
Entrepreneurial Culture: A Literature Review

Poi, Godwin PhD.

Director, Entrepreneurship Center & Head of Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, University of Africa, Toru-Orua, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Abstract: *Entrepreneurial culture is a catchy concept fronted by scholars and several governments in their bid to promote entrepreneurship for unemployment reduction via job creation. The concept of “entrepreneurial culture” has existed for decades, described as an organizational culture embodying and championing entrepreneurial characteristics and attributes. These have included risk-taking, innovation, and creativity; the elements one would expect to see among entrepreneurs. The literature suggests that entrepreneurial culture is related to a number of positive organizational outcomes, such as generating new business and improving firm performance. However, the conceptualization of entrepreneurial culture is an issue that is not addressed in the entrepreneurship literature. Entrepreneurial culture is an organizational culture construct centrally concerned with opportunities. The purpose of this paper was to conceptually examine entrepreneurial culture. The five dimensions of entrepreneurial culture discussed were organizational enthusiasm, stakeholder alignment, learning and development support, opportunity driven change and cohesiveness. Since the paper was largely conceptual, the paper used a desk research methodology by examining extant literature.*

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Culture, Organizational Enthusiasm, Stakeholder Alignment, Learning & Development Support, Opportunity Driven Change, Cohesiveness*

INTRODUCTION

Organization culture is an integral part of the organization and therefore, it is assimilated as a powerful organizational tool. The culture of an organization affects employee behaviour, and offers them a feeling of identity and control in decision-making. In this day and age, no organization is protected from forces and pressures exerted on it with regards to relevance, competitiveness, and constant change. To face this news, the organization must reconsider its behaviours and practices to renew it, to open out and reinforce its international position in the market. Some of these practices form what is called the entrepreneurial orientation (Zouhayer, 2013). Ravasi and Schultz (2006), state that organizational culture is a set of shared mental assumptions that guide interpretations and actions in organizations by defining appropriate behaviour for various situations. At the same time although a company may have its "own unique culture", in larger organizations, there are diverse and sometimes conflicting cultures that co-exist due to different characteristics of the management team. The organizational culture may also have negative and positive aspects. According to Sadri and Lees (2001), a positive organization culture could provide immense benefits to the organization and thereby a leading competitive edge over other firms in the industry whereas; a negative culture could have a negative impact on the organizational performance as it could deter firms from adopting the required strategic or tactical changes. Such type of culture could hinder future changes in an Organization. Van der Post, de Coning and Smit (1998) examined the relationship between organizational culture and financial performance of Organizations in South Africa. The results showed that organizational culture has a positive relationship with the financial performance of

the firms. The result also showed that firms that are financially more effective differ from those firms that are not effective with respect to the organizational culture dimensions used in the study.

Entrepreneurial culture is a condition in which new ideas and creativity are expected, taking risks are encouraged, failure is tolerated, learning is encouraged, innovations about product, process and management are defended and a continuous change is accepted as the carrier of opportunities (Foss & Lyngsie, 2011). Entrepreneurial culture as opined by Foss and Lyngsie (2011) is related to entrepreneurial orientation and other firm-level variables which captures the firm's motivation and ability to engage in the discovery of opportunities and the exploitation of those opportunities that are highest in wealth creation. Entrepreneurial orientation refers to the “strategy making practices that businesses use to identify and launch corporate ventures” (Nhuta & Kapofu, 2015: 67).

According to Kuratko, Hornsby, Naziger and Montagno (1993), entrepreneurial culture is a crucial factor of the installation of an entrepreneurial spirit. According to Naranjo-Valencia, Jimenez and Sanz-Valle (2011), entrepreneurial culture is a determining key of the strategy of innovation, and consequently, organisations should support values and standards according to their strategic choice. In other words, the culture of Organizations’ is posed as an axial element of the continuation of the organisations in entrepreneurial activities and arouses the interest to jointly analyze it with the concept of entrepreneurial orientation (EO).

