Creativity and the Entrepreneur

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Abstract "….in the long run no really subtle, deep, and far-reaching problems can be solved in any field whatsoever, except by people who are able to respond in an original and creative way to the ever changing and developing nature of the overall fact by which they are confronted." (Bohm, 1998). Creativity can lead to many initiatives which are relevant to the development of business. This paper begins to explore the relationship between creativity, marketing and the entrepreneurial process.

INTRODUCTION

The creative soul can lead to a new packaging design for a washing powder or, perhaps more sublimely to an artist creating a painting. Creativity can be messy, unexpected, a mystery, or merely frustrating. Popular writers like de Bono (1996) attempt to reduce creativity to the logic of self-organising information or patterning systems. Sources of such creativity can be found in innocence, experience, timed judgment, chance, accident and even madness.

Being creative is seeing the same thing as everybody else but thinking of something different. Often by combining existing objects in different ways a new purpose can be discovered. For example, Guttenburg took the wine press and the die punch and produced a printing press. Another way of looking at creativity is as playing with the way things are interrelated. The surrealist painters are often effective in juxtaposing two or more unrelated objects in order to create a tension. Within this tension is the source of the creative spark. If for example one considers Magritte’s painting “Time Transfixed, 1939” (Figure 1) then it helps to illustrate this point. Why is the locomotive coming out of the chimney? On its own a locomotive is nothing new to us. It creates no mystery. However in choosing to depict it in a fireplace Magritte creates a mystery which raise questions and possibilities. Entrepreneurs and even academics as they play with ideas are seeking to create and then explore the mystery. It may be that nothing comes of it but by taking part in this process one is exposed to the possibility of creativity.
What then is the importance of creativity to the enterprise or to the entrepreneurial process? Clearly the birth of a new business or finding a better way to do something requires a creative spark. The discipline of Marketing at its best requires creativity at all stages of the marketing cycle but what can we usefully say about creativity and the entrepreneur in all of this?

Creativity is a central concept in a number of disciplines, ranging from the fine arts and architecture to psychology, science and management studies. Much of our recent work has concentrated on investigating the entrepreneurial exporter in the arts and craft sector in the UK and Ireland, where creativity may be perceived as paramount to success. In endeavouring to explain internationalisation behaviour of the craft firm, we have embraced both traditional methods of conceptualisation and explanation such as Transaction Cost Analysis (Anderson and Gatignon 1986; Reid 1983), the Stages approach (Ortiz-Buonafina 1991; Rao and Naidu 1992), and the more recent Network approach (Coviello and Munro 1995; Johanson and Mattsson 1988). However, in this age of postmodernism, it seems fitting that we have also sought to explain behaviour by examining possible contributions from disciplines outside international business and marketing. Since creativity is also central to success in the arts and crafts, it appears even more fitting to explore its contribution to marketing and entrepreneurship.

Like entrepreneurship, many have argued that creativity cannot be learned - it is an innate characteristic of those involved in its practice. By examining the following quotation from the eminent art historian Gombrich (1996, p363) on creativity, a number of concepts can be identified which do not appear out of place when endeavouring to allocate entrepreneurial characteristics to the innovative firm:

"Creativity does not come out of the void. It is the impulse to search out the possibilities and varieties of solutions offered by the craft tradition which will produce novelty and originality, because what the craftsman learns is not only to
copy but also to vary, to exploit his resources to the full and push his skill to the very limits of what a task will allow and suggest.

The business entrepreneur is involved in identifying opportunities which appear original; depending on the stage of development of the firm, many decisions are made impulsively, with no apparent planning; and the entrepreneur differentiates his/her self from the more conservative owner manager by taking more risks and utilising and adapting existing resources much more in order to develop the business.

Another interesting insight, albeit historically dated but nonetheless relevant to current entrepreneurial practice and creative innovation, can be found in the work of Machiavelli in his treatise *The Prince* (Adams, 1992). The Renaissance, at this time, was spreading throughout Europe, with entrepreneurial merchants partly responsible for the buying and distribution of arts and crafts:

> There is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new order of things...Whenever his enemies have the ability to attack the innovator they do so with the passion of partisans, while the others defend him so sluggishly, so that the innovator and his party alike are vulnerable.

Once the entrepreneur has implemented the innovation or adopted a novel and creative approach, the business is immediately open to attack from competitors. The owner/manager can protect the product or service to a certain extent through e.g. patenting, but in many export markets, there may be little the entrepreneur can appear to do to protect market share and profitability. Perhaps by utilising long term creativity and by adopting Machiavellian attitudes and practices, the business can seek to differentiate itself from the competition.

Some examples of the issue of creativity in business practice in the arts and crafts includes the area of compromise between being creative and artistic and producing what the buying public desire. In previous papers, Fillis (1998 a,b,c) has attempted to construct profiles of craft business types in order to highlight differences in both domestic and export market behaviour - both entrepreneurial and conservative craft firms are inherently creative - the main difference being that the entrepreneurial craft person implements creative approaches both in producing the art work and also in managing the business. An example of the difficulty in achieving the correct balance is demonstrated in the following interpretation from an interview extract (Fillis 1999):

> ….artistic/creative skills and business skills should be of equal importance. Although this is not the case in many situations. Many craftspeople have good products and have excellent design skills but cannot sell their work because of poor business sense.

Another respondent noted that making time for being creative is also a problem - since the majority of craft businesses surveyed by McAuley and Fillis fall under the classification of micro-business, allocation of time and other limited resources is paramount to success. In order to demonstrate the relationship between creativity and entrepreneurial behaviour, the degree of creativity must be measured, but this can be problematic (Boden 1996). Instead of attempting to measure managerial perceptions of barriers to export via the traditional approaches of the structured questionnaire, complete with the obligatory Likert scales and/or
the sometimes less structured approaches of qualitative interviewing techniques, the use of psychological approaches such as Klondike spaces (Perkins 1996) may present the marketing researcher with a different perspective to the problem. It may be that some cultures, at least on the surface, appear to exhibit more creative flair than others - Fillis’s work has endeavoured to elicit differences in both domestic and export marketing practices in the arts and crafts sector which may be partly explained by variations in cultural beliefs and behaviour.

Boden and Bohm (1998) endeavour to explain the concept of creativity via a discussion of its use in the arts and science. Boden (p3) notes that Popper distinguishes between ‘discovery’ and ‘justification’, remarking that creative ‘inspiration’ is fundamentally irrational while Bohm (p3) suggests that the artist, the musical composer, the architect, the scientist all feel a fundamental need to discover and create something new that is whole and total, harmonious and beautiful. Seemingly irrational behaviour may be part of the entrepreneur’s make up in his/her endeavour to establish their own versions of acceptable business practice. Bohm examines the bigger picture, promoting the belief that creativity is not only manifest in humankind, but is also an inherent part of the universe itself. He further comments (p xi):

Though the artist works in the domain of perceptible media, and the scientist proceeds with instruments and theoretical abstractions, the inner intent and impulse of each is strikingly similar - to ascertain and manifest a certain quality of coherent “truth”.

CONCLUSION

The scientist is creative in terms of his/her approach in moving theory forward while the artist/craftsperson uses creativity to indulge in his/her own version of truth or Weltanschauung. Bohm also discusses the interaction of intuition with reason and logic (p ix) - interpreting this from a managerial perspective, formal attempts at describing export decision making may benefit from the addition of more ‘off the wall’ visualisations of the process. In a wider sense, by thinking in an abstract and creative fashion, researchers at the marketing/entrepreneurship interface may be able to arrive at different, if not new, conceptualisations of existing business practices. This is the challenge for a future research agenda.

REFERENCES


