



Per Davidsson: recipient of the 2023 Global Award for Entrepreneurship Research

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Abstract Professor Per Davidsson is the recipient of the 2023 Global Award for Entrepreneurship Research. Throughout an extraordinarily productive career, he has made invaluable contributions in building the field of entrepreneurship. His early studies on entrepreneurship and culture and his studies on the growth of small businesses played an important role in the emergence and development of entrepreneurship as a scholarly field of research. He has also, continuously, made more

conceptual contributions by critically probing the development of the field, and engaged in writing foundational books that have been used extensively in higher education institutes. By probing and challenging traditional assumptions throughout his career, he has contributed to the refinement and renewal of the field.

Plain English Summary The winner of the 2023 Global Award for Entrepreneurship Research, Per Davidsson, has been a pioneer of influential and

Regretfully, David J. Storey passed away between the time this paper was submitted and when the paper was accepted. His co-authors appreciated his fine work and participation in the preparation of this work and extend their condolences to his family, friends, and colleagues. He will be deeply missed.

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high-quality research contributions and has also been a community builder in the entrepreneurship field. Over the last 40 years, Professor Davidsson has provided insights into several of the field's main branches, including the diversity of high-growth firms, the value of networks and social capital, and the importance of regional aspects of entrepreneurship. Besides scientific articles, he has also written several books still widely used in higher education. Through a unique combination of skills and humility, Professor Davidsson has enabled researchers in the field to meet and interact, transforming the field of entrepreneurship into an academic discipline with relevance for the whole society.

Keywords Global award for entrepreneurship research · Entrepreneurship · High-growth firms

JEL Classification D22 · L26 · M13 · R11

1 Introduction

Professor Per Davidsson is the 2023 recipient of the Global Award for Entrepreneurship Research. During a career that spans almost four decades, he has been one of the leading scholars in the entrepreneurship field, pushing and catalyzing the development of several of its main branches. Through a unique combination of scholarly excellence, ambassadorship, and mentorship, he has helped build the field to the professional and vigorous discipline of the social sciences it has become today.

This article reviews Professor Davidsson's scholarly work and contributions, covering the areas of job creation, high-growth firms, the entrepreneurial process or journey, networks and social capital, theory development, and regional aspects of entrepreneurship. It further highlights his services to the scholarly community, both in terms of fostering and mentoring new generations of entrepreneurship researchers and in terms of building and growing the international entrepreneurship research community.

1.1 The global award for entrepreneurship research: brief background

The Global Award for Entrepreneurship Research was initiated in 1996 and has since become the most prestigious prize in entrepreneurship research. It consists of 100,000 Euros and a statuette designed by

the internationally renowned Swedish sculptor Carl Milles. According to the original statutes, the award should be given to “a person who has produced scientific work of outstanding quality and importance, thereby giving a significant contribution to theory-building concerning entrepreneurship and small business development, the role and importance of new firm formation and the role of SMEs in economic development.” The main aims of the award are (1) to highlight the importance of research produced in the areas of entrepreneurship and small business, (2) to further stimulate and promote research within these fields, and (3) to diffuse state-of-the-art research amongst scholars, practitioners, and people involved in small business development.

The domain of entrepreneurship research is broad (Carlsson et al., 2013), which means entrepreneurship research that can be considered for the award is undertaken in several different disciplines, including economics, management, sociology, history, business administration, geography, and psychology. Any aspect of entrepreneurship research is eligible, including the environment and the organizations in which entrepreneurship is conducted, the character of the entrepreneur (personality, cognitive and affective aspects), the entrepreneurial process, or the role of the entrepreneur and/or the entrepreneurial function in a wider sense (at the level of the community, region, country, or industry).

One ambition of the Prize Committee is that the award-winning contributions, seen together over a longer time span, reflect the extraordinary breadth of entrepreneurship as a research field in the social sciences. The key criteria for prize-worthy contributions are originality and influence (Braunerhjelm & Henrekson, 2009). It is recognized that contributions can be influential in many ways. A contribution can, for example, be influential because it has had a significant impact on subsequent scientific work, furthered entrepreneurship as a field (through creating important databases or by starting influential journals, scientific communities, etc.), furthered entrepreneurship education and training at the academic level, and/or influenced policymaking and society more broadly.

When selecting prize-worthy contributions, the prize committee emphasizes the qualitative aspects of the contributions of candidates. Quantitative metrics, such as citation counts and impact factor-adjusted publication volumes, do provide important information about candidates, but they will never replace qualitative judgment.

