**ENTREPRENEURS – Is There a DARK SIDE?**

Whilst perceptions of the influence of entrepreneurs differ, their unique contributions will always play a role in societies.

This article contextualises “entrepreneurs as individuals, who identify opportunities, allocate resources and create value. This creation of value is often through the identification of unmet needs or through the identification of opportunities for change” (Watson, accessed 8 February 2012).

The research findings detailed herein focus deliberately on the *dark side* of business entrepreneurs and form the thrust of this article’s polemic hypothesis pleading with entrepreneurial adventurers to convert to modern management concepts. Many positive entrepreneurs are acknowledged under the sub-section, A Sample.

**The Scenario**

**The advantages and disadvantages of nepotism**

Research is coming to grips with the entrepreneurial psyche / the traits (Gartner, 1988) and significant studies (outside the scope of this essay) confirm the culture of nepotism in families and / or amongst a group of friends during the early development of an enterprise (Chulguen Yang, 2011et al).

However, the acceptance of nepotism within western individualistic societies, rather than evolving collectivist Asian cultures, (Asian Culture Brief) is an employment taboo when “others” participate in a venture. This paradigm of practice leads to possibilities of behaviour that militate against equal opportunities and non-discrimination in the workplace.

Nepotism can be likened to an albatross around the neck of the entrepreneur, because understandably native emotional / sentimental bonds affect adversely the progress of the business (Singell, 1997). For example, to keep relationships, whilst having to make objective decisions that are at variance with the “emotionally bonded others”, could readily counter objectivity, fairness, transparency and non-discrimination when trying to balance sensitive interdependency, employment law and pragmatic concerns.

Contrariwise, progressive, rational and proven management models do not support such a “Monarchical Style”. Creative ventures will not survive if based on biased sentimentality (c.f. the growth of Apple, Samsung and Yahoo).

**Altruism?**

It is also arguable whether all entrepreneurs “do good”. Globalisation and the avaricious land-grabbing initiatives of powerful tycoons and influential conglomerates (with well-filled wallets, invasive influence and personal goals) rapidly elbow out the smaller fry; many of these and other activities indicate that some entrepreneurs could be classed as shysters and charlatans[[1]](#footnote-1). Research into *globalisation* indicates practices that have resulted from the power imbalance of capitalism’s displacing of the “corner shop and small holding” (Duncan, Globalisation, 2011).

Additionally, and in citing their sources, the World Institute for Development Economic Research states:

… Entrepreneurial activity is not universally “good” because entrepreneurs act in creative ways simply to increase their wealth, power, and prestige—and without active consideration of externalities or societal effects (Baumol, 1990). Entrepreneurial talent is
allocated to activities with the highest private returns, which may not generate the highest social returns (Murphy, Shleifer, and Vishny, 1991). If activities are chosen based on perceived profit, it is not implicit that they will have positive effects and can include activities with questionable or undesirable societal outcomes. Therefore, entrepreneurial
talent can be allocated among a range of selections with varying effects. (WIfDER)

Are all entrepreneurs altruistic and people-centred? The general answer is, “no”, because, for the entrepreneur, people are a means to an end viz. to build up *their* kingdom – little else matters.

Understandably, employees and volunteers will contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial enterprise but that is only one side of the coin.

Would it not be possible for entrepreneurs to channel their creativity into developing staff to develop *himself* / *herself* so as to enrich and advance *also* the mission of the Company? This is why many progressively managed organisations have an *active* staff development programme as opposed to a well-written theoretical programme that is nothing but a paper tiger.

Scotland’s famous son, Adam Smith, exposed the embryonic structure of the *selfish* component of the dark side under which business motivation nestled:

Every individual ... neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it ... he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention (Book IV, Chapter II, page. 456, paragraph. 9).

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our necessities but of their advantages. (Book I, Chapter II, pages 26-27, paragraph 12).

This lack of altruism in some entrepreneurs is evident in often callous dealings with their workforce and volunteers. Consider, for example, the developing scenario encompassing the renowned entrepreneurial founder of Amstrad, Lord Sugar, who continues to make news. This media personality and ex-political advisor is reportedly being taken to an Industrial Tribunal by an ex-employee (Daily Record, 2012).

Importantly, however, is the reality that it is the unchallenged *selfish gene[[2]](#footnote-2)* that predominates in the mind-set, secrecy and control ethos of most entrepreneurs.

At the present time, psychologists know “little about the psychology of entrepreneurship in an empirical way - although interest and research in the subject has begun to blossom. [However], what happens when [entrepreneurs] are in charge? The bottom line is that they make disastrous managers” (Science of Personality). Alarmingly, many entrepreneurs could be accused of replicating the feudal model of serfdom – albeit in a more sophisticated manner.

