

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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I was also honoured to be welcomed into the lives of the eight entrepreneurs (six of whom are presented herein) who participated in the phenomenological interviews underpinning the case studies in this thesis. You are appreciated for your humanity, candour, generosity and tolerance. You are the centre around which this thesis turns.

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Contents

Abstract		i
Acknowledgements		ii
Contents		iii
Figures and Tables		iv
Chapter 1	Introduction	1-9
Chapter 2	Theoretical Perspective and Methodology	10-25
Chapter 3	Method	26-60
	<i>Vignette One – The Researcher</i>	26
	<i>What I mean by entrepreneur in this study</i>	27
	<i>What I mean by innovation in this study</i>	35
	<i>Taking Steps – The method undertaken in this study</i>	38
	<i>Literature Reviews</i>	38
	<i>Participant Engagement</i>	39
	<i>Data Collection</i>	46
	<i>Vignette Two – From Social to Individual/s</i>	49
	<i>Vignette Three – Listening Like a Chihuahua</i>	52
	<i>Data Analysis</i>	55
	<i>Writing the Thesis</i>	59
Chapter 4	Case Studies	61-158
	<i>Peter’s Evolution</i>	61
	<i>Doug’s Journey</i>	81
	<i>Valuing John</i>	97
	<i>Nick’s Enlightenment</i>	113
	<i>Transforming Marcus</i>	128
	<i>Reluctant Joy</i>	144
Chapter 5	Analysis and Discussion of the Shared Themes	159-176
	<i>Interrelationships—A development process that guides entrepreneurship</i>	174
Chapter 6	Rich Points in the Social Data	177-201
	<i>Institutions</i>	178
	<i>Social sets in Marlborough</i>	182
	<i>Obstruction as a social process</i>	188

Chapter 7	Discussion and Future Research	202-223
	<i>Shared theme: perfectionistic striving</i>	203
	<i>Shared theme: pragmatism</i>	205
	<i>Shared theme: development</i>	209
	<i>Shared theme: meaningful reward</i>	211
	<i>Shared theme: being valuable</i>	214
	<i>Social themes: social sets and obstructive processes</i>	221
Chapter 8	Conclusions	224-226
Bibliography		227-245

Figures

Figure One	Marlborough District Unitary Authority map	5
Figure Two	The GEM entrepreneurial process definition	30
Figure Three	A development process that guides innovative entrepreneurship	174
Figure Four	Institutional support structure available to innovative entrepreneurs in Marlborough	179
Figure Five	Social sets in Marlborough	185
Figure Six	Reinforcing and manipulating sets in Marlborough	194
Figure Seven	Key attributes making leaders prime for obstruction	198
Figure Eight	Leaders versus obstructers	199
Figure Nine	Characteristics of social entrepreneurs	206
Figure Ten	A starting point (only) for conceptualising entrepreneurship as a part of a broader self-development process	220

Tables

Table One	Differentiated model of innovation	37
Table Two	Summary introduction to case study participants	44
Table Three	Summary of participant responses to their case study synopsis and analyses	54