Entrepreneurship culture is described as a culture embodying and championing entrepreneurial characteristics and attributes. These have included risk-taking, innovation, and creativity. An entrepreneurial culture has been suggested as the opposite of bureaucratic or administratively-oriented organizations (Bradley, Wiklund, & Shepherd, 2011). Entrepreneurial culture characteristics and attributes have also been positively linked to firm performance (Flamholtz, 2001; Flamholtz & Kannan-Narasimhan, 2005). In broader conceptual models, entrepreneurial culture has also been identified as a necessary component of a firm’s architecture in order to successfully pursue an entrepreneurial strategy that is, engaging in opportunity-seeking and advantage-seeking activities (Ireland, Hitt, & Sirmon, 2003). There has also been little exploration of the relationship between the entrepreneurial culture concept and the firms that are supposed to demonstrate this phenomenon. In particular, it is unclear which firms possess an entrepreneurial culture and to what degree they possess it. The importance of entrepreneurship to economic development has been highlighted by many researchers (Davidsson, Delmar, & Wiklund, 2006) and it is now well-recognized that education and training opportunities play a critical role in cultivating future entrepreneurs and in developing the abilities of existing entrepreneurs to grow their business to greater levels of success (Henry, Hill, & Leitch, 2003). This paper examines the role of entrepreneurial culture for business venture success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurial Culture

Birkinshaw, Hood and Jonsson (1998) defined entrepreneurial culture as an organizational context in which certain behaviours, including initiative are fostered. This definition confines entrepreneurial culture in a business context. In the same vein, Prabhu (2005), Conrad (1999)

and Dulcic (2003) defined entrepreneurial culture as a type of organizational culture while Dulcic (2003) further described it as a mix of all the factors that form the entrepreneur's personality. Beugelsdijk (2007) and Chen and Lin (2006) defines entrepreneurial culture as characteristics of entrepreneurs with Benneworth (2004) asserting that entrepreneurial culture reflects localized social mores and accumulated economic success which are not easily replicated elsewhere. These different perspectives on entrepreneurial culture having been defined within the context of established businesses limit the applicability of such conceptualization to development of entrepreneurship among individuals in the society. Hence, with the interest of governments to foster an entrepreneurial culture in the society, how is such a slogan conceptualized for its application to the society?

Entrepreneurial culture is a term derived from two words 'entrepreneurial' and 'culture'. Our understanding of the meaning of these two words can to a great extent aid in the conceptualization of entrepreneurial culture. Wickham (2006) defined the term entrepreneurial as an adjective describing how the entrepreneur undertakes what they do. He asserted that to use this adjective suggest that there is a particular style to what entrepreneurs do. Atherton (2004) defined being entrepreneurial as a behaviour that can be demonstrated and manifested regardless of the nature of involvement in an organization. Building on the body of knowledge on culture, Brownson (2011) defines culture as an attribute, values, beliefs, and behaviour which can be learned or acquired by man from one generation to another, from one individual to another, from one group to another as long as one is a member of the society and it has the ability of distinguishing one group from another. Therefore the nurturing of certain attributes, values, beliefs and behaviour indicates an attempt to foster a certain type of culture.

Entrepreneurial culture is here conceptualized as a society that depicts the exhibition of the attributes, values, beliefs (attitude or mindset) and behaviour associated with entrepreneurs by individuals in such a society which distinguishes them from others. As such, to foster it implies that such government policy measures must anchor on the promotion of the attributes, values, mindset and behaviour associated with entrepreneurs in individuals which will impact on such individuals' mindset towards entrepreneurship. Such an individual can be propelled to act entrepreneurially in an already established organization and other areas of life where they are opportune to find themselves. This implies that such individual when nurtured by any policy measures targeted at entrepreneurship will differ from other individuals since culture distinguishes one group from another (Hofstede, 1980).

Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Culture

Organizational Enthusiasm

This facet of organizational culture refers to the key characteristics of an excitement for accomplishing organizational goals and missions, understanding organizational vision, having passion for the work, and a unity of purpose. Organizational enthusiasm is highly related to past entrepreneurial culture conceptualizations that referred to the characteristics of possessing a vision and passion for the business (Shepherd, Patzelt & Haynie, 2010; Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008). This concept is partially based on entrepreneurs' perspectives towards work, the

