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Expanding Understanding of Business Creation: Adding More Ethnography Into the Research Mix

Questions posed for panels at Princeton Conference:

What do we think we could learn through more detailed observations and information about business creation that policy makers and practitioners would find valuable?

What have we learned from previous ethnographic studies of entrepreneurship? What do our past efforts tell us about the challenges ahead for collecting and analyzing detailed observations on [many] startups that can answer important questions?

What can we learn from how ethnography has been successfully combined with other qualitative and quantitative research methods to produce impactful research in other areas?

I write this paper as TIME magazine (6/26/17) headlines declare "*UBER FAIL: upheaves at the world's most valuable startup is a wake-up call for Silicon Valley*." THE ECONOMIST called for CEO Travis Kalanick's resignation, and the shareholders agreed. As a result of the Holder report, Uber is committed to revising its values, which have been summarized as "Let Builders Build, Always be Hustlin', Meritocracy and Toe-Stepping, and Principled Confrontations' (Bloomberg Businessweek 6/19/17 p28). Certainly this cultural crisis underscores the need for forensic ethnography, a sensitive means of piecing together information on how an organizational culture became dysfunctional. TIME suggests that "high flying firms…have been brought low by being shown to have perverted the old rules—overpromising or underdisclosing, The more tech companies dressed in Valley values—grand ambitions to innovate and revolutionize—turn out to disappoint, the faster the compact unravels." (page 27). Fortunately, our past experiences studying other successful organizations give us a good start on a useful forensic ethnography.

Organization Ecology: Networks & Culture
My dissertation research in Norway focused on voluntary (non-profit) organizations and their structural and cultural contribution to democratic political and social stability. In essence this research tested Harry Eckstein's *Division and Cohesion in Democracy: A Study of Norway* and involved lengthy interviews with officers of the 160 voluntary organizations in a West Coast municipality. In addition, I interviewed or surveyed a random sample of 100

local residents and attended organizational meetings and events during a parliamentary election campaign during my two year residence in my main study location and a contrasting coastal community. I learned that, contrary to suggestions from other ethnographers, including Frederik Barth, the women's organizations did real work and social innovation to solve community problems and were not merely coffee clubs for the exchange of gossip. In short, many of these women's organizations were non-profit entrepreneurial groups, assembling and allocating resources to solve local problems. Another question: to what degree did the 160 organizations have overlapping membership, creating an interlocking network? Since I had collected data on the more than 5,000 memberships, I could ultimately answer that question. This was 1970, not yet the era of big data. I had to hire a programmer to create a program that would handle a 160 by 5,500 data matrix using a numerical taxonomy approach and cluster analysis. I found that the voluntary sector was distributed in 5 different clusters that centered around political values. *In different neighborhoods a local organization, for example the Coastal Rsescue Support Organization, might be associated with different political clusters in different neighborhoods.* In short, I found that inter-organizational relations as well as individual organizational culture are both important in defining the organizational ecosystem.

The City administration had been very helpful with statistics and census materials and, when the City wanted to do a series of workshops for voluntary associations, I was happy to provide them with my organizational and leadership census since they had no such database.

Decades later, when I did a brief restudy of the Norwegian community and its organizations. I found that the City now had a full time staff member coordinating relations with the organizations, who invited voluntary organizations to apply to the city for funding of their activities. The more entrepreneurial organizations, which delivered on their goals were especially active and relatively well funded by the local government. These innovations had paid off. Also, there was no "Bowling Alone" shrinkage of voluntary organizations and social capital as famously revealed by Robert Putnam for the United States. Rather than contracting, the voluntary organizations in my research community had doubled in number. Many of the new organizations in the community focused on special needs and support of such populations.

New Research: High Technology Entrepreneurship in Peripheral Regions of the United Kingdom.

My next research project grew out of a Sloan Foundation Grant to a group of liberal arts colleges with the goal of expanding their interest in Technology Studies. Grinnell College developed an off-campus program in Washington D.C. in which a faculty member and a group of student would participate in semester-long internships in D.C. In the first

semester of this program, in 1983, I was a faculty intern with the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment, on a project on "High Technology Entrepreneurship and Regional Economic Development."(The OTA was swept away in the next decade by the Newt Gingrich revolution, which downsized or eliminated useful governmental organizations.) How do we transplant or cultivate Silicon Valley in unlikely places, like Iowa? What changes in government policy would help accomplish this feat of regional reinvention?