This means that quantity will never substitute for quality, and it is even possible for a scholar to receive the award for a single landmark contribution.

1.2 A short biography of the 2023 prize winner: Per Davidsson

Per Davidsson was born in Sweden in 1958. Educated at the Stockholm School of Economics, he received his Ph.D. in economic psychology in 1989 and became a full professor at Jönköping International Business School (JIBS) in 1996.

During 1998–2001, Davidsson was the program director and research principal for the Research Program on Entrepreneurship and Growth in SMEs, a major research program funded by the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation. In 2004, he became Professor in Entrepreneurship and Research Coordinator at the Brisbane Graduate School of Business, Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Australia (while always retaining a partial affiliation with JIBS). Following a period as Assistant Dean (research) at the Faculty of Business, he became Director of the Australian Centre for Entrepreneurship Research (ACE) at QUT in 2010, a position that he held until 2018. His international assignments have included affiliations with Zhejiang University (China) and the University of Louisville (USA). In addition, he holds an honorary doctorate from Leuphana University, Germany.

Through numerous and varying professional appointments, Professor Davidsson has been deeply engaged in the development of the entrepreneurship field. He was Elected Officer of the Academy of Management Entrepreneurship Division (2007–2012). His involvement in leading journals in the field includes positions as Editor at *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Associate Editor at *Small Business Economics*, and Editorial Board Member at *Journal of Management*, *Organizational Research Methods*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Zeitschrift für KMU und Entrepreneurship*, and *Foundations and Trends in Entrepreneurship*. He has received numerous prizes and awards and has given lectures, seminars, and keynote addresses at over 50 universities and research institutions across the globe.¹

¹ <https://ju.se/download/18.f532e7d1843389abc77ef0/1667468971988/CV%20Per%20Davidsson%20November%202022.pdf>

2 Per Davidsson's contributions

Over the past 40 years, Per Davidsson has produced a huge volume of work. One summary metric is that he has more than 150 publications, 24 of which have more than 500 citations according to Google Scholar. Inevitably this means that, within the broad area of entrepreneurship, there are themes and approaches that are persistent throughout his writing and others that have become either more or less important with time. This section sets out these themes and approaches as “headings” whilst recognizing that this approach fails to capture, in full, important cross-cutting dimensions. To address this latter point, we also add some concluding thoughts.

2.1 Job creation and high growth new and small firms

Stimulated by the work of David Birch, Per Davidsson began with an interest in two of Birch's findings.² The first was that new and small firms were major contributors to job creation and were therefore worthy of attention; the second was that, amongst new and small firms, some were disproportionately important in terms of job creation. These major contributors to job creation were called “high-growth” SMEs or gazelles.

This interest in the growth of SMEs, particularly of exceptionally fast-growing SMEs, has remained a key theme of Davidsson's work and one where he has made significant theoretical and empirical contributions. His much-cited work, with Delmar and Gartner (Delmar et al., 2003), draws upon the excellent Swedish data provided by Statistics Sweden.³ It examines a large number of limited companies and their employment change between 1987 and 1996; it then selects those that were amongst the top 10% that grew most rapidly on at least one criterion.

The core finding has always been the heterogeneity of these growth patterns. Indeed, the term “growth

² David Birch was the first recipient of the International Award for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Research in 1996.

³ However, even this data has its limitations. For example, in a paper investigating job growth, Davidsson and Henrekson (2002) showed that Statistics Sweden data were less than perfect in tracking changes of ownership. Although this involved only a very small number of enterprises, their impact on employment was considerable.

patterns” has always seemed a misnomer since it is the absence of such patterns that is most striking. Delmar et al. (2003) demonstrate this stunning diversity—and then valiantly seek to place these gazelles into seven groups. The numerically largest group is what they called the “one shots,” i.e., those firms that grew exceptionally quickly in one year but never again repeated that growth.

This work clearly demonstrates that, even amongst the gazelles, almost no firms exhibit linear or stage growth patterns. Unfortunately, the inferences drawn from this work are, too frequently, not the ones that we draw. For example, despite “stage models” having almost no empirical support, they continue to be inflicted upon generation after generation of entrepreneurship and management undergraduates.

