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The emerging personality of a small-scale entrepreneur

T.T. Srinath



WHEN I first read parts of David McClelland's (1961) book *The Achieving Society*, I was riveted by the thought of a small-scale entrepreneur's drive towards self-employment, as being a consequence of the need to achieve.

In getting in touch with the drivers that push a person to being self-employed, one realises, as research says (Brockhaus-1982), that the impetus comes from risk disposition, a sense of self-worth and the need to self-determine. The realization that a job would rob one of a feeling of fullness allows an entrepreneur to stray into the world of creating an enterprise.

As an entrepreneur authors the enterprise, he quickly realises that he cannot be separated from it, like 'the dancer from the dance' (Carland -1988), the two being meshed, and this becomes self-limiting.

Small-scale entrepreneurs, particularly the technocrat, the self-styled businessmen and small-scale manufacturer, symbolize the 'craftsman' (Smith -1967), narrow in education and training, low in social awareness and certain limitedness in dealing with the environment. This however, does not take away from them an 'internal focus' that superscribes their character. They are a bundle of conflicts - 'men of action and ideas' (Schumpeter - 1931) - with a desire to take responsibility for their decisions, the desire to own their business as it offers economic freedom, a reliance on self, a willingness to accept challenges and a need to be their own boss.

Against this is often high anxiety and poor organisation bordering on self-destruction at times. In many ways `an enigma' to many.

When they start they do so with a lot of pride, with a sense of hope and a surging need to build and leave a legacy. But in a society characterised by traditional values they experience status deterioration and leading to psychosocial disequilibrium and a situation of depletion of self-esteem.

Anger and anxiety contribute to a state of `retreatism' (Kets De Vries - 1977), reflected as it is in instability. This leads to a gradual change and virtual transformation of their personality.

Social influence and the lack of recognition as an entrepreneur make his initial foray into the world tinged with periods of disorientation, without apparent goals, encountering difficulties in acceptance of his ideas, succinctly almost `deviant' in behaviour. He turns `reactive'. People often say that his threshold of tolerance is low, his attention span limited and his need for gratification immediate.

What is not available as data to all who comment is the bubbling of frustration, largely because of a sense of perceived deprivation in formative years, a sense of impulsiveness, a persistent feeling of dissatisfaction, rejection and powerlessness and forces contributing to an impairment and depreciation of his sense of self-esteem.

The preparatory period is thus compromised by authority conflict, difficulty in organisational socialisation and predictive job-hopping. The stage is being set to move from being helpless to acting the role of control.

The only way of re-establishing contact with his reality, demonstrated by his ability to create meaning, is to design his own `enterprise'.

His dealing with the organisation is intense. But this very fact of psychological immersion, the key ingredient of initial success, leads to a state of dysfunctionality. He becomes autocratic, refuses to delegate, lacks interest in conscious, analytical forms of planning and is often impulsive.

But he is bold, contributing to quickness of action and risk predilection. However, he suffers from an inability to distinguish between operating day-to-day decision-making and long-term strategic moves. The horizon becomes restricted because of a flaky sense of prioritisation, spending unequal time on trivial and major strategic requirements.

Within the organisation, power depends on proximity to him and changing mood swings create an uncertain environment. Subjective and personal criteria become yardsticks for measurement and control. There is some role conflict and role ambiguity. Withdrawal or avoidance behaviour and reduction in communication among employees also become symptomatic. This awareness of potential danger in such an entrepreneurial model suggests a slow degradation and eventual destruction of the enterprise.

In a static environment perhaps, such discord may pass muster, for a while. But in a rapidly altering situation, defined by heterogeneity (differences in

needs and behaviour of organisation constituents) and hostility (cut-throat competition, resource shortage), the strain is visible.

In this changing environment, the emergence of the new-age entrepreneur is interesting. The new-age entrepreneur described as 'opportunistic' is fast outpacing the craftsman. He exhibits breadth of education and training, high social awareness and involvement, a high confidence in dealing with the social environment and an awareness and orientation towards the future.

He is a catalyst of change, does not accept the boundaries of structured situations, is able to carry out new combinations and is instrumental in discovering new opportunities, all of which make for the uniqueness of the entrepreneurial function.

However, for the craftsman, it is a struggle to grow up. His aversion to structure, his preference for personalised relationships and his reluctance to accept constructive criticism make growth, with its implicit need for a more sophisticated infra- and supra-structure and greater decentralisation, increasingly difficult to handle. Hoarding of information, inconsistencies in day-to-day interpretation of company policies, playing favourites and refusal or reluctance to let people really know where they stand do not contribute to an efficient and effective organisation. Mediocrity thus becomes an established norm.

While the craftsman tends to create a rigid enterprise, the opportunistic entrepreneur creates an adaptive organisation. A more drastic type of change is thus needed for 'craftsmen' for continued growth and success of the enterprise.

The implication is the need for attainment of a sense of psychological maturity, a willingness to assess personal strengths and weaknesses to master conflict-ridden behaviour and overcome and surpass the problems of the past. Separation from the enterprise in one form or the other is perhaps one alternative for survival.

While entrepreneurial spirit is one of the countervailing forces preventing decay, in the final analysis, the price the entrepreneur pays in an emotional sense is also the cause of his self-decline and reasons for a sense of ambivalence from society. Adaptation to present day reality and foregoing the legacies of his personal history coupled with self-awareness and insight will engender continued survival of the enterprise by overcoming rigid behaviour and bring greater flexibility in operating modes.

(The author is an independent trainer and behavioural consultant)

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