

BOOK REVIEW

The Entrepreneurial Personality: A Social Construction

By E. Chell

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Review by Malini Ratnasingam, University of Malaya

Are entrepreneurial abilities inherent or acquired? The nature-nurture debate is particularly relevant in the field of entrepreneurship research as there is strong empirical evidence on both sides of the debate. Chell makes a significant contribution in this book through a critical examination of the empirical data and arguments residing in three major theoretical approaches, the economic, sociological and psychological, before presenting a social constructivist perspective of the entrepreneurial personality. The nine chapters in the book are structured in the form of a sustained argument for the social constructivist perspective. Chell brings to bear her considerable experience as a researcher, writer and advocate of small business development in her meticulous analysis presented in each chapter.

The introduction clearly specifies that the book's focus is on nascent entrepreneurship within the private sector. In this chapter Chell also deftly cuts through the plethora of definitions of entrepreneurship by highlighting value creation, the entrepreneur as agent and entrepreneurship as a process. Separately these characteristics of entrepreneurs are not new; Chell's contribution is in the integration of these entrepreneurial qualities into a holistic and dynamic model that broadens the scope of understanding and research of the entrepreneurial personality.

The foundation for the social constructivist perspective is laid out in five key chapters. The economists' view of entrepreneurship (Chapter 2) traces the emergence of entrepreneurship as a recognized field of research. Chell outlines the early arguments emphasizing land, labour and capital to the neo-classical economists who began to consider intangible assets such as value, utility and rational decision-making. While the early economists such as Schumpeter identified the entrepreneurial characteristics of innovation, risk-taking and confidence in decision-making, Chell's criticism is that these prescriptive qualities were not supported with empirical evidence. The sociological perspective on entrepreneurship is presented through an examination of the structuring influences of the socio-economic environment (Chapter 3). Structuration theory is examined at the macro level represented by rules and resources, the meso-environmental level as reflected in social institutions and network linkages and the micro-level represented by local knowledge contained within the local culture. The weakness in this premise is that facilitating social environments alone are not sufficient to encourage entrepreneurship development, it is also necessary to consider how the socio-economic environment is perceived by the aspiring entrepreneur.

The psychological perspective is discussed in great detail in the following three chapters which present an up-to-date review of significant developments in theorizing about the psychology of entrepreneurship. Early psychological research identified the personality characteristics of 'need for achievement', 'internal locus of control' and

'risk-taking propensity' which Chell refers to as the 'The Big Three' (Chapter 4). Even though these three traits have been criticised for their static and narrow perspective on entrepreneurship, a review of both foreign and local research will show that they are still considered significant indicators of entrepreneurship potential. Mainstream research on the psychology of entrepreneurship then echoed psychology's shift to the socio-cognitive perspective (Chapter 5). Entrepreneurial characteristics identified include entrepreneurial self-efficacy, tolerance of ambiguity and social competence. Even though these characteristics are less deterministic in nature they still suffer the shortcomings of the trait approach. Current psychological models of entrepreneurship emphasize person-situation interaction within the context of social learning theory and the cognition-affect influence on entrepreneurial motivation (Chapter 6). Many local researchers have shown a preference for this approach particularly the Krueger and Brazeal model of entrepreneurship potential (pp.154-155). This is a key chapter in this book as it comprehensively reviews current empirical approaches to entrepreneurship research as well as provides the theoretical foundation for the social constructivist model advocated by Chell.

Chapter 7 is perhaps the weakest link in the chain of reasoning as it considers the ontology, epistemology and methodology of social science research before examining their use in entrepreneurship research. Chell's purpose is to encourage the use of mixed methods. However a better argument could have been made by limiting the scope of the discussion. Chapter 8 presents 10 case studies of both successful and failed entrepreneurs analysed in terms of 20 criteria denoting entrepreneurial behaviour. This data is used in the final chapter to support the model presented in the final chapter.

The social constructivist entrepreneurial personality (Chapter 9) has four main components; first is the agent in the person of the entrepreneur with his/her unique personality characteristics favourable to entrepreneurship. Cognitive processes are the second major component which includes the ability to recognise opportunities and confidently make subjective judgements and decisions while facing uncertainty. The third component is affect whereby a person's feelings motivate entrepreneurship. The fourth and last component is structure where a facilitating socio-economic and socio-cultural environment would encourage entrepreneurship. These components are drawn from the three major theoretical approaches and combined in an organic model that allows researchers to incorporate process aspects of entrepreneurship which is a significant improvement on static models previously in use. As such the social constructivist model proposed by Chell opens many avenues for future research and theorising and indeed this is crucial because there is scarce empirical evidence for this model. Chell does provide some qualitative case studies in support of her model however this is too limited to provide a rigorous test of this model.

The publicity blurb on the back cover describes this book as a classic that every library ought to have a copy of. I fully concur with this endorsement for the meticulous scholarship shown in the detailed review of past research and development of the social constructivist model of entrepreneurial personality.