The scholarly response in much subsequent research has been to assume that this performance diversity reflects a diversity or heterogeneity within the sample of gazelles. To address this, efforts have been made to homogenize samples by, most notably, excluding those that grew from acquisition rather than organically. Davidsson, in conjunction with Wiklund (Davidsson & Wiklund, 1999), has investigated this heterogeneity and obtained a key finding. They observed the crucial distinction between firms which grew rapidly in terms of job creation through acquisition and those that grew organically. They argued, very plausibly, that the former group of firms were less obviously contributing to net job creation in Sweden because their growth reflected an ownership change which was likely to be fully compensated by a job decline elsewhere in the economy.⁴ This distinction between organic growth and growth by acquisition is also addressed by Davidsson in his work with Lockett et al. (2011).

It is therefore important to distinguish between different “types” of growth, there being no merit in combining apples with oranges (Shepherd & Wiklund, 2009). However, adopting this approach runs a serious risk. It is that growth heterogeneity and volatility become an irritant that does not fit comfortably with explanatory variables that are theorized to influence

the performance of entrepreneurial ventures, but which are either fixed or change little over time—such as attitudes, prior experience, education, age, and gender. The risk is that these patterns are not as well explored because they fail to fit with favored theories.

However, the exploration of temporal volatility has been explored in more recent work strongly influenced by the earlier Davidsson findings. Using Swedish data, Daunfeldt and Halvarsson (2015) show that the probability that an enterprise in Sweden that is amongst the top 3% of fastest growers in 1999–2000 will still be in that group 6 years later is 0.3%. This emphasizes the difficulty of using variables with limited or zero temporal volatility to “explain” performance which is essentially volatile.

A third dimension of growth examined by Davidsson is its link with profitability. An important recurrent theme of this work, discussed in more detail in the next section, has been to recognize the dangers of inferring that correlation reflects causation. Being able to separate the two in real time is a key strength of the Davidsson et al. (2009) paper. It questions whether “sustained” growth can be achieved if it is not preceded by profits. Drawing on the resource-based view (RBV), it argues that profitability must come first—a point that is also made in Stefens et al. (2009)—because profitability reflects the ability of an enterprise to “create value” which is at the heart of the RBV. Davidsson et al. (2009) demonstrate this well using both Australian and Swedish data, showing that later-period firms which were both profitable and fast-growing were significantly more likely to have had high profit than high growth in the base year. A recent, massive replication study across 28 countries has confirmed the original results (Ben-Hafäedh & Hamelin, 2023).

Overall, therefore the Davidsson contribution—frequently in conjunction with others, which we return to below—has been to carefully document the scale and nature of the growth of SMEs. From Birch’s original agenda, this work finds the contribution to job creation in Sweden is considerable, although the contribution made by Swedish gazelles appears to be less than in several other OECD countries (Davidsson & Henrikson, 2002). Another conclusion was the realization that it was not so much small but new firms that contributed to job growth—most (established) firms are neither great innovators nor job creators (Davidsson, 2023). This insight has also been supported by John Haltiwanger (Haltiwanger et al., 2013)—another recipient of the Global Award for Entrepreneurship Research.

⁴ Of course, it was recognized that there could be second-round benefits if the acquiring company was able to use the assets of the acquired company in a more productive way.

2.2 The entrepreneurial process or journey

The entrepreneurial process or journey has been another area where Davidsson has made considerable theoretical and empirical contributions. This work involves identifying those individuals, from a larger population, who have begun the entrepreneurial journey by taking some steps such as seeking premises or funding but who have yet to start in business. The term “nascent entrepreneurs” is applied to this group. This approach was pioneered in the USA by Paul Reynolds and is referred to as the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (PSED).⁵ A review by Davidsson and Gordon (2012) found 83 eligible articles using this format, based on nine data sets from Canada, China, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the USA.

The collection of such data is massively time-consuming and requires considerable care over definitions and sampling procedures. But, once acquired, it can provide insights into the entrepreneurial journey which are available from no other source. Davidsson and Gordon (2012, p. 854) say the approach has three key advantages:

The sampling of ventures before they could be considered operational reduces issues of survivor bias. The longitudinal design permits the study of process issues as well as time separation of independent (IV) and dependent variables (DV) for improved tests of causality. Further, the real time following of the development of the start-up process reduces issues of memory decay and hindsight bias.

PSED studies can offer valuable insights into the factors that influence both the journey to entrepreneurship and, more questionably, the performance of the enterprise once it commences trading. Samuelsson and Davidsson (2009) use a Swedish data set to examine the factors influencing the speed of venture creation and the extent to which this varies according to whether the enterprise is “imitative” or “innovative.” They conclude that the innovative group has generally undertaken more “steps” than the former, and that the human capital of the individual founder(s) is more closely linked to completion.

