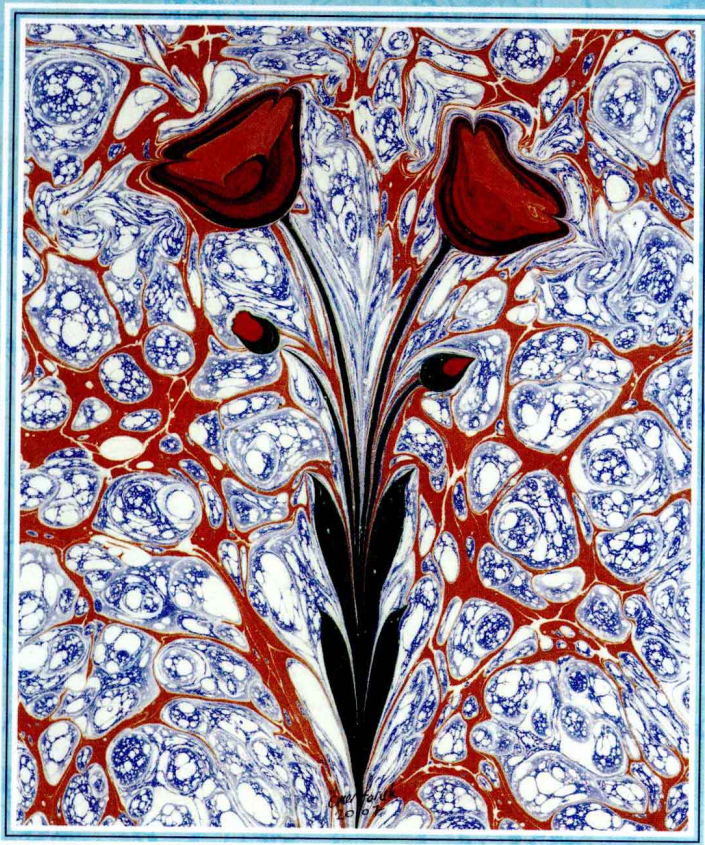


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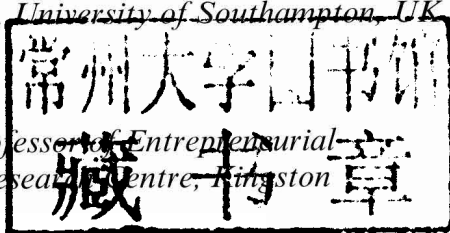
Nascent Entrepreneurship and Learning

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1. Introduction

1.1 SCOPE AND AIM OF THE BOOK

This book examines the process of nascent entrepreneurship from a learning perspective. The overall aim of the research is to generate insights into nascent entrepreneurs' learning and managing experiences by exploring their perspectives in relation to the enterprise culture and education discourses in the United Kingdom (UK). Embedded in a social constructionist paradigm, a process-relational stance is taken to entrepreneurship. This recognises the dynamic and emergent processes through which business opportunities are realised and constructed in the context of social interactions with numerous stakeholders.

The social constructionist position, in which this research is grounded, calls for the need to understand human experiences in their socio-cultural context, with an acknowledgement of human agency and active perceptual constructions of people in a society. Nascent entrepreneurs' biographies, motivations and characteristics or capitals that make up their profiles are examined at the micro-individual level, combined with meso-level considerations, including social processes of business venturing. The research also analyses how these micro-individual and meso-relational processes relate to macro-field forces of enterprise culture, moving beyond an individual or team understanding of nascent entrepreneurship.

The book is supported by an empirical investigation of two case studies of the business venturing process. The first case pertains to the formation of a creative venture (that is a brand communications agency, which uniquely includes in-house production of advertising vehicles with marketing strategy business) by a team of five nascent entrepreneurs. This group of friends set up the company outside the local university's incubator centre while they were students in different areas of arts, design and technology at the local university. The second case account is about a solo entrepreneur's business venturing story, which *is* characterised by a venturing process supported by the local university's incubator centre.

