A Study of Innovative Entrepreneurship in Marlborough, New Zealand

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Abstract

This study responds to the call, made by Anthropologist Alex Stewart, for anthropologists to re-engage with the entrepreneur. The broad aim of this study is to describe and analyse the lived experiences of innovative entrepreneurs in Marlborough, New Zealand. The study is informed by a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. The research design is based on contemporary interpretative phenomenological analysis conducted within long term participant-observation fieldwork. The study is transdisciplinary in that it is informed by the disciplines of anthropology, economics, psychology and business. Innovative entrepreneurs are an important focus of study due to their role in economic and social change. Thus far anthropological studies have not focused on the innovative entrepreneur in New Zealand.

This study makes an original and significant contribution to entrepreneurship studies. I present rich, empirical data on innovative entrepreneurs viewed through the anthropological lens. As such, my study embraces the "humanness" of the participating innovative entrepreneurs. I describe five shared themes that coalesce in a process that guides innovative entrepreneurship. These shared themes are: perfectionistic striving (an adaptive and targeted striving for improvement), pragmatism (openness to new ideas, testing and applying them), development (purposive change within and outside of the self), meaningful reward (validation of value) and being valuable (solving problems to improve outcomes). This process begins with the desire, formed early in life, to be valuable and leads to a life-long process of problem identification and solution construction. This results in self-development as well as developmental outcomes such as businesses and products. I recommend a life span human development approach to future research that includes the collection of deep empirical data and offer a new definition of the innovative entrepreneur.

While the innovative entrepreneurs in my study desire to be valuable, the social world in which they are embedded is not always compatible with them. Through analysis of the rich points in the social data I present original social models describing social sets in Marlborough and obstructive processes that usurp institutional power by reinforcing these sets. As entrepreneurs become more visible and influential as leaders they can be drawn into obstructive processes causing some innovative entrepreneurs to avoid—as much as possible—both the local support institutions and the social sets. This has implications which I discuss and I recommend further research to expand upon my findings.

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