or smaller than each other, and the scoreboards at sporting events typically show one team with more points than the other.

Just as others have considered the potential importance of evolved preferences in relation to topics such as family businesses (Nicholson, 2008); employee voice (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, & Edmondson, 2009); and leadership (e.g., Yammarino & Dansereau, 2011), Frank's premise and reason for the title is that our natural concerns with relative position reflect long-standing evolutionary pressures. Against Frank's backdrop in which the ability to recognize relative positions is presumed to be an evolved or innate inclination, the