In methodological terms we have adopted *naturalistic inquiry* as the research design, which is compatible with the social constructionist position taken. The triangulation of participant observation, in-depth

interviews and documentary analysis has been carried out in order to address the research questions. Because of the longevity (two years) and intensity of the fieldwork and the resulting richness of data generated, the first case constitutes the principal case account in this research. The second case study provides very useful and rich material to juxtapose the salient themes and patterns in general and to reach towards a multi-layered understanding of nascent entrepreneurship and that of underpinning processes of learning and managing in particular.

A multi-layered conceptualisation of nascent entrepreneurship has been offered in this book, with the following key themes at each layer. The layers include three levels of analysis: micro-level analysis, which includes scrutinising nascent entrepreneurs' individual experiences by examining their motivation, dispositions and resources that they draw on and capitals, using the term 'capital' in Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation,¹ that they want to attain in life; meso-relational level analysis, which refers to the analysis of relational experiences of entrepreneurial learning and managing by looking into relational dynamics of 'venture communities' that they form as a part of their entrepreneurial becoming; and macro-level analysis, which denotes an examination of how the 'field' of enterprise culture – with its associated policies, intervention and support programmes – and institutions impact on their development of entrepreneurial learning and managing.

Our key argument is that it is not sufficient to study nascent entrepreneurship and the concurrent process of entrepreneurial learning at the individual (entrepreneur) or collective (team or organisational) levels and examine the socio-behavioural aspects of learning. Entrepreneurial learning should be understood by inter-relating personal (micro), relational (meso) and macro-contextual aspects of nascent entrepreneurship. These three layers, together with eight aforementioned sub-themes, form the basis for multi-layered understanding of nascent entrepreneurship from a learning perspective. This study takes this gap in our knowledge as the starting point and intends to move the discussion further by undertaking a multi-layered examination of nascent entrepreneurs' learning and managing.

The contributions of this book are multiple. Firstly, it provides an investigation of social construction processes of nascent entrepreneurship, from a learning perspective, which is identified as an under-researched area by many scholars in the field. Secondly, the research provides rich empirical material in the form of case accounts to exemplify such processes. Thirdly, a multi-layered framework of nascent entrepreneurship has been developed in this research, which moves beyond individual or collective understandings of entrepreneurship, by taking an inter-disciplinary approach

and applying Bourdieu's conceptual tools in a comprehensive way in the entrepreneurship field. Finally, a number of research implications for academics and practical insights for practitioners including nascent entrepreneurs, enterprise educators and mentors are offered in Chapter 10.

1.2 ORGANISATION OF THE BOOK

Chapter 2 presents a review of the policy context in the UK in relation to enterprise culture by examining the underlying philosophies, assumptions and institutions from a historical perspective. Enterprise culture debates have been presented in order to emphasise the political, economic and social factors in the UK that have resulted in enterprise education and support agendas. The role of universities has been not insignificant, with particular reference to university incubators. The vagueness of the notion of enterprise and its political and ideological use in government pronouncements is worth noting (Chell, 2007).

Chapter 3 locates the current research in relation to developments in entrepreneurship and organisation studies. It places emphasis on how entrepreneurship has been conceptualised in academic discourses over time. In line with the research aims and questions, three major perspectives, which are in tune with social constructionist and constructivist perspectives in studying social phenomena, have been identified when charting the literature on entrepreneurship. These include processual perspectives, relational perspectives and process-relational perspectives on entrepreneurship.

Approaching entrepreneurial behaviour and process from a variety of angles and methodological positions, processual studies centre around the functions and activities associated with perceiving business opportunities and creating ventures to pursue them. Thus a processual way of looking at entrepreneurship entails the examination of emerging characteristics of the entrepreneurial process. From processual perspectives, the dynamic process through which business opportunities are realised becomes the central focus of entrepreneurship studies (Fletcher, 2003).

Relational perspectives highlight the human relationships involved in the process. Entrepreneurial activities are realised and constructed through social processes. This understanding of entrepreneurship builds on the Schumpeterian (1934) notion of contributing to economic change through new combinations of products or processes. Entrepreneurs bring about new ideas, products, or processes by working in relation to a team, small community or network of people (Johannisson, 1990; Fletcher, 1997, 2003). This leads to process-relational perspectives, which combine

the processual view of emergence with a relational dimension in order to generate deeper insights. The relational part is in essence about relating to each other through language, narrative, discourse as well as enactment.