As an aside:

* This Paper does not support the minority practice endorsing every *leader* as an ipso facto *entrepreneur,* and strongly emphasises that not every *entrepreneur* is a *leader.*[[3]](#footnote-3)
* Research findings, experience and anecdotal feedback affirm that few entrepreneurs are managers of people.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* Entrepreneurs lead in selected expertise and products but this rarely equates with the necessary leadership of people and management.
* Sadly, not all adventurers accept these distinctions and the possibility of more organisational chaos, conflict and unhappiness within their kingdom usually follows.

**A Sample**

Aspects of the above facts are affirmed amongst this selected hierarchical pantheon of entrepreneurs (past, present and warts and all) and include: Bill Gates (Microsoft), Andrea L Taylor (Microsoft Computer Software), Steve Jobs (Apple), Richard Branson (The Virgin Group), Harry Oppenheimer (De Beers), Oprah Winfrey (Entertainment), Anita Roddick (Body Shop), Coco Chanel (Cosmetics), Adenike Ogunlesi (Clothing), Aliko Dangote (Commodities and Building materials), Adriane M Brown (Venture Capital & Private Equity), Mary Baker Eddy (Religion), Oral Roberts (Evangelist and Educationalist), Billy Graham (Evangelism Inc.), all religious founders, Cecil Rhodes (Colonialist), Genghis Khan (Nation builder), Lee Byung-chull (Samsung), Lakshmi Mittal (Steel), Saddam Hussein (Dictator and Sadist), Kim Sung Il (North Korean Tyrant), Adolf Hitler (Nationalist turned war criminal), the Mafia, Triads, drug cartels, the local shopkeeper (Convenience and retail stores et al) and home and family businesses enterprises including the amazing mother and housewife. The full list is as long and distinctive as recorded history and entrepreneurial initiatives, creativity and ingenuity continue to feed humankind’s expanding archives of uniquely famous, successful, eccentric, sociopathic and notorious women and men who have embedded their blameless, positive or bloody footprints across the continents of the globe.

**The Many-Sided Diamond**

Cut or uncut, native crystalline carbon has value. Similarly, an entrepreneur’s multifaceted genius, character and personality have importance. However, an uncut diamond is not as valuable as the polished production.

“Writers and practitioners from Drucker to Christensen note that the essence of entrepreneurship is ‘creative disruption’ – tearing up the old to make way for the new” (The Science of Personality). This has been evidenced in the genius that replaced the vinyl record with the CD and then the MP3 and … what next?

The entrepreneur makes or breaks an established organisation especially when challenging a corroding Organisational Culture that needs changing[[5]](#footnote-5). The baby des not need to be thrown out with the bath water because progress is being strangled by the umbilical cord of those who exclaim, “As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be[[6]](#footnote-6)”.

Parallel to this is the resonating interpersonal conflict when two entrepreneurial dervishes attempt to dance on the same mat (Rhodes Boyson, page 130).

**Humanity rules**

In common with the rest of humanity, the majority of entrepreneurs are not saintly figures whose track record of personal integrity and public purity would necessarily guarantee them sainthood.

Behaviour and genius are different sides of the diamond and humankind often fails to appreciate the entrepreneur because of their cupboard of skeletons. Steve Jobs, for example, gave the world his genius but did so in the wake of reportedly past and not-so-private indiscretions. His character was to introduce the phrase, “the Apple Paradox … Steve Jobs is a very difficult person with minimal leadership skills” (Science of Personality), but was able to change the processes of communication, even though his interpersonal communication skills reportedly caused much unhappiness and *angst* in colleagues and subordinates (Steve Jobs).

Does the wisdom of the Bard offer food for debate, "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones" (Mark Anthony in Julius Caesar 3:2)?

**The Entrepreneur versus Management**

Entrepreneurs rarely make good managers – the two functions are light years apart - and Drucker’s paradigm, as an example, is not readily accepted by most kingdom builders and when merged, their distinctive purposes clash.

Management is “but a force and an entire ecosystem that organizations fit and thrive in … it deals with the fundamentals of knowledge, wisdom, and leadership; ‘art’ because of its practice and application. Managers [should] draw on all the knowledge and insights of the humanities and the social sciences – on psychology and philosophy; on economics and history, on ethics as well as on the physical sciences. *But they have to focus this knowledge on healing a sick patient, teaching a student building a bridge, designing and ‘selling’ a user friendly software program (italics are those of the writer)”* (Maciariello, citing Drucker, page 5).