Davidsson has established an Australian study referred to as the Comprehensive Australian Study of Entrepreneurial Emergence (CAUSEE). This was modelled closely upon PSED II in the USA (Reynolds & Davidsson, 2009) and has been used to better understand the scale, speed, and impediments on the entrepreneurial journey. For example, Davidsson and Gordon (2016) examined the extent to which the Global Economic Crisis (GEC) had influenced nascent entrepreneurs. It concludes that the effects are less than might have been expected, with only those nascent entrepreneurs considering establishing a tech venture being significantly discouraged. As the authors note, this may, in part, reflect the Australian experience of the GEC, which was less scarring than in many other OECD countries, but it may also be that optimistic individuals continue to be optimistic almost irrespective of circumstances. This again points to an area worthy of further investigation.

2.3 Networks and social capital

A key component of much theorizing about the entrepreneurial journey is the positive role played by networks and social capital. Here, the contribution of Davidsson is considerable, as reflected in his most frequently cited article with Benson Honig (Davidsson & Honig, 2003).⁶ It examines the role of social and human capital in influencing individuals in three steps on the entrepreneurial journey. The first two steps are discovery and exploitation. The third step is “successful exploitation”—defined as the enterprise having achieved profitability or sales within 18 months of start-up. The paper examines if individuals with more human capital and social capital are more likely to succeed in any of these three steps and be better at, for example, identifying opportunities and/or benefitting from using their social networks.

The evidence base for the study is an early Swedish PSED-type study which was undertaken with great care. Although many cite the article as providing evidence for the power of social networks, its results do not point to the “easy” conclusion that more and stronger networks consistently facilitate all stages in the entrepreneurial journey. Instead, what Davidsson and Honig show is that human and social

⁵ Paul Reynolds was the 2004 recipient of the International Award for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Research.

⁶ As of August 30, 2023, this article had 6809 citations.

capital plays only a small role in explaining which individuals make the final step of “successful conversion.” Where social and human capital plays a clearer role is in the earlier stages of discovery and conversion, implying that it is primarily in these stages, but not later, when entrepreneurship is a social game. Too frequently, those that cite this excellent work do not emphasize the weaker link between networks and social capital in explaining “successful conversion.”

2.4 Theory development

In a delightfully politically incorrect statement, Davidsson (2004) confesses to being “a sinner over this thing called theory,” primarily because he sees it as a guide to empirical direction, rather than as a desirable end in itself. It is perhaps for that reason that Davidsson has comparatively few “theory-only” articles, even if one of them (Zahra et al., 2006) can make a valid claim to be a highly influential articulation of the link between entrepreneurship and dynamic capabilities.

This paper defines dynamic capability as the ability to reconfigure the resources of a firm in a manner envisaged and deemed appropriate by its principal decision-maker. However, it acknowledges there is no necessary/automatic link between dynamic capability and performance, because this also depends upon the “substantive capabilities” of the firm and on its knowledge base. Learning is at the heart of the model. This is achieved through experimenting and observing, with the owner-managers being “in control” since it is their vision that influences performance.

The paper distinguishes between dynamic capabilities in new firms and in established businesses but perhaps does not distinguish sufficiently clearly between the two types of enterprise. The former is significantly more likely to be risky, without a track record, lacking credibility, and with their owners not only having very different levels of talent but often insufficient time to signal their abilities before their enterprise ceases. Crucially, having time to “experiment and observe” is not open to most new firms, since about 40% cease within 3 years. The challenge here remains to articulate a theory of new firms that captures these characteristics, without a reliance on learning (Storey, 2011).

2.5 Regional aspects of entrepreneurship

From an early stage in his career, Per Davidsson has been interested in, and contributed to, the question of why entrepreneurship within the same country was so unevenly distributed. The Reynolds et al. (1994) study, which drew upon evidence from Sweden set out by Davidsson et al. (1994), showed one striking consistency—in the six countries covered, the within-country business birth rates consistently varied by a factor of three.

This concern with spatial issues also appears in Delmar and Davidsson (2000), who compare nascent entrepreneurs in Sweden with those in Norway and the USA. This was a pioneering study for its time by drawing upon the PSED approach. Delmar and Davidsson set out many of the factors likely to raise the likelihood of being a nascent entrepreneur that became “standard” in subsequent studies. These include individuals who are better educated, those more likely to currently be self-employed, and those with more managerial experience, who live in Stockholm, and are male.

