

Family Dynamics and Entrepreneurial Daily Practices

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Abstract

Objectives: This paper adopts a practice-based view of entrepreneurship, in relation to Giddens' structuration theory, focusing specifically on the practices Moroccan women entrepreneurs perform to actualize their businesses, in their specific contexts. Our purpose is to develop an enhanced understanding of these women's practices, especially with regard to family involvement in their businesses. Understanding how these women make sense of themselves and their businesses, and the ways in which broader cultures/structures/communities both shape and are shaped by those meanings, deepens our understanding of these women's agency.

Prior work: As stated above, we view entrepreneurship as a practice, performed in everyday interactions and thus build on earlier practice-based understandings of entrepreneurship (Bruni et al. 2004, De Clercq & Voronov 2009, Johannisson 2011). As well, we build on earlier work on ethnic minority entrepreneurship (see Ram, 1994; Flap et al, 1999; Bhalla et al., 2006, Essers and Benschop, 2007).

Approach: This paper adopts a practice-based view of entrepreneurship, focusing specifically on the practices Moroccan women entrepreneurs perform to actualize their businesses. Practice research originates in an increased interest in human practices in the social sciences, and is, to put it broadly, interested in the activity patterns that constitute daily life (Schatzki et al., 2001). It has been adopted in organizational,

management, and entrepreneurship research. The practice-based perspective, or practice 'turn', can be traced back to such philosophers as Wittgenstein, Derrida, Heidegger, Lyotard and Bourdieu. Influential 'adopters' of practice theory in organization studies can be found in Whittington (1996, 2003, 2006), Jarzabkowski (2004, 2005), and Balogun (cf. Balogun et al. 2007). Based on their works, a practice-based perspective has gained ground in strategy and organization studies, having been applied to understand such a wide variety of topics as knowing and learning in organizations (Nicolini et al. 2003), leadership (Denis et al. 2010), accounting (Fauré et al. 2010), organizational change (Balogun et al. 2005, Stensaker & Langley 2010) and creativity in organizations (Nayak 2008). Still little entrepreneurship research has actually been based on the practice turn, exceptions including de la Ville (2003), Bruni et al. (2004), De Clercq & Voronov (2009), and Goss et al. (2011).

A practice-based perspective can be employed to situate entrepreneurial formations there, "where it happens and where it can happen: as lived experience, as story, as drama, as conversation, as performance, in all its everydayness." (Steyaert 2004: 19). It is not the actors, 'people', that are the direct focus of practice-based research, but the actions, events, 'happenings' they are performatively a part of. This requires another approach than the traditional interview or questionnaire: "a practice turn in entrepreneurship research invites other styles for gaining an insight into the phenomenon" (Johannisson 2011, p. 148). Studying a practice implies sharing the life form that made such practice possible in the first place (Wittgenstein), suggesting ethnographic research.

Three Moroccan female entrepreneurs have been selected (please note: not explicitly with family involvement in their businesses as a selection criteria, i.e. no family businesses) for a pilot study. They have been, in line with basic principles of ethnography, observed during their daily practices, especially with regards to interactions with family members. This was done through so-called 'shadowing' (Czarniawska, 2007). The researcher closely watched how these women went about their daily business, which enabled her to 'capture' accidental talks between these

women and their family member, and other actors, taking notes, and, whenever possible filming incidents which caught the researcher's eye (see also Bruni et al., 2005). As well, entrepreneurs, their family members and other relevant actors have been interviewed.

Results: The embeddedness and the dialectic of agency and structure were clearly visible in the daily practices of the female entrepreneurs of Moroccan descent. By showing the family dynamics in the entrepreneurial daily practices, we moved beyond the discussions on gender and entrepreneurship or the expected limitations for Muslim women in the Netherlands to perform entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, in contrast to expected gender roles regarding Moroccan women, our observations show that male relatives are highly involved, also in domestic activities. Observing and studying daily practices concretely show the real involvement of (many!) family members.

Implications: This pilot study illustrates how the entrepreneurship literature can be enriched by considering the entrepreneurial daily practices and including the embedded environment.

Value: This study provides an important contribution to the understanding of the entrepreneurial practices of Moroccan women entrepreneurs, in that sense being highly informative for policy makers in this domain. As well, it is an important addition to the – still scarce – practice-based contributions in understanding the entrepreneurship phenomenon (see above, 'prior work').