Contrastingly, due to a fixation with *self,* many entrepreneurs are often (possibly, unconsciously) the prime cause of communication chaos, apathy and staff distress within their own organisation. Paradoxically, their valued outstanding abilities tend to disregard civility in, and the necessity for, communication; planning, responsibly honoured schedules, transparency, accountability to stakeholders and working within any framework other than their own worship of *self*.

Sadly, already cowed staff are reticent about going against the grain for fear of being targeted as “uppity” and subsequently being side-lined or fired.

The entrepreneur who starts his [her] own business generally does so because he [she] is a difficult employee … does not take kindly to suggestions or orders from other people … his [her] idiosyncrasies do not hurt anybody so long as the business is small, but once the business gets larger requiring the support and active cooperation of more people he [she] is at risk if he [she] does not change his [her] approach. It has been correctly stated that the biggest burden a growing company faces is having a full-blooded entrepreneur as its owner. (Harvard Business Review, citing du Toit).

From an overall perspective, the conventional manager is very conscious of rules, structures and taboos, whereas the entrepreneur interprets and views regulations as mere guidelines to be used when necessary - and are nevertheless largely ignored (Jamaican Cleaner, citing Thomas Zimmerer and Norman Scarborough, 2006).

Entrepreneurs tend to bypass many structures and “do their own thing”. The theoretical constructs necessary for a business are often contained only within dusty files. However, window dressing cannot shield (forever) this entrepreneurial dark side from tension and allegations from employees and volunteers who possess a modicum of insight, intelligence and perceptivity?

**The Control Freak Syndrome**

Interestingly, Fayetteville University, citing Osbourne (1991), “identified the Dark Side [of the entrepreneur] as the "corrupting power of ownership" … in which the power of ownership corrupted the organization”.

The majority of entrepreneurs are usually control freaks. Their internal locus of control and their freedom (volatility) to act and take unilateral decisions precludes them from working in a formally structured group – they have to be the “top dog”, barking dictates, and “don’t like someone having authority over them, so don’t tell an entrepreneur what to do” (op cit, Harvard Business Review, 1985).

Why do many entrepreneurs not accept that humility and a willingness to learn from others could be of benefit to them, others and their enterprise? Sadly, many are aware of a need to change but seldom take counsel to address their destructive modus operandi. Is obstinacy (not a synonym for determination) their Achilles heel?

**The Saboteur Syndrome**

Sadly, some entrepreneurs feel threatened by individuals who possess talents that outshine their own. To then secure and protect their kingdom of *self* they will sabotage the input of others by either firing or forcing from their organisation any challengers whom they perceive might want to steal some of their thunder[[7]](#footnote-7). Henry Ford[[8]](#footnote-8), for example, was not only a virulent ant-Semite but a harsh and dictatorial individual who fired any who became “too uppity”, including an individual who had contributed much to the early years of the Ford enterprise (The Day the Bubble Burst, Chapter 3).

Will this culling of talent be advantageous to their longer term business practice, reputation? Why is the *selfish* gene *allowed* to dominate?

Does this exclusively feudal modus operandi sit well in the modern world of teamwork, co-operation, efficiency, consultation, succession-planning, transparency and the mutual sharing of valuable expertise?

**The Sun King / Queen Syndrome**

Does the grandiose, autocratic spirit of the French Monarch, Louis XIV, the Sun King (1638-1715), (Encyclopaedia Britannica) live on in the lives of many entrepreneurs (c.f. Alan Sugar, 2010)?

The dark side of a *self*-inflated ego and aggrandisement causes some entrepreneurs to believe that “they’re the best person for the job [they] like their control, they have trouble delegating [and] if they do hand over a task [tasks do not equate with delegated functions], you can bet [they] are keeping tabs and checking over shoulders to make sure it’s done [their way and remove any sense of fulfilment from the chosen appointee]. Don’t check over an entrepreneur’s shoulder ... that’s a recipe for disaster and will invoke a furious reaction. ” (Men With Pens, 2008).

Does this approach not parallel that of the emotionally disturbed individual who acts because he / she have heard voices (their ID[[9]](#footnote-9)) telling them what to do? In the case of some entrepreneurs their childhood-formed ID takes full control and they regress into infantile mode (Psychology 1010). Or, on another level, would transactional analysis exhume the cry of the inner child wanting to be recognised, acclaimed and acknowledged – if so, by whom (I’m OK, You’re OK)?

Additionally, rather than allowing delegation to competent others to be the means of reaching an objective, their line interference often mutates also into manipulation and scheming (divide and rule; marginalising) so as to get people to do what they want and thus form / reinforce cliques comprising the US and THEM cohorts (Bauman, 1993).