From the first I was uncomfortable with the methodology of the study, which largely consisted in contracting with academic researchers to troll through Standard & Poor's data to see what would shake out. What shook out often had no clear policy implications. While it is interesting to learn that most high tech firms are established within 3 miles of an interstate highway interchange, this does not give me confidence that building more interchanges would produce more high tech firms! I spoke to my project colleagues about the possibility of ethnographic interviews with high tech entrepreneurs would produce more useful information but was told that ethnography was too time-consuming and that Congress wanted to hear recommendations that were based on numbers, not opinions. However, when the non-ethnographic, finished report was sent out to referees for critical review, the report was criticized for" having no story" and little useful information for policy changes.

While the OTA internship had been frustrating, it was productive in motivating me to learn about the research question by applying more appropriate ethnographic methodology.

For my next sabbatical I started a project of ethnography of small (50 or fewer employees) high tech firms (software or hardware) in peripheral regions of the U.K.: Mid Wales, Central Scotland and Northeast England, regions not known for their technological development. I began by speaking with people who were knowledgeable about the technology developments in the Cambridge—Bristol corridor where most of the technology development in the U.K. was centered. I learned about the impressive Cambridge business incubator and hung out there to talk to aspiring entrepreneurs, often Cambridge science dons, who were happy to talk after they parked their bikes and slipped out of their bicycle clips. In each of the peripheral regions that I subsequently studied, I visited the local versions of business incubators and talked with the staff about their experiences. In each of the regions I also visited and interviewed business development agencies, governmental as well as private. I also obtained visiting scholar status and privileges at appropriate universities, such as University of Stirling in Scotland and Durham University in Northeast England. These institutions all had important roles to play in creating a local environment or ecosystem for local entrepreneurship. Each of the regions had a unique ecosystem. One, for example, had a very successful business incubator, established in a converted school building. All of the services of secretarial and administrative staff as well as clients in the venue arrived and departed from the front door next to a coffee room which was frequently

the venue for many discussions for different clients. One of the software firms teamed up with a whiskey bottling startup to create a business spin off, the product of propinquity and a common coffee room previously used for teaching first graders.   In another region the incubator was purpose-built with multiple entrances to make it easy for people to get to their offices without having to interact with anyone without making a special effort. As you have anticipated, this incubator failed to produce any businesses as joint projects of the current clients of the incubator.

In another region with fewer resources, there was no physical incubator, but the local development agency regarded itself as a kind of virtual incubator that anticipates the needs of their clients and then finds a way to deliver the needed resources. In this region I had been doing interviews with the CEOs of several hardware firms who complained that the development agency had not been able to help them find software firms to help them with product development. I suggested the possibility of one of the software firms that I had interviewed recently. Then I contacted the development agency and told them about my recommendation and shared my up to date information with the development agency. They concurred after they had an opportunity to learn more about the capabilities of the software firm.

While at OTA I suggested that the important unit of analysis for this research might be the entrepreneurial network, rather than the firm (Office of Technology Assessment 1984:37-38). By entrepreneurial network I mean to include all the individuals who had been recruited to make some significant contribution, either positive or negative, to the founding and operation of a firm. It includes the collection of individuals involved in an enterprise whether they are paid members of the firm, unpaid volunteers, families of the management or employees, various financial, technical, accounting, management, and marketing consultants and agencies.

The network concept does not assume that a single entrepreneurial individual is at the center of this network, with other members subordinate. On the contrary, the network notion is quite compatible with the idea of collective entrepreneurship advocated by Reich (1987).
Just as the notion of "support networks" has become important in a variety of policy fields (Wellman 1981), the notion of entrepreneurial networks invites the analyst to examine the environment of the firm more widely for those intermittent, contingent and sometimes transitory sources of support which may flow from outside the corporate boundaries of the firm. Part of the support network of one small Scottish manufacturer, for example, is a friend who is a managing director from a similar, but more technologically advanced firm in England. The English director spent several days in Scotland helping to introduce new production processes at his friend's factory.

