

L'ABÉCÉDAIRE CRITIQUE EN ENTREPRENEURIAT / CRITICAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP ABC PRIMER

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L'abécédaire critique en entrepreneuriat / Critical Entrepreneurship ABC Primer

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1. Présentation de la rubrique / Introduction to the section

Cette rubrique, paraissant à chaque numéro, vise à suggérer une entrée dans les approches critiques en entrepreneuriat, qui évoluent dans la communauté entre méconnaissance et scepticisme, par le biais d'une interrogation ou d'une refondation du vocabulaire. Dans la tradition de l'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze, il ne s'agit donc pas de proposer à proprement parler un dictionnaire objectivant les termes employés mais bien plus de proposer un regard critique sur le discours entrepreneurial. Les auteurs et autrices sont aussi en mesure de développer une perspective originale et subjective des entrées traitées. Ainsi trois types d'entrées sont proposés dans cet abécédaire en tentant de trouver un équilibre entre les types :

- Perspective critique du vocabulaire traditionnel;
- Développement d'un vocabulaire critique en entrepreneuriat;
- Pratique entrepreneuriale et critique : des mots ordinaires reflétant une autre pratique entrepreneuriale à l'œuvre.

This new section, which will feature in every issue, aims to provide insight into critical approaches to entrepreneurship—which evolve within the community between ignorance and skepticism—via short contributions that question or re-establish the meaning of specific pieces of vocabulary used in the field of entrepreneurship. The format of the section is inspired by Gilles Deleuze's ABC primer. As such, the contributions are not intended to be dictionary entries that objectify the terms used; instead, they aim to offer a critical perspective on entrepreneurial discourse. Guest authors are thus invited to write two pages on a word that resonates with their subjective and critical perspective on entrepreneurship. They can choose to do one of the following when writing their entry:

- present a traditional concept of entrepreneurship and redefine it through a critical lens;
- expand upon a critical concept in entrepreneurship; or
- discuss an ordinary word that reflects the everyday practices of entrepreneurs.

The word “Creativity”

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*“He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Rev. 21:5”
(Sørensen, 2008: 85).*

While creativity is a concept well integrated into the entrepreneurship discourse, it is often addressed ‘between the lines.’ Indeed, creativity is seldom expressed in Schumpeter’s description of entrepreneurship as doing new things by putting together new combinations, motivated by power and joy, and breaking out of equilibrium. Nonetheless, reading between the lines, we can imagine that such activity involves some kind of creativity.

An artist I was following ethnographically over a period of five years often reflected that he felt people were attracted by his creativity. People around him—and the project he was pursuing, to place a small, red (typically Swedish) house on the surface of the moon—also mentioned the mix of excitement and creative energy ‘in the air.’ However, his idea of placing an artistic installation of a house on the moon, led to a constant debate as to whether he should be described as a creative genius, or just insane. There is a fine line between the two, and tipping over to the creative side may very well depend on what kinds of resources (money, power, legitimacy etc.) are available.

Richard Branson, Jeff Bezos, and Elon Musk—some of today’s multi-billionaire entrepreneurs—share the artist’s fascination for space. The fine line is here reinforced by their ability to access an abundance of resources. By stretching their ‘creative minds,’ Branson aims to take tourists into space with Virgin Galactic and Bezos with Blue Origin, while Musk has pushed for the colonization of Mars. In these extravagant cases, creativity is made possible by excessive resources. Yet this is seldom explicitly addressed. It is as if creativity is so obvious that the concept becomes superfluous.

The creative potential of an individual seems to determine how entrepreneurial he or she can be seen. The greater the potential or the more excessive the idea, the more obvious it is to see him (seldom her) as an entrepreneur. In other words, the creative actor is, per definition, the successful entrepreneur (Sørensen, 2008). But what if we understand creativity more broadly, as an everyday activity that includes our collective potential to solve problems, through adjustments and fine-tuning in working life, and even as play (*homo ludens*)? (see Hjorth, 2008; Berglund and Tillmar, 2015).