Covert influence can also be enhanced by dictatorially forcing subordinates towards a desired outcome. Does this dark side not dampen and eclipse the creativity, initiative and loyalty of serving stakeholders in enhancing the growth of the enterprise? Is it no wonder that many informed employees choose to walk the plank rather than stay on board the ship named, Megalomania?

Written across the lintel at the temple of Delphi were the words γνῶθι σεαυτόνand, indeed, is to *“know thyself”*, and then adjust appropriately, not the sine qua non of a more humane practise of entrepreneurship?

**The Bottle Neck Syndrome**

The bottle neck syndrome emanating from their dark side is another cause for concern. In the days of the Divine Right of Kings, petitioners to see the monarch often had to wait lengthy periods of time before being granted an audience. One of the negatives of the non-delegation practice of the pre-occupied, ego-centric entrepreneur is the frustrating, unfair waiting process for decisions and sanction to proceed along lines of action.

How does this authoritarian behaviour relate to the *X* and *Y* Theory of Management[[10]](#footnote-10)? Does this behaviour adversely impact on the longer-term effectiveness, growth of business goodwill, efficiency and staff morale?

**The Read Me Syndrome**

Many entrepreneurs conceitedly expect their subordinates to be able to instinctively know what is required of them. Due to their marked inability and unwillingness to explain lengthy instructions and read lengthy documents[[11]](#footnote-11) there is an irrational demand for omniscience from employees. Sadly, this leads to miscommunication and a gradual distancing between the lower to higher level of interactive contact. Readers familiar with the United Kingdom’s travel network will be aware of the warning to *MIND THE GAP* between the train and the platform when entering or alighting from the train. It might be that within the entrepreneurial world this advice could, when applied to human interaction, be a metaphor of relevance.

**Home from Home Accommodation**

Many entrepreneurs join the army of workaholics across the globe. Apparently there are two main types of workaholic, “The attention seeker who fills his life with the excitement of work — and the escape workaholic who works to get away from his or her problems” (Mitchell Wallick PhD, 2011).

In parallel, Kathryn A. Cunningham, PhD, the director of the Center for Addiction Research at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston writes, “Some … also may have a fear of failure or loss of position in society” (ibid, Mitchell Wallick,PhD, 2011).

Assuming that there is value in Dr Wallick’s opinion, this raises the issue of *why*. If not working all hours of the day to pay bills et al, then what is the reason for seeking fulfilment in the work place? What is his / her home life like? Is it not true that the bee will always fly to where the honey is?

Whatever the reasons, the person who is *driven* is not motivated by the same force that *drives* others towards success. The *driven* individual is in danger of burn out and professional counselling is a positive option.

**The Martyr Syndrome**

Due to the entrepreneur’s squirrel-like gathering of all the workload, the understandable pressure on this adventurer is huge. It is then that the martyr emerges – especially during crises. Many become upset because nobody will / can help out and the collateral damage caused by drained emotions cannot be underestimated. Is such acting out not also a primal cry to be noticed; admired and respected or declare their “divinity”?

As an example, history records that Joan of Arc heard the voices of St. Michael (and his angels), St. Catherine and St. Margaret - this ultimately led to her being burnt at the stake fuelled by English revenge and with religious bigotry (Catholic Encyclopedia). Is the moral of the story not to also submit one’s own “inner voice” to peer review and then giver serious consideration to feedback? Joan was eventually canonised some 600 years later (1920); 30 May is now her feast day but was the pain and suffering necessary?

**What next?**

Happily, entrepreneurs are here to stay but, hopefully, with less of their dark side. So much more can be accomplished if each entrepreneur would allow other talented individuals to exercise *leadership* where they cannot; to *manage*, because their great work demands this; to receive criticism with an open mind, because it is important that they understand, accept and then address their limitations.

What would happen if the dark side allowed light to enter?

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2. Dawkins, R. The *Selfish* Gene, Oxford (2nd edition) ISBN ISBN-10: 0192860925 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Leadership training might develop the desired expertise. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Management training might develop the desired expertise. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. cf The Product Life Cycle [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Christian Doxology [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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9. See http://psychology.about.com/od/theoriesofpersonality/a/personalityelem.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See http://www.netmba.com/mgmt/ob/motivation/mcgregor/ (Accessed 30 January 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Winston Churchill, “Please be good enough to put your conclusions and recommendations on one sheet of paper in the very beginning of your report, so I can even consider reading it”. Is this not arrogance, personified? http://thinkexist.com/quotes/winston\_churchill/2.html (Accessed 6 February 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)