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- Introduction
- Trying to Understand Entrepreneurship
 - Entrepreneurship in Economic Theory
 - Chances & Restrictions of Micro-Entrepreneurship
 - Harness Entrepreneurial Behavior in Non Economic Life into Entrepreneurship
- Entrepreneurship & Intrapreneurship
- Entrepreneurship versus Self-employed
 - Overburdened & Overworked
 - Apply the Principles of Division of Labour to the Entrepreneur's Abilities
- Focus on Idea Development
- De-mystify Creativity
- Adapt to Society's Values
- Refine the Idea
- Literature

Introduction

Operating in a competitive and increasingly complex environment arguably demands entrepreneurial behaviour and, of course, people who have the competencies to work within such a context. This is the **entrepreneurial age**. Entrepreneurs are driving a revolution that is **transforming and renewing** economies worldwide. Entrepreneurship... gives a market economy its vitality. New and emerging businesses create a very large proportion of innovative products that transform the way we work and live... They generate most of the new jobs (Bygrave 1994, p. 1).

Even if you call this an exaggerated and typical American euphemism – to thoroughly comprehend innovative entrepreneurship may add valuable insights into the future of work. It can be argued that **assisting entrepreneurship** most certainly will constitute some characteristics of the skills and competencies in the future. The common rationale for this seems to lie in the need to cope more effectively with high rates of change in society, particularly as they contribute to much higher levels of uncertainty in business, and consequently, the labour market. At the root of the policy concern is the **issue of competitiveness** and the ability of economies to sustain **economic and social development** in an increasingly open society. In the labour market context it is argued that there is a need to find means of helping individuals cope with circumstances under which they may need to change jobs, occupations and locations numerous times during their careers (Gibb 1998, p. 1)

On a national or societal level there is the context of the concern for the development of entrepreneurial cultures in society (op. cit., p. 4)

Trying to Understand Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship in Economic Theory

Let us take a closer look at how the figure of the entrepreneur is treated in **economic theory**. We have a surprise in store. Astonishingly, in the literature of economics the entrepreneur has been largely left out. Entrepreneurship is an important and, until recently, sadly neglected subject, says Mark Casson (1990, p.XIII), who could be called the rediscoverer of the **entrepreneurial figure**.

In the past ten years, research has taken a new direction, bringing out the separate and distinct function of the entrepreneur in contrast to that of the manager. Why is so much emphasis placed on this difference? Because it is about a quality all of its own, something new. **The essence of entrepreneurship** is being different says Casson. **What is so different here?** The manager, one could argue, must operate under normal conditions and in routine business, while for successful entrepreneurship exactly the opposite qualities are needed.

The entrepreneur is not the capitalist, either, a distinction that goes back to **J. B. Say** and which was taken up by **Joseph Schumpeter** (quoted from the 1993 edition, p. 217), the **classic economic reference** for entrepreneurial behaviour. This distinction is significant, since the two functions have been repeatedly treated, in non-specialist literature but to some extent in the history of economics as well, as if they were one and the same. The difference can be otherwise expressed in a current bon mot: "The entrepreneur creates jobs, the capitalist opens them up. The entrepreneur has an idea, founds a business, employs people. The capitalist has money, buys into an enterprise and tries to increase the return on his capital. He rationalizes or closes unproductive parts of the business, thereby tending to make employees redundant.

Schumpeter, too, describes the entrepreneur as forsaking well-trodden paths to open up new territory and as turning (believe it or not!) dreams into reality (op. cit., p. 125 f.). **Schumpeter puts the stress on innovation**, not on the invention. The **entrepreneurial function** consists not of inventing things, but rather of bringing knowledge to life and into the market (op. cit., p. 128 f.). Schumpeter himself assumes that with innovation existing structures are destroyed. He saw the markets, realistically viewed, as dominated by oligopolies. Competition, and with it a more efficient allocation of resources, arises only through the invasion of these markets by **new entrepreneurs**, who destroy the existing market equilibrium with their innovations. This mechanism has been taken into economic discourse and is termed creative destruction.