A third, very neat, contribution also tangentially addresses the topic of research geographies. The research question posed by Davidsson (2013) could have stemmed from a—possibly heated—discussion at an entrepreneurship conference somewhere in the world where an experienced academic from Europe is making the case—perhaps loudly—that their work is not appreciated in front-rank journals where referee reports are characterized by North American spelling of certain words and claiming this is because of a bias against the “European tradition” of work in this area. The case made by Davidsson (2013) addresses this issue head-on and once more demonstrates his ability to offer wise counsel to young—and sometimes not-so-young—researchers. He shows just how difficult it is to capture what is meant by the “European tradition” and then shows the powerful and increasing editorial roles played by Europeans in key journals. He is too diplomatic to say so explicitly, but the message is clear to all: no system is perfect, and much good work frequently encounters publication problems, but the editors of top journals are very keen to include the next “big thing” wherever it comes from. The onus upon all, from whatever part of the globe we come, is to deliver high-quality work which makes a clear contribution to knowledge.

2.6 Current directions

It is appropriate to end this review of Per Davidsson's output by examining the directions in which it has been progressing more recently.

Three examples of more recent work indicate important "directions of travel" for Per Davidsson. The first is the work with Crawford et al. (2015) which points to a continual scaling-up of both the data and analytical techniques required to make real contributions to entrepreneurship scholarship. This paper reviews four datasets—PSED II in the USA; CAUSEE: An Australian Study of Entrepreneurial Emergence; KFS: The Kauffmann Firm Survey in the USA; and INC 5000: Fast growth firms identified by INC Magazine. It shows that not only performance data are non-normally distributed but also a wide range of input variables, raising questions over the validity of the use of statistical techniques that assume normality—such as OLS. The implications of this non-normality are considerable. At its most basic, it requires considerably larger sample sizes than is characteristic of most empirical work in this area. Secondly, it requires explicit recognition that, for example, those in the top deciles may be radically different from elsewhere in the distribution. The classic example is the work of Hurst and Lusardi (2004), showing that wealth only influences entrepreneurial choice for the top 10% of the population.

To some extent, it might be argued that, for decades, there has been some awareness on the part of some researchers of the performance of "outliers." This is most clearly reflected in the discussion of gazelles above. However, as noted in our discussion of that literature, there has been either a lack of awareness of its significance or a theoretical framework to take it fully into account. The wholly valid inference drawn by Crawford et al. (2015) is that the expunging of outliers—especially those exhibiting high performance—is misleading because it fails to spell out to policymakers the importance and contribution of these exceptional firms. But it is not only policymakers that can be mesmerized by "outliers." The danger may be much greater of "gung-ho" individuals believing there was a good chance of them becoming the next Amazon/Google.

A second "direction of travel" exhibited by Davidsson is his linking with theorists to develop and test

new and novel ideas. An example of this is a paper by Senyard et al. (2014). This work considers the concept of bricolage—defined as "making-do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities" (Senyard et al., 2014, p. 211). It examines whether bricolage has a positive or negative impact upon the innovativeness of new and nascent enterprises. The strength of the paper is its ability to convert what might be considered a slippery concept into testable hypotheses and then to draw upon a dataset to undertake some preliminary testing (cf. Davidsson et al., 2017). The authors claim to show the use of bricolage enhances different forms of innovativeness.

A third example we draw on here is Davidsson (2015). In this sole-authored work, Davidsson critiques the literature on entrepreneurial opportunities arguing it has a "favorability" connotation, defined as an inability to be other than successful. This "Hollywood version of entrepreneurship" is reflected in, for example, even failure being viewed as a success (Coad, 2014) or the vastly greater number of articles on SME growth than on the much more characteristic outcomes such as closure, bankruptcy, decline, or stability (Davila et al., 2015).⁷

The Davidsson critique is, however, highly specific. It argues that "opportunity" is not a suitable construct for the entrepreneurial process. This is partly because it has lacked a consistent definition, partly because it combines more than a single construct, and partly because of its favorability. By the latter, he means that "opportunity" is defined in such a way that competently exploited by a suitable actor, the outcome must be successful. So, a successful outcome is the creation of a new venture implying that if the opportunity is exploited, then it is successful by definition. If an actor fails to act upon what is objectively an opportunity (for them), this cannot be explained by the characteristics of the opportunity. The risk of tautology is close at hand, and Davidsson makes the case for the concept of opportunity to be unpacked.