To learn more about how development can occur in less technologically developed regions, one needs to focus on not just the successful regions, but also on the high tech entrepreneurs who have, surprisingly, started up in unexpected places like an old steel industry region like the Northeast of England and an agricultural region of Mid Wales. What had motivated the founders of these new starts to choose such locations? Long interviews with the founders revealed some important patterns. First, the founders could be classified as "immigrants" who came to the region as adults in contrast to the "Natives" who always lived in the region or returned to the region after living elsewhere for a time. The immigrants could be classified either as "life-style immigrants" who came to the region to raise children in the countryside or to be closer to nature and such outdoor pastimes as hill walking. Entrepreneurial immigrants came to the region because the costs of doing business in peripheral regions such as Wales or the English Northeast was less than in the English South East, the home region of most of the entrepreneurial immigrants. Ethnographic interviewing of the founders of firms quickly reveals the central motivations surrounding the establishment of the firms. Life Style entrepreneurs tend to be less growth-oriented than others. This frequently means that development agencies are less interested in helping them than firms that are obsessed with growth. After all, the success of development agencies is frequently measured by the growth of jobs. The kind of assistance needed from Business support agencies may differ greatly and the agencies may or may not be aware of these differences (Caulkins 1992, 1995).

"Natives," of both types, the "returning native sons," or the "local heroes" who have lived continuously in the region, tend to be very loyal to the region and tend to hunker down and focus on stability and continuity in the case of market down turns or other economic troubles. Entrepreneurial immigrants tend to be the least committed to the region and are willing to move wherever economic conditions are most favorable. The importance of this distinction was recognized by the Scottish Development Agency and they started celebrating the Local Heroes among their entrepreneurs. Finding new targets for their assistance meant that they were less interested in establishing pacific rim manufacturers in Scotland even though it might be a boost in local job growth. Local Heroes and Returning Native Sons have more loyalty to the region (Caulkins 2003).

CONSENSUS ANALYSIS AND BUSINESS CULTURE OF CONSULTANTS AND ADVISERS

While interviewing entrepreneurs in Scotland I became aware that some of them believed that they were not always well served by the development agencies and consultants because the experts often gave contradictory business advice, due, perhaps, to a lack of agreement by consultants on priorities. I took this as an hypothesis and interviewed 8 senior business advisors about what constitutes success and what constitutes small business failure, using a freelisting approach to identify the characteristics of those two domains. Then advisers were asked to rank order the characteristics of each domain in order of importance. Contrary to the hypothesis, the advisors were in general agreement, a

finding that did not fit the image of diverse and contradictory advice from the consultants and advisers (Caulkins 1998).

This methodological approach takes Fredrik Barth's anthropology of knowledge as a point of departure and identifies culture as knowledge shared above a specified threshold (Caulkins 2004). The method samples domains of knowledge in organizational settings and asks diverse members of the organization to list the elements of the domains. After compiling the elements, the informants are re-interviewed, along with a wider sample, to prioritize the elements according to a criterion of importance. A consensus analysis of the informants' data matrix reveals the degree to which the knowledge is shared and constitutes a culture, or is less shared and constitutes a proto-culture, subculture, counter-culture, or a fragmented and idiosyncratic domain. Three case studies are used as illustrations. Widely adaptable in international management research for exploring organizational cultures and subcultures, inter-organizational fields, and international ventures, the consensus analysis method articulates with the three major theoretical perspectives on culture, the *integration*, *differentiation*, and *fragmentation* perspectives.

Consensus analysis, a technique developed in cognitive anthropology for analyzing structured interview data, produces three useful results: (1) a measure of the degree of agreement among informants about a domain of knowledge, belief, or practice; (2) the "culturally correct" information about that domain according to the pooled answers of the informants; and (3) a score for each informant representing that person's knowledge of the domain. Consensus analysis is not just for high-agreement domains, however. This paper (Caulkins & Hyatt 1999) explores a typology for conceptualizing diversity in low-consensus domains, including (1) weak agreement, (2) turbulent, (3) subcultural, and (4) contested domains. The typology helps measure and interpret diversity and change within organizations and social movements. Could we use consensus analysis to explore the diversity or consensus in the organizational culture of UBER? I think it might be a useful part of the forensic anthropology needed.