Hans Hinterhuber (1992) points out a special relationship between the entrepreneurial vision and the person: entrepreneurial ideas, he says, are an expression of one's own life and professional experience. He even speaks of the feeling of a mission. This sense of mission must be present to set free the energies needed to market a product successfully. The author gives several examples of some entrepreneurial ideas that have marked our society more than others, because their originator had an idea in the Platonic sense and were imbued with a sense of mission: **Gottlieb Duttweiler in Switzerland**, with his idea of breaking down traditional commercial structures and offering products much cheaper, especially to poorer population groups, or **Steven Jobs and Stephen Wozniak**, with their vision of democratizing the computer. Interesting, too, the indication that entrepreneurial vision is an idea of sweeping, classic simplicity (op. cit., p. 44). Going along with this is a sense of reality: ideas by themselves do not yet constitute vision. A sense of reality means seeing things as they are, not as one wishes them to be.

And finally the ability to withdraw from reality: the highhanded creation of new basic conditions which redefine the rules of the game. In the American literature, this latter is often described thus: The entrepreneur has to put the odds in his favour, even if and especially if founders of enterprises when first presenting their ideas often cannot make them comprehensible. (Faltin, 1998, p. 4)

Chances & Restrictions of Micro-Entrepreneurship

Is entrepreneurship a concept for the rich and educated only?

At first glance entrepreneurship seems to exclude almost all people in society. **Do you have the great idea and the financial funds to create a business company?** A venture that can survive in an increasingly tough competitive environment? In fact, most surveys indicated that small enterprises are at a disadvantage to large companies. However, since de Soto published his *El Otro Sendero*, the informal sector (which in many developing countries produces up to 40 % Gross National Product and employs more than half of the working population) has become the focus of new interest into micro-entrepreneurship. **De Soto** has shown that it is not the lack of capital that is putting micro-enterprises at a disadvantage but the bias of bureaucracy and restrictions against micro-entrepreneurs (de Soto, 1992).

In an experiment known as microcredit which has been replicated by other organisations in dozens of other countries, **Muhammad Yunus** Grameen Bank has set an example that the poor can run micro-enterprises in a surprisingly successful way. Since its start 21 years ago the bank has lent \$ 2.3 billion to more than 2 million clients. I'm against charity, he says, it takes away human dignity and initiative (International Herald Tribune, Febr. 28 March 1, 1998, p.5).

In history, **entrepreneurship was an important chance for outsiders**, such as the Jews or the Indians in East Africa. For a great majority of the poor it is practically the only one. They do not find jobs in the formal sector, yet they have to survive in the informal sector. Most conservatives, in the past, favoured entrepreneurship but dismissed the values and **chances of micro-entrepreneurship**. They regarded large projects and the formal sector to be the only possible approach to development. However they are beginning now to recognize the potential for micro-enterprises, particularly for the poor people.

Our **educational system**, as it is, seems not to facilitate an adequate approach towards entrepreneurship, maybe not towards real life situations in general. As Ivan Illich pointed out, most learning does not take place in schools. It is rather the result of unrestricted participation in real life situations. The picture of the market which the educational system projects, is in most cases quite different from reality. Not the ruthless egoist is demanded and rewarded here. In the reality of **functioning markets**, there is quite a different lesson to be learned: that **one's entrepreneurial idea**, one's quality and pricing must fit peoples demands; that one's customers and staff are the people one depends on; that one has to build reliable relationships as one's most valuable asset. One has to participate in community matters to keep gangsters, corrupt police and bureaucracy on the sidelines.