The process-relational position adopted in this research project takes account of the following conceptualisation of entrepreneurship, which is based on the studies of Stevenson and Gumpert (1985), Stevenson and Jarillo (1990), Hart, Stevenson and Dial (1995), Chell (2000, 2001, 2007, 2008) and Fletcher and Watson (2003):

Entrepreneurship is the process through which people with ideas for product, service or process relentlessly and relationally pursue business opportunities without regards to alienable resources currently available and with an intention and motivation to create wealth and accumulate capital.

Chapter 4 follows with a discussion on nascent entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial learning. Aldrich (1999) defines nascent entrepreneurs as those who initiate serious entrepreneurial activities that are intended to culminate in a viable business start-up. They are in the process of beginning their entrepreneurial venture with the potential and capacity to become successful entrepreneurs (Westhead and Wright, 1998); therefore they have very limited experience or practical understanding of the concepts and processes involved. Thus, the intrinsic elements of the entrepreneurial process of business venturing include entrepreneurial learning and managing. These, we anticipate, will be highly evident in the case of nascent entrepreneurs. As such, they will develop meanings and understandings of venturing through a constant process of negotiations and exchanges with clients, competitors, mentors, financial organisations, regional development agencies and members of a variety of networks. From this analysis we bring together key ideas from the extant literature on entrepreneurial learning.

Chapter 5 discusses the methodological approach taken in crafting the research. The social constructionist paradigm and Bourdieu's relational methodology are explained with reference to their application in the research underpinning the book. The social constructionist position in which this research is grounded calls for the need to understand human experiences in their socio-cultural context (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; K.J. Gergen, 1985; Burr, 1995), with an acknowledgement of human agency and active perceptual constructions of the members of a society (Martin and Sugarman, 1996; Chell, 2000, 2008; Nicholson and Anderson, 2005). The individual entrepreneurs' biographies, choices, motivation and the 'capitals' (Bourdieu, 1986), some of which they draw on and some others that they make determined effort to attain, have been examined

in the project. Entrepreneurial learning literature (for example Cope and Watts, 2000; Cope, 2003, 2005; Rae, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Politis, 2005), which reveals complexities of the learning process and yields rich insights into entrepreneurs' transformative learning experience in their cultural and organisational context, is reviewed in order that we may locate the current research as a continuation of these 'interpretive' studies (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) that aim to explain the dynamics and subtleties of the process.

Chapter 6 presents the research design based on 'naturalistic inquiry' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and an overview of social constructionist paradigmatic assumptions, research questions, associated methods of data collection and analysis, and criteria applied for establishing the trustworthiness of this qualitative study. The research data were collected primarily through participant observation and in-depth interviews. Observation and interview data were supplemented by documentary evidence provided by participants. Observation data were stored and analysed using Spradley's (1980) participant observation framework. Meeting talks and interviews were analysed from transcripts using qualitative data analysis techniques that Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (2002) provide in their source books. Bourdieu's (1986, 1990, 1998) conceptual tools including dispositions and different forms of capital at micro-individual level, *habitus* at the meso-relational level and field at the macro-level were instrumental in defining broad categories of data during the analysis. This allowed the data to be accessible at individual case level and particularly cross-case level.

Chapter 7 presents the first case study, labelled using the pseudonym 'KBrandArt'. The first case venturing process relates to the formation of a creative venture (that is a brand communications agency, which uniquely includes in-house production of advertising vehicles) so-called 'KBrandArt'. The case material was generated by observing the venture team meetings and daily and strategic conduct of the business by five nascent entrepreneurs, who set up the company outside the local university's incubator centre while they were students in different areas of arts, design and technology at the local university. This case material includes face-to-face interviews and documents from their organisational texts (mainly business plans, meeting notes, internal memos and press releases). The 'Creative Industries' (CI) context, as defined by two government documents (Department of Culture Media and Sport, 1998, 2001), sets the common macro-level ground for both case accounts.