Business consultancy training and Technological transfer in Norway

My next research focuses on a technology transfer program, initiated by the Norwegian Technologisk Institutt, devoted to training business consultants who might assist small businesses with new technology and new strategic planning processes. In developing the BUNT project, the Technologisk Institutt was intending to increase the quality of business advising and speed the adoption of innovation in businesses.

Several groups of volunteer business advisers went through training programs in which their work with a firm was highly subsidized. Subsequently, some BUNT- trained consultants carried out more projects, subsidized by government funds. Others, however, did not pursue further projects.

CONSULTANTS		PROJECTS
13	Consultants had 1 new project	13
6	Consultants had 2 new projects	12
7	Consultants had 3 new projects	21
2	Consultants had 4 new projects	8
1	Consultants had 7 new projects	7
Total 29	Total	61

What were the problems that made it difficult to recruit more business for the consultants?

As part of the evaluation of the program, researchers interviewed over 80 of the participating consultants about their experiences in the program and the kinds of problems that they may have encountered.

This first step had identified a range of problems, but was not designed to indicate how extensive or how serious the problems were. These questions were to be addressed in a meeting of the consultants in Oslo.

How Serious were the problems?

At the meeting in Oslo consultants were given a questionnaire that listed, in randomized order, the most frequently identified problems from the first stage of research. Each consultant was asked to prioritize the problems according to their seriousness, in their experience. Since the items were randomized, order bias was controlled for, and the consultants did not talk to each other in the process, so that each consultant prioritized the problems independently.

Possible outcomes for Problem Domain

Consensus—everyone is in agreement on the problems facing consultants

Subcultural—several subgroups emerge, with common problems within the group

Fragmented—no groups emerge, problems tend to be highly varied

Checking the Consultant's sense of the importance of the problems

The questionnaires were collected and the data entered in a consensus analysis program to discover whether or not there was a consistent profile of problems that individuals struggled with, whether there were two or three different patterns, or whether there was no consistent pattern at all.

No Consensus on Importance!

No pattern was found. This information was reported back to the assembled consultants and representative of TI about one hour after the initial data were collected.
When a slide showing a 2 dimensional plot of the consultants had been prepared, showing the shotgun-pattern of consultants, among whom there was little agreement.

This slide was projected on the screen for the assembled consultants, many of whom laughed at the outcome.

However, this was a distressing outcome as far as many of the consultants were concerned. They "knew" that there were problems with the program that needed to be addressed by TI.

Distressed Consultants

Some were troubled that the opportunity to focus on the common problems had been thrown away.

Several addressed the problem by saying that the reasons that there was no agreement was because we social scientists had invented some set of problems that didn't correspond to the reality of his experience.

We reminded the consultants that we had merely compiled the list of problems from those mentioned in interviews with the consultants, but there still seemed to be a general opinion that the social scientists had somehow failed to identify their common problems.

The agenda of the meeting went on, and later in the day, the consultants broke up into smaller groups to discuss the problems that they had encountered in the projects. Graduate students were assigned to each group to take notes on the discussion. It appeared that in each group a relatively common pattern developed. One of the consultants in the group would be more talkative and would mention several of the kinds of problems that he encountered, and the rest of the group would soon focus on those issues, as questions, discuss possible solutions, etc.

In short, the problems that formed the focus of each of the groups discussion were those of the most forthcoming of the consultants, not a compilation of all of the problems encountered by the members of the group When each of the 5 small groups reported back to the assembled conference, each reported a different set of problems.

The reporter for the last group, fully aware that the reports of the small group sessions had produced a shotgun pattern similar to that of the allegedly incompetent social scientists, admitted that it was clear that there were strong differences in the experience of the consultants.

Fragmentation Perspective

 "Problems encountered by consultants"were characterized by ambiguity, complexity and individual rather than shared experience.