Is it mere ecotopia to believe that the distribution of goods can be possibly organised by micro-enterprises? In an ecological way? No expensive outlets, no **waste of packaging materials**, no overheads or corporate boardrooms? Can we imagine these small units to become something like a substitute for department stores? Who commands retail business in the way it is organised in the Western hemisphere? If you walk around in Bangkok, you will find lots of young people selling fashionable garments just in front of department stores in which exactly the same items are sold at much higher price. **Nobody organises** (and exploits) **these young entrepreneurs**. Do you expect customers not to purchase from these poorly equipped shops? People do buy and particularly those educated tourists who do not feel attracted by extravagantly equipped outlets. Of course, the established and influential shop owners (tax payers!) try everything to get rid of these competitors. They do not succeed because the city administration has accepted the colourful shops and their attraction not only for tourists but also for improving inner city life (Faltin 1993).

What makes up the difference between our little utopia and reality? Maybe it's our lack of imagination only. The distribution of goods, at least of some, could be indeed conquered by micro-entrepreneurs. That would even or particularly make sense in terms of ecology. Such a market can be simple, very efficient and cost-saving. It could be more exiting and human than those posh constructions of steel, glass and extravagance. As a side effect you get more employment, allow more enterprising spirit, make for participation of the poor, and give a chance of taking market share from the established groups. If you want to tax the informals, do it. Paying taxes in exchange for guaranteed access to the market will pay off well for the informal entrepreneurs. In the case of the internet the success of micro-enterprises has already visibly come true.

Harness Entrepreneurial Behavior in Non Economic Life into Entrepreneurship

We are all fascinated with peak performance and new achievements, **Tomecko** (1998) argues, and we only have to flick through the thousands of entries in the Guinness Book of World Records to confirm that the sense of **competition and achievement** is widespread and vibrant. (It is expected that over 100 million copies of the Guinness Book of World Records will be sold by the year 2000.)

- The world record for the tallest stack of standard playing cards is held by Brian Berg who used 700 decks of cards to build a house of cards that was 6.2 meters high with 105 storeys.
- The record for tree sitting is held by an Indonesian, Bungkas, who went up a palm tree in his village 25 years ago and is still up there.

The challenge is how to harness this **energy and innovation** that is so often spent on trivialities and channel it towards the improvement of the human condition by means of innovative entrepreneurship (op. cit., p. 1).

Entrepreneurship & Intrapreneurship

Most commonly, the term entrepreneur is referred to as the person that founds a new business venture. This interpretation inherently seems to put entrepreneurship out of reach for **the vast majority of people**. (I'm not a genius, and I've not the financial background necessary, hence how can I think of entrepreneurship?)

But it is even the large **grown-up organisations** that have come to realize that they lack entrepreneurial thinking. Hence they have an interest in entrepreneurship in a much broader scope, sometimes labelled intrapreneurship (Pinchot 1985) defined as the harnessing of entrepreneurial behaviour within the large company or **institution associated with changes in corporate culture**, organisation and structures often in favour of smallness and decentralisation. The impact of the information technology, leading to greater interest in the potential for distributed networks, has reinforced interest in the management of disaggregated organisations (Gibb 1996).

This could induce a profound change in educational goals and maybe the orientation of job seekers. Normally they offer their certificate of education, and wait for an employer to buy into it. Were they to offer an **entrepreneurial idea or mind-set**, their bargaining power and chances immediately would improve as would the potential of the company that hires them!

How can they deal with each other? The applicant could offer: "If you employ me, I am willing to put my business idea into practise in your company." This is an attractive offer for a company that lacks innovative entrepreneurship. The deal would also be attractive for the applicant: He does not get involved with the burden of establishing and running his **own business administration**. It would be a novel approach and it would be interesting to see how the mutual benefits can be negotiated in the deal.

Entrepreneurship versus Self-employed

Overburdened & Overworked

The German term for self-employed, *selbständig*, which is often used to describe the small shop owner, has another, quite popular connotation: You have to do it all **yourself** (*selbst*) and you have to do it **all the time** (*ständig*). This, of course, is not an attractive prospect. You get overburdened and overworked.

As quite often **self-employment is given the same meaning as entrepreneurship** we understand why many people don't see any perspective in entrepreneurship. Running an enterprise by choice, or if you will, by heart, as opposed to an enterprise possibly forced upon you by circumstances are two very different situations.