⁷ They report a search of scholarly material over the 1993 to 2012 period showing the percentage of mentions is 99% for "company growth" vs. 1% for "company decline" and 98% for "firm growth" vs. 2% for "firm decline."

This line of reasoning has evolved into work that specifically deals with the concept of enablers, or, as expressed in Davidsson's (2015) paper, the distinct, external circumstances that play an essential role in enabling a variety of entrepreneurial actions by several potential actors. To some extent, rectifying his self-proclaimed stature as a theoretical sinner, the follow-up work elaborates on the nature of external enablers and the mechanisms by which they are connected to (potential) entrepreneurial action (Davidsson et al., 2020). This work undoubtedly bears the mark of someone who has debated and been at the forefront of pushing the entrepreneurship agenda for decades.

3 Service to the scholarly community

Per Davidsson has made a major contribution to the scholarly community in three important, but also very different, ways.

The first is through his role as supervisor and mentor of doctoral students. Whilst at Jönköping International Business School (JIBS), he contributed to several excellent scholars following in his footsteps. These include Johan Wiklund, Frédéric Delmar, Mikael Samuelsson, and Alexander McKelvie. As an associate supervisor, he played a significant role in furthering the work by Helene Ahl, Ethel Brundin, Lucia Naldi, and Anna Jenkins. Some, in turn, have not only become stars themselves but then gone on to supervising students. Indeed, there are now examples of a "third generation" of prominent scholars—such as Karl Wennberg, who was supervised by Johan Wiklund who previously was supervised by Per Davidsson. He moved to Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in 2004. There he began a similar process of working with doctoral students who became outstanding academics—the most notable recent example being Scott Gordon—and recruiting postdocs.

A second way in which Per Davidsson has contributed to the scholarly community is directly through representing it. Unfortunately, many scholars see their work as being focused primarily—or even exclusively—on their own efforts, or those of their co-authors. This makes them unwilling to act as ambassadors for their science, frequently causing those organizations "representing" the scholarly community to be led by individuals drawn from outside the front rank of scholars.

Per Davidsson, however, has been prepared to provide this leadership, i.e., to devote the time and incur the opportunity cost of a reduced output and to undertake such roles. For example, he was elected as an officer of the Entrepreneurship (ENT) Division of the Academy of Management (AOM) for the 2007–2012 period and served in its 5-year leadership track becoming Chair of the Division in 2010/2011. Furthermore, his period in office corresponded to a time when the stature of the Division increased sharply, as reflected in the following quote taken from a report from the Central Academy:

92% of members are satisfied with the division; this represents a significant increase from the 2007 survey... We share your view that "the 2011 survey results paint a very positive picture of ENT."

A third significant contribution has been his focus on helping others to produce "better" work, but doing it in an engaging, frequently humorous, way, so avoiding the pomposity that can be intimidating to less-experienced researchers. His willingness to report the errors, naivety, and poor judgment that characterize much of our working lives is not something that all are willing to share with others. For those that do, it of course reflects a degree of confidence on the part of the sharer, but much more importantly, it provides huge reassurance to less experienced researchers tempted to believe their most recent achievements will be terminal.

This is reflected in the easy style of Davidsson's well-cited book *Researching Entrepreneurship* (Davidsson, 2004) but also in several articles such as Davidsson and Gordon (2012). Here, for example, they say to PSED scholars as a group, "you are pioneers and our task is to help you improve." Most importantly, given the advice and suggestions for further work provided in the article, there are good reasons to believe in the sincerity of their statement.

4 Overall conclusion

The contribution made by Per Davidsson to our understanding of entrepreneurship has been extraordinary and shows no signs of slowing down. At its heart is his ability, often in conjunction with others,

to take and shape theoretical concepts into a form that subjects them to some form of empirical verification. This requires four, almost independent, sets of skills. The first is extremely rare and is the clarity of thought required to turn complex theory into testable hypotheses that genuinely reflect the theory. The second is the “heavy lifting” of collecting data that is appropriate for the testing; the third is conducting the analysis. The final skill is to set out the theory, data, results, and implications with clarity and insight. Many researchers have one or more of these skills, but very few indeed have all four, honed to a level that Per Davidsson has exhibited over decades.

Last, but certainly not least, is his ability and willingness to provide help and assistance to others. His track record of supervising and mentoring doctoral students who themselves have then gone on to become leading scholars is surely unrivalled. Per Davidsson is a worthy recipient of the Global Award for Entrepreneurship Research.

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