My reflection from being swept away in the turmoil of the first wave of the pandemic was a sense of an everyday creativity; both in my role as a teacher (providing a course the

week after Covid-19 was declared a pandemic), and in my position as a researcher (following the local hospital pharmacy and their attempts to both manage the global shortage of drugs and create safe conditions for front-line workers). This was a transgressive creativity driven by a professional ethos; a kind of creativity that didn't follow market rules and understandings, but which questioned such aims (to grow a company, conquer a market, make a profit), and which also escaped the notion of creativity as excess.

As a university teacher, I quickly became aware of how the pandemic made an impact during spring 2020. Within a few days, we went from teaching on campus to meeting our students online. Digitalization, which had been on the agenda for quite some time, became a concrete reality with only a few days' notice. Could we do it? Could we learn these new applications in so little time? Could we rely on their functionality? What would the consequences be for quality? And what would distance learning actually mean? With students spread all over the world! There were many questions, but few answers. To my own surprise, we found ways to collaborate in the teaching team, and despite being locked in our homes — at a distance from each other — we began to experiment creatively with technologies that, just some weeks before, we had not even known existed. In our joint exploration of systems and applications, we circled around the central question: How can we find a way to teach that contributes to adequate learning? The work that took shape at our kitchen tables was exploratory. We were navigating an unknown territory and could indulge in creative ideas. It was almost as if, when everything was against us, nothing was impossible. When we met the students, they also seemed to feel the seriousness of the moment. Concentration levels were high, the willingness to ask critical questions constantly surprised us and the results of the students' work exceeded our expectations. This was despite — or maybe thanks to — the fact that we were building the track while the train was running.

At the same time, I had the opportunity to follow how the hospital pharmacists mobilized to maneuver the global shortage of drugs and medical products, and at the same time prepare the hospital for front-line workers who expected the worst but hoped for the best. In the study, I followed how ward pharmacies were transferred, how the hospital was re-organized and designated Covid-19-wards were set up, and how a synchronization among care professionals was initiated. There was a constant shortage of materials and drugs, and the pharmacists faced challenges they had not seen before. It was no longer possible to press a button and wait for market deliveries. Instead, they had to turn to proven knowledge and combine it with forgotten methods in a search for practical solutions by reviving tried and trusted pharmacy craftsmanship. Using the WHO recipe, they could secure the stock of hand sanitizer, searching for necessary components in the local community and in other parts of the hospital. By finding ways to tap sterile water from the water system in the dialysis department they could also secure access to the sterile water which was needed to moisten the lungs of ventilator patients. When they were in danger of running out of the anesthetic Propofol, they initiated a collaboration with nurses and doctors in the Intensive Care Units to find creative solutions to the life-threatening shortage.

In both the creative online teaching experimentation I enjoyed with my colleagues, as well as in the revival of the pharmacists in securing stocks of drugs and medical products, there was a sense of playful excitement combined with determination to succeed and the joy of succeeding. I interpret this everyday creativity as an expression of professional judgment, something that in considering 'business as usual' has been suppressed in an economically over-rationalized organizational world. The Swedish philosopher Jonna Bornemark (2018)

has pointed out how staff in interpersonal professions (such as care and education) feel that they no longer perform the work they have been trained for but have been transformed into 'hyperrational' slightly remote-controlled cogs in the wheel, where creativity is taken hostage by governing documents and chained by financial concepts such as 'business goals, results, efficiency, governance and customers.'

In the midst of the pandemic we suddenly found we were able to let go of the economical rational logic and give more space to the professionals' experience, judgment, empathy, ethics and creativity, allowing them to be a guide to coping with problems that unfolded. This everyday creativity is still 'silenced,' expressed between the lines. Yet this is not because it is so obvious that it becomes superfluous, as in the case of the taken for granted male, privileged, heroic, medialized and excessive entrepreneurship, but because it is the opposite. Everyday creativity is invisible, non-heroic, lacks resources and grows among us when we—as professionals—are spurred to find solutions, solve problems or enjoy the satisfaction of making small adjustments to improve something. Perhaps it is also difficult to detect, because it cannot be found 'within' the individual, but between individuals; as a form of creativity that escapes us because it unites us.

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