To put it in pictures:

The **entrepreneur is like a surfer**, with an optimistic mindset for his sport, building on his own talents and preferences, enjoying the challenge of ever changing waves and winds, quickly overcoming mistakes or minor defeats. The surfer is open minded to sharpening his skills, gathering new know-how, welcoming all available inputs and using them **in a creative and efficient manner**.

The self-employed is like a sailor on a battered sailing ship with all the elements as if sworn against him, cursing the ever-changing waves and winds, lacking adequate materials and qualifications. Maybe his original occupational choices could not be pursued, were not available at all or this situation turned against him: so here he is, stuck with his sailing ship. He is in a desperate mood, seeing nothing but trouble and storm, sceptical towards new ideas or new inputs.

Hence, it is very important not only to have an innovative idea but also that this idea is in harmony with the entrepreneurs personality.

For the self-employed, permanently overburdened, his unfortunate situation seems to be translated into an enormous **catalogue of knowledge** requirements. The traditional concept of self-employed qualification is that he has to know almost everything: accounting, keeping inventory on hand, negotiating with suppliers and customers, legalities, the tax man's requirements, managing employees, equipment maintenance, creating team spirit, and so on. One could put an almost **endless list of qualifications and competencies** that an self-employed needs for business operations. It is this understanding and demand for an all-round qualified person that not only makes it rare to find, and difficult to train, but also a deterrent to ordinary people.

No question that it is helpful for entrepreneurs to have a basic know-how and understanding of business management. But: to what extent is it necessary for the entrepreneur to have all these competencies fully developed in his own person?

Apply the Principles of Division of Labour to the Entrepreneur's Abilities

There is a growing notion in American economic literature that **entrepreneurship is different from business administration**. The emphasis in entrepreneurship is on innovation and the start-up of a new venture whereas business administration emphasizes the organisational aspects of existing entities. It does not seem a good idea to demand the competencies for both fields in one person. (Unfortunately, if you ask successful **business founders of the old generation** about the skills that were required for their success, they will enumerate exactly all the different qualifications mentioned above).

We should be aware that in future the concept of an all-round qualification is obsolete. We most certainly will have to apply the principle of division of labour to this problem. People have **different skills, attitudes and preferences**. For example, instead of trying to educate an engineer how to become a smart salesperson (which is very much against his professional and personal attitude) it seems better to separate these two functions and allocate them to two different persons. There are too many **business techniques to be learned**. To handle each of them adequately would be simply overwhelming.

Maybe we have to rethink the **entrepreneur as a regisseur** in a movie production: he is the brain to put the different actors, requisites and services together. This constitutes a more than full time job already.

Probably this is the reason to emphasize a "lead entrepreneur" supported by a "management team" (Timmons 1990, Bygrave 1994).

Focus on Idea Development

"There are plenty of ideas around", is often said, "**the important part is to put them into practice**". Isn't that reflecting reality quite well? In fact there are lots of ideas in a sense of impressions and thoughts that come to your mind. But to generate a new and innovative idea (in Schumpeter's sense of innovation) is a totally different operation. These types of ideas or concepts are not easily available.

The attempt to generate them needs in-depth analysis in the particular business field and perseverance in trying to create a new solution. Of course ideas have to be put into practise and it is certainly not an easy task to do this. But as it is **an arduous process**, it would be a pity to build the whole edifice on a weak foundation. If you are going to produce a movie and expend a lot of effort and money – does it make sense to base it on a weak story?

The quality of the entrepreneurial idea is of utmost importance. Whether you can successfully conquer the market or you have to fight for mere survival does very much depend on the quality of the concept that you developed and refined.

As an entrepreneur you do not necessarily need to be an inventor but you should be an innovator. Why? If your idea is not innovative, those businesses already in the marketplace will have a competitive edge over you. They are the ones who already have customers, they have the **experience with suppliers**, and they know the **specifics of the product itself**; they are well known in their environment whereas you as a newcomer are not. In short, they have all the advantages and you likewise have a **corresponding number of disadvantages**. Hence, to enter the marketplace it is almost a necessity to have a new idea.