Chapter 8 presents the second case account, 'R-Games', which is about a solo entrepreneur's business venturing story. Her story is characterised by a venturing process supported by the local university's incubator centre.

Chapter 9 offers a multi-layered framework of nascent entrepreneurship. Nascent entrepreneurship is conceptualised from a multi-layered perspective by taking into account the interplay of micro-, meso- and macro-level qualities of the process. The key argument is that individual nascent entrepreneurs (micro-level) actively and relationally form their new ventures as a part of a broader venture community (meso-relational level), which is embedded in the macro-field of enterprise culture with its institutions and education programmes.

The salient themes of the book are pulled together in the conclusion in Chapter 10. It is the idea that the current research is a part of these several movements in knowledge. This study would, we hope, enable us to make a contribution by studying such an under-researched area in diverse settings and offering rich case study material and ultimately to generate significant insights to venture community members, academics who research and teach the subject, and policy-makers at national and international levels.

NOTE

1. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital is broader than the notion of capital in economics. It is used in a more encompassing sense to represent 'resource' that can assume monetary and non-monetary as well as tangible and intangible forms. This is delineated in Chapter 5 of the book.

2. Setting the discursive context: enterprise culture debates in the UK

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

Political discourse in many advanced liberal economies has been dominated by references to ‘enterprise’ for the best part of a quarter of a century (du Gay, 2004, p. 38). The enterprise culture is founded on the premise that entrepreneurship has a transformative function, which drives the economy (Jack and Anderson, 1999). This belief that new enterprises fuel employment and wealth creation, combined with a shift from the orthodoxy of Keynesian economics to a market-driven ideology, has cemented entrepreneurship into political discourse (Ogbor, 2000; Swedberg, 2000; Perren and Jennings, 2005).

The chapter seeks to examine the political discourse of enterprise culture that has prevailed in the UK since the early 1980s, by analysing the underpinning philosophies and assumptions from a historical perspective. To this end, the chapter is organised as follows: the first section discusses the political usage of the term ‘enterprise culture’, by showing how successive politicians have played on the ambiguity of interpretation in order to serve several purposes at different times. The second section considers the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the further development of the enterprise agenda. The part played by university incubators provides a deeper insight into the context for nascent entrepreneurship. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key debates.

2.2 ENTERPRISE CULTURE DEBATES

The notion of enterprise culture has been at the forefront of political debate for three decades, with successive UK governments having committed themselves to making the UK a country of enterprise (Gavron, Cowling, Holtham et al., 1998). During the course of the 1980s, the idea of an enterprise culture emerged as a central motif in the political thought and practice of the Conservative government in the UK (Keat, 1991). However, there is a continuing political enthusiasm for encouraging

enterprise and entrepreneurship in the UK (Ram and Smallbone, 2003). As pointed out by Gibb (2002a), enterprise has been at the core of the UK government's 'competitiveness initiative' for several years (Blair, 1998 in Gibb, 2002a; Department of Trade and Industry, 1998). Gibb (2002a, p. 235) maintains that there is a crucial difference between the 2002 Labour government's version and that of the Thatcher government. The difference is that the Thatcher government's attempts to create an enterprise culture were based on free market economics and bringing about a range of external structural changes (Morris, 1991).

Specifically, these interventions entailed: dismantling the welfare state, reducing the power of trade unions, deregulation, introduction of the market mechanism, privatisation, cuts in taxation, reducing the role of the state and enlarging that of the individual, reducing the public sector borrowing requirement, introducing firm monetary and fiscal discipline thus bringing inflation under control, and promoting self-employment (Carr and Beaver, 2002). By implementing these policies, questions were raised about the moral underpinnings of the Thatcherite enterprise culture and the need to develop a deeper understanding of the values and attitudes implicit in the concept of enterprise within the organisational psyche and society more widely (Keat, 1991; Gavron et al., 1998; Carr and Beaver, 2002, p. 106). Therefore, the Thatcherite project of economic reconstruction has been redefined as 'one of cultural reconstruction – the attempt to transform Britain into an enterprise culture' (Keat, 1991, p. 1).