purpose of entrepreneurial organizations, and their overarching vision for the organization. For example, Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen (2008) noted several entrepreneurs who remarked about wanting to “change the world” and “make the world a better place.” The vision of Apple’s Steve Jobs is often referenced in this same sense (Aley, 2011; Dyer, Gregersen, & Christensen, 2008). However, while entrepreneurs may aspire to make an important societal or world impact, there is clearly a great gulf between most entrepreneurs and Steve Jobs. For instance, an organization like Apple is of such a size and scope that grandiose visions of change may carry a very different meaning than in smaller organizations. Vision in entrepreneurship has also been described as identifying customer needs and spotting opportunities, developing systems to review the external environment, formulating appropriate objectives and strategies to guide the organization, creating a shared vision, and developing a mission to give purpose to the organization (Sadler-Smith, Hampson, Chaston, & Badger, 2003). These kinds of mundane, but more specific and practice-oriented examples of vision may be much more in line with an entrepreneurial culture’s orientation to work. Indeed, what this might describe is a work orientation towards accomplishment and goal achievement. That is, entrepreneurial cultures are oriented towards seizing opportunities, accomplishing goals, and having an accurate sense of the overall mission of the organization.

As with vision, passion has also been studied as an important individual aspect of entrepreneurs. Where vision represents the existing place and future direction that entrepreneurs may see for their organization, passion refers to the zeal and enthusiasm they have for their organizations. Entrepreneurial passion has been defined as "an entrepreneur's intense affective state accompanied by cognitive and behavioural manifestations of high personal value" (Chen, Yao, & Kotha, 2009: 201). Passion plays an important role in organizations, and is a strong indicator of how motivated an entrepreneur is in building a venture, whether he or she is likely to continue pursuing goals when confronted with difficulties, how well he or she articulates the vision to current and future employees, and whether he or she will be able to influence, persuade, and lead people in growing the venture (Chen *et al.*, 2009).

Stakeholder Alignment

Stakeholder alignment refers to the nature of the organization’s relationship with its stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, partners, and investors. A stakeholder alignment is focused on building and developing supportive relationships with these stakeholders, and recognizing and appreciating how these relationships benefit the organization. Past definitions and descriptions of entrepreneurial culture have not emphasized a stakeholder orientation and this seems like an important oversight. The critical role played by stakeholder relationships has been noted numerous times in the entrepreneurship literature. Zott and Huy (2007) described how customer and supplier relationships and responsive customer service were critical to new start-ups. Chen *et al.*, (2009) found that entrepreneurs needed to be very attentive to the perceptions of potential investors who would analyze new ventures with great scrutiny. Chatterji (2009) noted that entrepreneurial ventures would need to carefully manage their credibility with potential new partners when getting started. Ozcan and Eisenhardt (2009) described how start-up firms utilized ties with investors to develop their initial business. These sources highlight the importance of managing stakeholder relationship hold for entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial

ventures, which suggests a similar implication for entrepreneurial cultures. Furthermore, the importance of managing stakeholder relationships is echoed in the cultural subtype examples, namely TQM and adaptive cultures. In these examples, achieving results and satisfying the legitimate interests of stakeholders are seen as important organizational values.

However, the difference between stakeholder alignment as described here as a cultural dimension versus a stakeholder alignment as a form of strategy lies in the notion of a “moralist” stakeholder culture (Jones, Felps & Bigley, 2007). A “moralist” stakeholder culture refers to possessing a genuine concern for the welfare of normative stakeholders, that is, stakeholders for whose benefit the firm should be managed. In this case, stakeholder relationship would not be viewed as necessarily strategic means towards organization ends, but rather as legitimate claim holders to good organizational management.

Learning & Development Support

This facet is characterized by cultural values of optimism towards improvement, valuing efforts to learn, improve one’s self and others, and an interest in employee development. This facet is influenced by past literature which indicates that entrepreneurial cultures broadly value continuous improvement, new ideas, and experimentation (Monsen & Boss, 2009; Shepherd *et al.*, 2010). In entrepreneurial cultures, people are thought to generally (or at least sometimes) have good ideas and are motivated to improve things and pursue new opportunities. In Dyer *et al.*, (2008) study, an entrepreneur remarked that he noticed that young people in his organization are impressionable because they do not yet know what to do and ask questions to try to understand. This inquisitiveness and interest in learning was seen as valuable and worth fostering in the organization. Kotter (2001) noted a CEO of an organization with a self-described entrepreneurial culture where the organization would offer special training to “high-potential” young people, an enriched set of experiences, and an unusual degree of exposure to people in top management. This suggests that people in the organization were perceived as malleable in that they could learn and benefit from this special training and instruction. In an innovation-supportive culture, the behaviour of individuals making themselves vulnerable to feedback from others, demonstrated a willingness to listen and learn.