So, **innovation is an important ingredient for success and survival**. Statistics show that, at least in developed countries, about 50-80 % of all new start-ups do not survive more than five years. (Compared to entrepreneurial ventures, Russian roulette looks like a better prospect: five of six shots let you survive, but in entrepreneurship four of five shots will destroy you). Most probably the **innovative element of your business idea** is your most crucial partner for survival.

You also need innovation to stay competitive. This is perhaps more difficult than the original start-up because company founders find themselves unexpectedly in a new, unfamiliar territory: A more or less big organisation. **Day-to-day administration** then burns up increasingly greater amounts of their time and energy on detail, rather than on enhancing or adapting their **original idea or vision**. To have an innovative idea in the beginning is not sufficient for the long term. **Imitators will come up**, big companies will make use of their size and influence. You need continuous reaffirmation to innovation.

De-mystify Creativity

You need not be a genius to create a good idea.

Although it is a common perception that **creativity is something rare** and outstanding, modern research findings do not substantiate such an assertion. There are a number of rules that can be learned by almost everybody. **Goleman, Kaufmann and Ray** (1993) have demonstrated how creativity is accessible to each of us. One of their points emphasised (keep a prepared mind, i.e. don't give up, let the solution to a problem grow with time) agrees exactly with an observation of the **German researcher Goebel** (1990): he found that within a group of about fifty young successful entrepreneurs it was their persistent reassessing of a problem that was the only characteristic shared by all.

My own experience with students at **Freie Universität** is that what they regard as an entrepreneurial idea is something like a flash, a first impression of what they would go for – but far from anything one would call a mature **entrepreneurial idea**. Regularly their idea is not thoroughly thought or researched through. Connecting links, analogies, cross associations have not been tried – in short, the potential of generating a **powerful idea** is not realised. On top of this you can find a certain attitude which I would call "fixated on a first idea". Like falling in love or down a trapdoor these students are unable to let go of the fixation.

The **phenomenon of fixation** was similarly experienced in the advisory work of the Berlin Institute of Entrepreneurship. It is helpful to explain this phenomenon to the clientele and deliberate on it. In my own workshops, called "**Entrepreneurship Laboratory**", I offer a kind of contract. We discuss the initial idea but the one who brought it in continues to be the owner of the idea. By this contract the owner gets his idea enhanced and enriched, whereas the fear, the idea could be stolen, is diminished. (The fear is exaggerated anyway; it would take much more intimate knowledge and thought to **copy or steal an idea** than the holder imagines).

Providing young people with appropriate **entrepreneurial skills** means essentially developing programmes with a strong pedagogical emphasis upon encouraging creativity, problem solving, development of leadership skills, decision making, risk taking, initiative taking, persuasion, negotiations, selling and a variety of other life skills. Such pedagogy can be developed within any curriculum context: it does not necessarily have to be business-related (Gibb 1996, p. 26).

This is not to be confused with training in business administration which does not provide real insight into idea generation and the start-up of a new venture.

Adapt to Society's Values

The concept of market economy as a set of rules has no inherent value, no inherent direction. Its "value", if you want to call it that, is to lead to the most **efficient use of resources**. Economists tend to regard this lack of a value system as an advantage. Almost everybody else does not. Of course we can not impose a set of **values on entrepreneurship**. But we should be aware that it is values which motivate and it is a value system that creates culture in society.

By creating a culture of entrepreneurship, by opening up the field for more groups of society which are not traditionally linked to business, we can expect an input of more values, of new patterns of problem solving, of new ideas being put into entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs would be in good companionship and on central stage. **Max Weber** has described this phenomenon most strikingly.

"For Weber the main motivating factor for the entrepreneur was religious belief or the Protestant work ethic which established social norms that discouraged extravagance, conspicuous consumption and indolence. The result was higher productivity, increased savings, and investment, all factors which are vital to growth." (Kolshorn/Tomecko 1995, p.3).

In a time where we become increasingly aware of our limited resources it seems not too far stretched to predict a comeback of at least some of these values.