Culture change, which was supposed to result from a common training program, was fragmented. The policy implications for Technologisk Institutt were clear: the problems that people encountered with the program were fragmented and idiosyncratic so that no systematic changes in the program were obvious fixes for the tech transfer. Consultants wanted government action to lessen their problems but there was no consensus on problems. Norwegian cultural models of agreement made it difficult for consultants to see that they had a variety of different problems in getting new projects.

BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS AND GRID GROUP ANALYSIS

The firm, as a corporate unit ,is not be the best analytic unit (see also Rosa & Caulkins 2013) The entrepreneurial network is a sensitizing concept, not a full-blown analytic

framework. Fortunately, however, this notion fits neatly in Mary Douglas's theoretical framework of grid/group analysis, to which we now turn.

British anthropologist Mary Douglas,was exemplary in her determination to make anthropological theory useful in the study of complex industrial societies. Douglas incorporates the most important aspects of Weberian and Durkheimian theory in the grid/group framework without accepting the limitations of these one-dimensional frameworks (Douglas 1970, 1978, 1982, 1987). The two-dimensionality of grid/group analysis provides a powerful tool for describing social structure.

Consider group as a horizontal continuum and grid as a vertical continuum, each ranging between high and low values. The group dimension indicates the degree to which individuals give time and commitment to a social unit larger than the individual, or the degree to which they are embedded in a larger social unit. As Douglas observes,

> Rules of admission to a group can be strong or weak, making it more or less exclusive; the life-support a group gives to its members can be complete, or partial. For any social context we can recognize   appropriate measures of group commitment, whether to ancient lineage, to a learned profession or to a regiment or a church (Douglas 1982:3).

Measures of the group dimension include frequency of interaction and the mutuality and scope of the relationship (Mars 1982:27). Are the individuals in frequent face-to-face contact, do they have associates or colleagues in common, and do they interact in a variety of contexts? In addition, is there a strong boundary which demarcates the group? Positive answers indicate high group. This dimension can be described, perhaps more accurately, in terms of networks, for a group is nothing more than a completely connected network. Low group signifies a loosely-connected, ramifying network in which the individuals in different sectors of the network may not know each other.

Grid, the second dimension, is the degree of regulation and control of individuals in a social setting, whether or not the individual is embedded within a group. Along this dimension, Douglas (1982:3) suggests, "the possibilities should run from maximum regulation to maximum freedom, the military regiment with its prescribed behavior and rigid timetabling, contrasted at the other end with the free life, uncommitted, unregulated." A social setting with ascribed roles would be high grid; a setting with achieved roles would be low grid. Grid can be measured by at least four variables (Mars 1982:25). First, autonomy varies inversely with grid. The greater the choice or control over one's actions, the lower the grid. Second, the more insulated the individual (or other unit) from others, the higher the grid. The insulation can be physical, as is the case with an executive office on a different floor than the rest of a business operation, or structural, as occurs when an executive secretary filters all business contacts between the outside world and his boss. The insulation could also be normative, in which certain kinds of information are routinely kept from someone in order to preserve his innocence or "deniability" (as the Irangate jargon has it). Finally, individuals may be insulated symbolically, for example, by wearing special clothing, such as a prison uniform.

The third and fourth indicators of grid are reciprocity and competition. The environment is high grid if the range of possible reciprocity is constrained. In a firm (or entrepreneurial network) where members exchange Christmas presents the environment