Opportunity Driven Change

This facet is related to learning and development support yet distinct from it. Whereas learning and development support emphasizes personal improvement, opportunity driven change speaks to the core entrepreneurial features of innovation, creativity, and risk-taking with respect to products/services and processes. As indicated by Ireland *et al.*, (2003) definition of entrepreneurial culture, continuous change, the improvement of products/services and processes, and valuing innovation and risk-taking are seen as conveying new opportunities. Innovation in particular is strongly associated with entrepreneurship. This association is usually traced back to the work of Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950) who defined the entrepreneur as an innovator and a person who carries out new combinations, in whatever position within a business (Van Praag, 1999). The process of innovation has been defined as “the development and implementation of new ideas by people who over time engage in transactions with others within an institutional

context” (Van de Ven, 1986: 591). These notions of developing new ideas and taking a chance on them to seize new opportunities seem central to an entrepreneurial culture.

Cohesiveness

In entrepreneurial culture literature and in the related subtype examples, the general notions of collaboration, communication, and social interaction were identified as important cultural characteristics (Ketchen Ireland & Snow, 2007; Salama, 2011). However, what appears to be related yet overlooked was the kind of collaboration that reflected dealing with the shared struggle and adversity often experienced in entrepreneurial ventures. For example, the shared struggle of start-up where entrepreneurs and early founding teams go to great lengths to get the venture operational (Carter, Gartner & Reynolds, 1996) or perhaps the shared struggle and sacrifice experienced as part of the venture’s later survival (Haugh & McKee, 2004). For entrepreneurs, there is also the struggle and adversity that comes from challenging the status quo of a market or industry (Dyer *et al.*, 2008). An entrepreneurial culture would seem to require collaboration and sharing, but also something more than that. As a result, the facet of cohesiveness is envisioned to include the notions of collaboration, communication, and sharing, in addition to the notions of coordination and responsibility in the organization.

Constituents of Entrepreneurial Culture

Entrepreneurial Attributes

Entrepreneurial attributes have been recognized as being of great importance in understanding and fostering entrepreneurship (Raab Stedha & Neuner, 2005). Attributes are indicators of entrepreneurial potentials. They can be acquired from both nature and nurture (Bridge, O’Neill, & Martin, 2009) thereby implying that every individual may have some entrepreneurial attributes though most of them may not realize it. As such, it may be in this respect that some government through policy instruments seeks to nurture entrepreneurial culture. Though it has been argued in the literature that entrepreneurial attributes are stable (Rauch & Frese, 2007), some researchers disagreed with the view by asserting that entrepreneurial attributes are changeable (Robinson, Stimpson, Huefner & Hunt, 1991) in that, individuals who are thought not to possess certain attributes could have such attributes developed via external triggers (*ibid.*) of which government policy measures are likely to trigger such changes in the participants of such measures. Entrepreneurial attributes allows a practical understanding of how entrepreneurial culture manifest itself (Lee-Ross & Mitchell, 2007).

Entrepreneurial Values

Kluckhohn (1967 cited in Kundu, 2009) defines value as a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristics of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of actions. Values are associated with standards of behaviour (Soanes *et al.*, 2006 cited in Brownson, 2013) as such, entrepreneurial values are those values or standards of behaviour associated with entrepreneurs in which when nurtured can distinguish such individual from others. Values are the driving force for decision making (Keeney, 1994). They reflect the entrepreneurs conscious view (or belief) of him/herself and

directly shapes his/her movement towards action or owns' motive (McClelland, 1965). Thereby implying that values can influence a person's mindset for actions on a behaviour. Kilby (1993) noted that values are instrumental in advancing the constructive understanding of human behaviour and consequent change. As such, personal values have important implications not only for the decision to pursue entrepreneurship but also in the way in which the individual entrepreneur approaches a venture (ibid.). Morris and Schindehutte (2005) pointed out that, values can become internalized in such a way that they affect entrepreneurial motives and behaviours. Scholars have found that variation in the prevalence of entrepreneurial values and beliefs affect the rate of the formation of new firms (Fritsch & Mueller, 2004) as such, these points to the importance of shaping individual's values towards entrepreneurship if the government is to attain their goal of job creation. Payne and Joyner (2006) identified three values prized by successful entrepreneurs which are integrity, honesty and work ethics.