Morris (1991) provides a detailed account of the historical development of the notion of 'enterprise culture' by showing how its meaning fluctuated through a series of policies from 1974 until the beginning of the 1990s. In 1974, the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) was founded to study free market economics. In its publications from this time until around 1985, 'enterprise' was understood largely in terms of commercial and industrial initiative and advocacy of the extension of the market model to new areas (Morris, 1991, p. 23). These studies therefore focused on the removal of various economic and fiscal barriers in order to allow for the development of the culture of enterprise rather than defining the characteristics of the enterprise itself (Morris, 1991). Since 1985, there was an increase in emphasis on individualism (including personal property and individual responsibility) and the ethos of the market as individual choice. This ideological emphasis manifested itself in the establishment of an Enterprise Policy Unit in 1987, whose aim was the creation of a full enterprise culture, concentrating on enterprise, educational issues, business concerns and taxation. In a 1987 policy document (cited in Morris, 1991), the CPS defined 'enterprise culture' as follows: 'Enterprise culture is defined as the full set of conditions that promote high and rising levels of achievement in

a country's economic activity, politics and government, arts and sciences, and also distinctively private lives of the inhabitants'. Further, enterprise was associated with risk-taking in all areas of life; individual commitment and creativity were to be manifest at all levels of 'work and play' in order to foster initiative (Morris, 1991, p. 24). The emphasis on motivation, creative ambition and excellence was considered to be a significant point as these could be gained through education. Therefore, it would appear that the idea that 'enterprise is teachable' is rooted in these developments and forms a central plank of enterprise and entrepreneurship education to the current day.

A seminal lecture by Lawson (1984, cited in Morris, 1991) advocated the view that 'Britain must create an enterprise culture by changing psychology in order to change the business culture'. He contended that the effects of all the measures to free the market could be thwarted by the particular British historico-cultural and psychological realities; so what is required is education in enterprise and specific policies to counter these realities. A new scheme called 'Enterprise in Higher Education' (EHE) was introduced in 1987 by the then Department of Employment, the aim of which was 'to increase dramatically the supply of more highly qualified people with enterprise' (MSC, 1987 cited in Morris, 1991, p. 30). Thus, the definition of enterprise was extended to include: 'generating and taking ideas and putting them to work, taking decisions, welcoming change and helping to shape it and create wealth'.

The changing meaning of enterprise in the late 1980s paved the way for the introduction of concepts such as 'social entrepreneurship' or 'social enterprise'. In his 1986–87 speeches, Lord Young argued that the basis of national unity was a cluster of shared values and only enterprise values could provide this basis. As expressed by Morris (1991, p. 31):

The values of personal responsibility and confidence, together with the desire to improve one's own circumstances, are the foundation for what he calls 'enterprise in the community'. That is the creation of communities based on self-respect and respect for others, which is manifest in good citizenship.

This period is referred to by Morris (1991) as 'partnership in cultural engineering' in which a conscious attempt was made to create the conditions to effect massive cultural and psychological transformation of British society in order to bring about an enterprise culture.

Analysing the political speeches delivered between 1985 and 1988, Fairclough (1991) deciphered the 'enterprise discourse', which had been shaped and reshaped in relation to shifting strategies, and reached the conclusion that 'enterprise discourse is best conceived of as a rather diffuse

set of changes affecting various aspects of the societal order of discourse in various ways' (Fairclough, 1991, p. 39). Fairclough's (1991) analysis starts with the dictionary meanings of 'enterprise', as he outlines three senses of the word: engagement in bold, arduous or momentous undertakings; disposition or readiness to engage in undertakings of difficulty, risk, danger, or daring spirit; and private business as a collective noun. He refers to these as 'activity', 'quality' (in the sense of personal quality), and 'business' senses. He notes the ambivalence potential of enterprise in Lord Young's speeches since any occurrence of the word is open to being interpreted in any of the three senses or any combinations of them. Establishing the links to wider strategic objectives of the speeches, Fairclough (1991) points out that the strategic exploitation of the ambivalence of the word 'enterprise' in the political speeches of the time is a significant element in achieving the higher purposes – particularly contributing to revaluation of a somewhat discredited private business sector, by associating private enterprise with culturally valued qualities of 'enterprisingness'.