is lower grid than one in which the managing director distributes gifts but receives none in return. Finally, a highly competitive environment --a marketplace -- is low grid, while the more constrained the possibilities for competition the higher the grid. Low grid is the environment which fosters innovation:
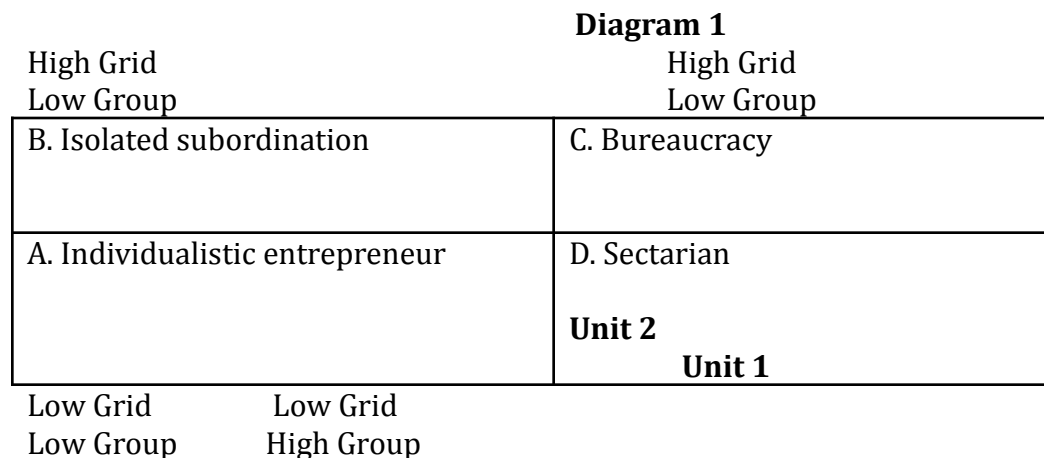
> The more the individual is expected to create his own role, and the more his transacting with others is entirely up to himself, the better advised he is to corner a little resource, to specialize, or at least to offer an improved version of what everyone else can do. Hence we recognize in low-grid conditions the tendency to cultivate idiosyncrasy--and this fits well with the general tolerance of deviance. (Douglas 1982:240)

As Douglas (1982:240) notes, low grid is favorable to the development and expansion of science and the arts.

The framework can be summarized in the following diagram:

Diagram 1

High Grid   High Grid
Low Group   Low Group

B. Isolated subordination	C. Bureaucracy
A. Individualistic entrepreneur	D. Sectarian **Unit 2** 　　　　　　**Unit 1**

Low Grid   Low Grid
Low Group   High Group

Both grid and group are continuous, so that concrete social units could be located at different coordinates within a quadrant. For example, Units 1 and 2 (above) are both in the D quadrant, but Unit 1 has a higher group score and lower grid score than Unit 2. Unit 1, therefore, is a more extreme example of the sectarian quadrant. A nearly infinite variety of concrete social units can be accommodated in this framework, each differing in grid/group coordinates.

The general characteristics of each quadrant are as follows.

Quadrant A: Entrepreneurial individualism describes the environment of the classical entrepreneur which "allows options for negotiating contracts or choosing allies and in consequence it also allows for individual mobility up and down whatever the current scale of prestige and influence " (Douglas 1982:4). Individuals are responsible only for themselves and not for the weak or the needy, unless they willingly accept that responsibility (Gross and Rayner 1985:7).

Quadrant B: Isolated subordination is an environment in which the behavior of

individuals is strongly regulated according to their socially assigned classifications (Gross and Rayner 1985:8). It can be a hierarchical environment in which many individuals are segregated from the decision-making process. Often these are stigmatized individuals who "do as they are told, without the protection and privileges of group membership" (Douglas 1982:4).

Quadrant C: This is the traditional bureaucratic environment, particularly one in which seniority rather than merit is the criterion for promotion. "Loyalty is rewarded and hierarchy respected: an individual knows his place in a world that is securely bounded and stratified," according to Douglas (1982:4). This is a collective environment in which everyone suffers together in bad times.

Quadrant D: Sectarianism or survival collectivism is an environment in which the external group boundary is a constant preoccupation. For this reason, organizations in this quadrant regard themselves as unique, as mavericks which are categorically different from other organizations with which they might be compared. The distinction between "them and us" is critically important because the world outside can infect or pollute the group, destroying the quality and purity of its actions, thoughts, and products. Success of the organization can be measured by the quality of the product rather than profit, turnover, or other measures(see for example, Hamilton 1987:75). This preoccupation with quality for its own sake makes the sectarians more like artisans than classical entrepreneurs (Stanworth and Curran 1976).   In addition to the threat of pollution from outside, organizations in this quadrant perceive a constant danger of treachery from inside, so that scapegoating and the expulsion of unworthy members of the group occurs from time to time. Other aspects of interpersonal relations are ambiguous and negotiable. As Gross and Rayner suggest,

> Leadership tends to be charismatic and lacking in
> clear rules for succession. Extreme cases are
> represented by certain religious and political cults whose members interact with
> each other on an egalitarian basis Gross and Rayner 1985:10)

Outsiders may perceive the sectarian organization or network as deviant, while for insiders the egalitarian
structure and deeply-felt concern for quality production is at the same time a matter of pride and an indictment of the dominant organizations in the environment.