Mourdoukoutas and Papadimitriou (2002) associated values such as autonomy, the freedom to act independently, innovativeness, freedom of experimentation, risk taking, proactiveness, ability to take initiatives and competitive aggressiveness with entrepreneurship. Tambunan (1999 cited in Shariff & Peou, 2008) found that small business owner-managers having entrepreneurial values such as creativity, integrity, achievement, among others, were more likely to have superior performance in managing organizations than owner-managers without these values. McGrath, MacMillan & Scheinberg (1992) in their exploratory analysis of cultural differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs concluded that entrepreneurs share a common set of values despite their different cultural backgrounds. As such intervention should seek to increase the social recognition of entrepreneur's value to aid in the fostering of entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial Mindset

Mindset is a mental attitude which determines how an individual will interpret and respond to situations (Wordweb, 2009). It is defined as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object (Schwarz, Wdowiak, Almer-Jarz & Breitenacker, 2009). Fisbein and Ajzen (1975) posited that attitude is one of the psychological systems that cannot be seen completely through actions but, can only be seen through actions shown impliedly but not made explicitly in an individual. Attitude provides the foundation for human motivation and personal accomplishment (Kristansen & Indarti, 2004). Therefore, the question here is, can an individual's mindset be nurtured in a particular direction? Robinson *et al.* (1991) explained that attitude is dynamic in nature, it changes across time and from situation to situation. The rate of change varies depending on how deep seated or fundamental the attitude is to the individual's identity. Therefore, by being interactional, attitudes influence and are influenced by experiences we have, actions we take, and how we think and feel about those experiences (ibid.). This implies that individuals who participate in any designated government policy in their bid to foster entrepreneurial culture may have a change of mindset towards entrepreneurship (Schwarz *et al.*, 2009). As previously stated that the constituents of entrepreneurial culture are related to each other, attitude has been found to be related to entrepreneurial behaviour (Krueger, 1993).

For instance, Luthje and Franke (2003) suggested that if public policies seek to raise the number of new entrepreneurs, an improvement of individual's attitude towards entrepreneurship is an

effective level. Moen, Rahman, Salleh and Ibrahim (2004) recommended that programmes should aim at cultivating attitudes towards entrepreneurship as a person may have the business knowledge but without a positive attitude about entrepreneurship, they may not plunge into the field as such a change in their attitude with more positive aspects towards the entrepreneurial field should be emphasized thoroughly to produce more entrepreneurship among participants (ibid.). In the same vein, Walstad and Kourilsky (1998) added that those who wish to foster entrepreneurship must support and reinforce the perceptions that it is personally feasible, and socially and personally desirable. Empirically, studies have also linked entrepreneurship programmes to a change in attitude towards entrepreneurship. For instance, Hatten and Ruhland's (1995) study of students' attitude towards entrepreneurship in an SBI (Small Business Institute) programme found significant and positive changes in the students' attitude towards entrepreneurship emphasizing that participants in entrepreneurship programmes are more likely to become entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial Behaviour

The creation of new venture is the central focus of entrepreneurship research (Samuelsson & Davidsson, 2009). New venture creation is sometimes referred to as the entrepreneurial behaviour/action, start up (Ibid.) as well as entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship has been used in the developed countries as one of the most effective means of tackling the problems of unemployment of which various empirical researches have affirmed. For instance, Lasch Gundolf and Kraus (2007) found unemployment as one of the key factors that determine entrepreneurship. Pietrobelli, Rabellotti and Aquilina (2004) found relationship between self-employment and emerging form of entrepreneurship. Self-employment was not motivated by the desire to evade taxes, but rather an active role of the government was seen to have enhanced it. Benus' (1994) study on the US self-employment assistance programme found that the self-employment programmes increased not only the likelihood of entry into self-employment, but the likelihood of total employment as well as the duration of the employment.

CONCLUSION

An entrepreneurial culture, echoing the core attributes of entrepreneurship, incorporate notions of risk taking and flexibility, among others, in the service of opportunities. Finally, entrepreneurial culture is a group endeavour which may be hard to come by, even in firms where such a culture would be expected to be found. These sentiments, taken as a whole, align with the proposed conceptualization of entrepreneurial culture. These ideas appear to support the view of entrepreneurial culture as an organizational culture focused on opportunities and the principles necessary to identify/develop them and ultimately, act on them.

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