Assume an entrepreneur, not unlike an artist or a scientist, wants to create something extraordinary and unique, something that makes his or her name shining. Naturally the emphasis will be on creating an extraordinary idea. **Goebel** (1990), in his survey of **young entrepreneurs in Germany** describes the positive aspects of such an obsession. The idea, he says, of doing something that nobody else has done or thought of, sets tremendous energies free. It makes the person capable of working hard and effectively even under extremely difficult and adverse conditions (p. 87). We should appreciate and utilize such stamina and enthusiasm.

If someone chooses the **field of entrepreneurship**, instead of art or science, what is wrong with such an effort? On the contrary we should encourage those attempts. It will enlarge and enrich the corps of entrepreneurs. Not the least, it will enhance the standard and attractiveness of entrepreneurship in society. We have to cast the net farther to create a more vivid and diverse **culture of entrepreneurship**.

Refine the Idea

After the **entrepreneurial idea** has passed the explorative phases, has got an innovative core and has proved – theoretically – to provide a competitive edge, the next step has to be idea refinement. While idea development is a process of opening up to new horizons and contents, idea refinement is a process of focussing, of going into details. Without opening up, we will not get an **innovative part in our business idea**; without refining, we will not get the idea to run in real life smoothly. Refinement means more than just giving a finishing touch. Refining questions are: Are there any areas left for further **improvement of the idea**? Or: What developments have to be watched carefully which could affect the original idea?

An important aspect can be synergies. Is there anything that can be used simultaneously that someone else also uses or needs? Are there any by-products, for example, that offer spin-offs? Maybe my input is someone else's output? The Thai farmer **Mahaju** provides an excellent example how to use synergies. He invented a production circle consisting of pigs, ducks, fish and rice where the waste product of one stage became the input of the next stage. **Synergies are a field of their own where idea refinement can be applied to make creative use of potentials.**

You have not started yet and have the chance to anticipate mistakes without having to pay for them. Refinement also means the chance to study your future customers more carefully, maybe doing some more detailed research on it. Get as much precise and intimate knowledge of your target groups as possible. If your idea is really **innovative and provides better value-for-money** for your clients, why not, for example, find out whether pre-financing, payment in advance by customers, is a possibility. It would be a cheaper means of financing and you would get rid of hassles with banks and bureaucratic work.

Refinement of your idea also relates to your **future business partners**. Find out who would be your most cost-effective and reliable supplier, advisor, tax consultant and so on. (Part of this is traditionally encompassed in the business plan. Frequently these people can provide knowledge for improving your entrepreneurial idea further). **Anticipate your market-entry**. Refine your strategy to counter possible imitators of your idea. How can you make sure, for example, that it is you who should be regarded as the genuine authority and remain to be perceived as this, even with more resourceful competitors coming on stage.

Beware of experts at the early stage of idea development. Get the experts and professionals in only after your baby – the new idea – has gained some strength. Otherwise it may easily be killed by their conventional views and their sarcasm. Now, in the process of idea refinement, the professionals are of good use for the reality check. But be aware that they are naturally biased against genuine new approaches to their own field (of course there are exceptions to this observation). **"You are a fool – until your idea becomes a success", Mark Twain** already stressed. It's a pattern that can be found in the biography of almost all innovative entrepreneurs.

You need to have eye-opening capabilities. Like a child that lives in a world of permanent discoveries, innovative entrepreneurship needs curious eyes and an attitude that there are plenty of discoveries still to be made.

New participants of the "**Laboratory**" often tell me that they feel like they live in a world where everything exists already and is merchandised. In fact, if you go through magazines and sales catalogues you are tempted to feel the same. Is it true that all our **reasonable needs** have been met already and the products for those needs are on offer? I personally do not believe that the products for our needs have already been developed. **Quite the opposite may be true:** That we are in need of a new breed of entrepreneurs, who, embedded in their social culture, develop a better understanding of their contemporaries' needs and bring with them a **childlike curiousness, humour and perseverance**.

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