Fairclough (1991) observes that almost all of Young's definitions of enterprise give it the quality sense. The differentiating point is the contrast between qualities that are specific to business activity and more general personal qualities. By giving examples of definitions from four speeches, he depicts a scale, which moves from business to general qualities. What is more important is the varying communication objectives, situations and audiences of speeches. For example, the following definition occurs in a speech whose focus is tackling unemployment: 'Enterprise encompasses flexibility, innovation, risk taking and hard work – the qualities so essential to the future of our economy and our nation' (Lord Young as quoted in Fairclough, 1991, p. 41). Another definition, which was provided in a speech two months later, was addressing the issue of inner city policy and 'enterprise in the community': 'Enterprise . . . means an acceptance of personal responsibility and a confidence and desire to take action to improve your own circumstances' (Lord Young as quoted in Fairclough, 1991, p. 41).

The expression 'enterprise culture', which occurs throughout these speeches, is widely used as a label for core components of government policy and strategy and is itself very vague, not only because 'enterprise' is vague between the three senses, but also because the relationship between the two elements of such nominal compounds is itself open to multiple interpretations (Fairclough, 1991). Providing a fairly representative sample of the speeches as a whole, he sums up the following usages: enterprise and employment, initiative and enterprise, enterprise and individual responsibility, self-reliance and enterprise, skills and enterprise, professionalism and enterprise, and talents and enterprise.

Looking into the configurations of the meanings, he notes that just as

establishing particular salience hierarchies among the senses of a word can serve strategic purposes, so it can establish wider configurations between the discourses of enterprise and skill on the one hand, or between the discourses of enterprise and individual responsibility on the other. The analysis leads us to the following: firstly, the narratives (or vocabularies or discourses) of 'enterprise' and 'skill' blend enterprise with a particular vocationally oriented conceptualisation, wording and ideology of education and training, and that of its relationship to work and other dimensions of social life; and secondly, the narrative of 'enterprise' and 'individual responsibility' combines enterprise with personal morality.

Finally, Fairclough (1991, p. 47) suggests that the total configuration that results is the linguistic aspect of a major strategic conjunction in government policies: between a promotion of 'enterprise' in the workplace and beyond, consumerism and a vocationally geared education system.

Another work, which examined government pronouncements of enterprise culture during the 1980s, is that of Selden (1991). He looked into the speeches and published papers of Lord Young and Lord Lawson. As in the article of Fairclough (1991), he starts with the ambivalent nature of the terms 'enterprise', 'enterprising' and 'entrepreneur'. Joining the views of Morris (1991) and to some extent Fairclough (1991), he suggests the need to take a more encompassing approach in understanding enterprise discourse. The general human qualities that the term 'enterprise' connotes should not be restrained within a narrowly economic discourse. Seeing the industrial revolution as the first true moment of the enterprise culture, and relating the enterprise culture to the basic pillars of capitalism, Selden (1991) demonstrates the increasing emphasis placed on individualism in the speeches and readings of enterprise culture particularly in late 1980s:

This is based on the fundamental premise of the enterprise argument: only by allowing the individual to act in an economically self-interested manner can sufficient wealth be created to allow individuals to care for others. ... The entrepreneurial discourse is here in danger of undoing its binary logic. The terms are clearly in uneasy relation: 'wealth creation versus wealth consumption, standard of living versus caring, civilized society'. We cannot have a caring, civilised society, unless we allow individuals selfishly to reach the standard of living that makes helping others possible. There is no way of knowing at what stage the creation of wealth overflows into the socially altruistic consumption of wealth. It is necessary to legitimise individual greed in order to effect civilized ends. The priority of self-interest over helping others remains. ... We must all accept the values of the enterprise culture. We must accept that helping ourselves comes before helping others. The enterprise discourse asks us to accept Hamlet's advice and to stop being the primarily social beings some of us feel we are. If we keep acting as though we are essentially entrepreneurial beings, we may actually start believing it; 'for' as Hamlet says 'use almost can change the stamp of nature' (Selden, 1991, p. 70).