This framework allows systematic comparison between different levels and types of social units: intersocietal comparisons (eg. the US. and the U.K.), intrasocietal comparisons (different corporations in the U.K.), or comparisons of the same unit at different points in time (eg. British Telecom before and after privatisation). The unit that I have singled out for comparative analysis is the entrepreneurial network, which can be described in terms of both grid and group. A high-group entrepreneurial network, for example, is one which is closely knit, interacts frequently and is well-defined in terms of membership. If the network also has highly specialized, asymmetric roles, it is high grid, as well. We can imagine entrepreneurial networks in any quadrant of the diagram.

But do we need more analytic categories than the classic entrepreneurial setting of the "A" quadrant and the Weberian bureaucracy of the "C" quadrant? One must be cautious about assuming that all small businesses fall neatly into the former quadrant and all large firms into the latter, however. Lincoln (1985), among others, has questioned the adequacy of the Weberian and Neo-Weberian models of large organizations, and Scott firmly rejects the assumption that small firms constitute a homogeneous structural category. He notes (1986:6) that "the small firm sector contains enormous diversity

Ethnography and NARRATIVE

The study of narrative, the communication of a sequence of events, has attracted the attention of scholars from a variety of disciplines in the past decades. In an article provocatively entitled "Life as Narrative," psychologist Jerome Bruner (1987) advances two theses. First, "we seem to have no other way of describing "lived time" save in the form of narrative" (1987:12). Second, the relationship between life so-called and narrative is a two-way affair: that is to say, just as art

> imitates life in Aristotle's sense, so, in Oscar Wilde's, life imitates art. Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative. "Life" in this sense is the same kind of construction of human imagination as "a narrative" is. (J. Bruner 1987:13)

The stories that we tell about ourselves shape the meaning of our lives in a powerful sense. As sociologist Alfred Shutz remarked, "we can only grasp the meaning of our actions retrospectively" (Hamersley and Atkinson 1982:196). The narratives that we and others construct provide the scenarios, scripts, or models that may shape other people's lives as well as our own. "Indeed," as J. Bruner contends (1987:15) "one important way of characterizing a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life."

For my purposes, the most interesting narrative models are those constructed by owner-managers of small electronics businesses when asked to tell about the founding and history of their businesses.(Footnote 1) Managers tend to enjoy this task as it provides an opportunity for reflection and reassessment of an important part of their lives. Some, of course, have told their story enough times that they have developed a canonical version, but most owner-managers do not have their story as tightly scripted as that.

Business schools use these founder-narratives in many parts of their training. Two months ago at Durham University Business School I listened to several veterans of the Graduate into Enterprise Program tell their stories for a new group. Their stories, like novels, films, and other narratives, have themes and plots. For example, one young owner of a new health club in Newcastle returned repeatedly to the theme of persistence. He had faced many frustrating difficulties, but had persisted and triumphed over adversity, just as we, the audience could do. (Here the narrative as a script for other people's lives is clear.)

The theme of persistence, which might be called the "Robert the Bruce & the spider" theme for this cultural context, is a familiar one, but I do not know whether it is good advice in a normative sense. But my initial concern is not with sorting out or discovering which narratives offer good models and which offer bad models. First, I am interested in the

variety of models in the small business culture.

I call these founding narratives, with tongue slightly in cheek, *creation myths.* Usually this label is applied to accounts which offer an explanation of how the world and humanity came about. Creation myths also give us an interpretation of the character of humans and their relationship to each other, to nature and the supernatural. By using the label of creation myths for founding narratives, I am not inviting a comparison between the story of Genesis and the story of ICL. Rather, I am calling attention to the fact that founder narratives are constructs or interpretations of the nature of the business world, the relationships of the humans who work in it, and, implicitly perhaps, of nature and the supernatural. In the narrative,the teller does not replicate the events of the founding as they might be recorded by some omniscient observer. We are awaiting the next chapter in the UBER narrative.

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